



The South Central Modern Language Association

"Grammar in Use": Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti

Author(s): Marjorie Perloff

Source: *South Central Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2/3, Futurism and the Avant-Garde (Summer - Autumn, 1996), pp. 35-62

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern Language Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3190371>

Accessed: 26/09/2008 02:28

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=jhup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press and The South Central Modern Language Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *South Central Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

“Grammar in Use”: Wittgenstein / Gertrude Stein / Marinetti

Marjorie Perloff
Stanford University

A grammar relates to not liking to see again those you used to know.

What is the difference between resemblance and grammar. There is none. Grammar is at best an oval ostrich egg and grammar is far better.

—Gertrude Stein, “Arthur a Grammar”¹

“Grammar,” Ludwig Wittgenstein typically remarks in his *Philosophical Investigations*, “only describes and in no way explains the use of signs.”² And he gives the following account of the way grammar actually works:

498. When I say that the orders “Bring me sugar” and “Bring me milk” make sense, but not the combination “Milk me sugar,” that does not mean that the utterance of this combination of words has no effect. And if its effect is that the other person stares at me and gapes, I don’t on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect that I wanted to produce.

499. To say “This combination of words makes no sense” excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reason. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another begins; and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what I am drawing it for.

500. When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation.

More than twenty years before Wittgenstein put forward these propositions, Gertrude Stein was producing poems, fictions, and

plays that had sentences like the following:

Roast potatoes for.
 Loud and no cataract.
 I wish matches.
 Explain whites for eggs.³

Confronted by such sentences, early readers of Stein almost invariably went into what Wittgenstein calls, with reference to the sentence “Milk me sugar,” the staring-and-gaping mode. “The words in the volume entitled *Tender Buttons*,” wrote the reviewer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, “are English words, but the sentences are not English sentences according to the grammatical definition. The sentences indicated by punctuation do not make complete sense, partial sense, nor any other sense, but nonsense.”⁴ *Grammar*, in this context, means a set of prescriptions which all “acceptable” sentences must follow, in contrast to Wittgenstein’s conception of grammar as the description of how sentences are actually formed. “When one draws a boundary,” he cautions, “it may be for various kinds of reason.” The so-called “senselessness” of a sentence like “Milk me sugar” is merely the result of such boundary drawing: “a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation” (*aus dem Verkehr gezogen*).

Roast potatoes for. The words withdrawn from circulation here are those that would determine whether “roast” is an adjective or a verb and whether Stein’s sentence is indicative or imperative: “We’re having roast potatoes for dinner” as opposed to “Please roast those potatoes for dinner,” or “for me.” The sentence’s incompleteness provides many intriguing semantic possibilities.⁵ “Roast potatoes” are “for” what or whom exactly? Why do we cook and eat them? Or are the potatoes an example, “Roast potatoes, for instance”? Furthermore, “for” puns on “four” (i.e., four potatoes, with the further echo of the well-known children’s counting game, “One potato, two potato, three potato, four. . .”). A second pun brings in the language of Stein’s adopted nation: *four* is French for “oven.” *Pommes de terre au four*. Where else one would one expect to find roast potatoes? And further: there is a buried pun on “fore”: roast potatoes before the salad, perhaps. Or before they get cold.

Then too, the “withdrawal” of intermediary words “from circulation” creates significant sound patterning. The final “t” of “roast” is moved forward to come between “o” and “a”: “p-o-t-a.” And then it happens again, chiasmically: “t-o.” The word “for,” moreover, contains the “r-o” of “roast,” only now in inverted order. The sixteen-letter unit has two *a*’s and four *o*’s, alpha and omega, as it were, as if to say that the potato is the staple of life and hence of articulation. Roast potatoes, after all, are everybody’s food. Indeed, the sixteen-letter phrase has only seven phonemes, “simplicity” of sound thus perfectly conveying the reference to this, the “apple of the earth.”

Stein thus seems to “draw a boundary,” not out of a refusal to “make sense,” or

a predilection for pure nonsense, but because she wants to draw out specific semantic implications not normally present in culinary discourse. Obviously, if Miss Stein were telling her cook H el ene what to make for dinner, the sentence would be highly inappropriate and the cook would stare and gape, or she would ask, "For how many people?" or "For lunch or for dinner?" But "Roast potatoes for" is being used, not in the cooking game, but in the game of testing the limits of language, which is, for Stein, *the* game that matters. And in this "poetry game," the locution makes rather good sense.

For one thing, "Roast potatoes for" has been anticipated in an earlier "Food" poem in *Tender Buttons* called "Breakfast":

A change, a final change includes potatoes. This is no
authority for the abuse of cheese. What language can instruct any
fellow.

A shining breakfast, a breakfast shining, no dispute, no
practice, nothing, nothing at all.

A sudden slice changes the whole plate, it does so suddenly.
(*TB*, 41)

One pictures a small mound of mashed potatoes on the breakfast tray next to the cheese omelette. But why does this addition constitute a "final change"? What language "instructs," perhaps, is that words are endlessly slippery: the "use" of cheese easily modulates into "abuse," and the "final change" is never really final: "A sudden slice changes the whole plate." However we want to construe the "nothing at all" that happens, the relation of potatoes to cheese is taken up again in the sequence of potato poems that includes "Roast potatoes for":

POTATOES

Real potatoes cut in between.

POTATOES

In the preparation of cheese, in the preparation of crackers,
in the preparation of butter, in it.

ROAST POTATOES

Roast potatoes for. (*TB*, 51)

The "cut in between" in #1 refers to potatoes being cut open or cut down the middle, and perhaps stuffed with cheese or butter and served with crackers. Then too, the second "POTATOES" is "cut in between" the other two potato poems, and, as Bettina Knapp has noted, it may well be a sexual allusion to the penetration of the female body ("in it"), followed as it is by the sexual punning on "crackers" ("crack hers").⁶ And "Roast Potatoes," in this context, recalls Stein's famous line in the love poem "Preciosilla": "Roasted susie is my ice-cream."

In recent years, the sexual coding pervasive in Stein's language has been submitted to intense and rewarding scrutiny by feminist criticism,⁷ but what has

not been sufficiently recognized is that, in Stein's particular case, issues of gender are closely linked to those of exile. Like Wittgenstein, whom she had never met and whose work she did not know,⁸ Stein chose exile in large measure because the familial and cultural pressures of her native country would have made it all but impossible to live a homosexual life, even though, again like Wittgenstein, she remained largely closeted, even in her adopted country.⁹ The double bind of sexual and national difference, in any case, produced, in Stein's case as in Wittgenstein's, a very special relationship to language. As Françoise Collin puts it in "L'Écriture sans rature":

She has accomplished her *depaysement* once and for all by the age of twenty, taking up residence in a country where her language isn't spoken. This is her only exoticism but it is a radical one. . . . Living in a foreign environment, Gertrude Stein distances herself from the language that she hears all around her—French—which is not her own, and which is for her an object of fascination to the point where she appropriates any number of its elements and formulae. But she is also distancing herself from her own language, American, which is not spoken around her, which has become the language of the other, even if it is the language of intimacy. The writing of Gertrude Stein is ex-centric with respect to two languages, according to different formulae: it is a third language.

Other than this rupture with her native land, everything enters into the sphere of the familiar. Whatever she confronts, she addresses as "tu." Whatever she touches, whatever she names, whatever she sees, becomes hers.¹⁰

Here the parallel to Wittgenstein is especially interesting. Both continue to write in their native language, but since much of Wittgenstein's "writing" is in fact the student transcription of his Cambridge lectures (in English), we have a double language base: a somewhat stilted and convoluted English "translates" (not quite) a much more straightforward German. But even the German, it could be argued on the analogy of Stein's American, is no longer the Austrian German of someone actually living in Vienna but a distanced language, spoken and written self-consciously. In Stein's case, however, the situation is even more schizophrenic since American is the language of intimacy with Alice, French the language of friendship (for example, with Picasso) and of daily social and domestic contact.

In both cases, accordingly, grammar—taken for granted by most writers who are "at home" in their own language and hence are likely to pay more attention to image and metaphor, to figures of heightening, embellishment, and transformation—becomes a contested site. "Grammar," after all, "does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfill its purpose. . . . It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs" (*PI*, #496). It does not, for example, explain how the "have" in "I have a pain" differs from the "have" in "I have a book" or why one's right hand can't "give" one's left hand money. Or, to turn to Stein's lexicon, grammar cannot explain why it is incorrect to say "I wish

matches" (*Pink Melon Joy*). Doesn't "désire" as in "Je désire des allumettes" translate as both "want" and "wish"?

"I wish to have matches" or "I wish for matches" would do the trick, although if one went into the drugstore to ask for matches, these constructions would sound excessively stilted. Can an infinitive or a mere preposition—"for"—make such a difference? "Roast potatoes for" suggests that they can. "'I,'" remarks Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, "is not the name of a person, nor 'here' of a place, and 'this' is not a name. But they are connected with names. Names are explained by means of them. It is also true that it is characteristic of physics not to use these words" (*PI*, #410). One might add that for the non-native speaker, these are the words that cause the most confusion. "Consider," writes Wittgenstein in #411, "how the following questions can be applied, and how settled":

- (1) "Are these books *my* books?"
- (2) "Is this foot *my* foot?"
- (3) "Is this body *my* body?"
- (4) "Is this sensation *my* sensation?"

Here the grammatical structure is identical but the words "this" and "my" function quite differently. In (1), "these" is a pointer: I notice some books lying on a desk and wonder whether they are "*my* books." In (2), as Wittgenstein points out, the question can only make sense if, say, my foot has been anaesthetized or paralyzed, and the question is then a way of saying, "This foot doesn't even feel like my own foot." In (3), the reference may be to a mirror-image, as if to say, "Does my body look like *that*?" And (4) is the oddest of all because of course there is no way for me to point to "this sensation" unless it is in fact "*my* sensation."

Gertrude Stein had a predilection for language games that exploited precisely these subtle differences. Like Wittgenstein, she took the naming function of language to be its least challenging aspect. "A noun," she wrote in "Poetry and Grammar," "is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. . . . things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns. Nouns are the name of anything and just naming names is alright when you want to call a roll but is it good for anything else."¹¹

Here Stein may well be thinking of a particular example of roll-calling: namely the *parole in libertà* of F. T. Marinetti and his Futurist *cénacle*. In "The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" of 1912, Marinetti had declared that "Poetry should be an uninterrupted sequence" of image-bearing nouns, nouns "related by analogy." "Example: man-torpedo-boat, woman-gulf, crowd-surf, piazza-funnel, door-faucet."¹² The "destruction of syntax" thus effected was to be enhanced by means of a "typographical revolution"—"*three or four colours of ink*, or even twenty different typefaces if necessary. For example: *italics* for a series of similar or swift sensations, *boldface* for the violent onomatopoeia, and so on."¹³

The “destruction of syntax” was, of course, also Stein’s project but, as we shall see, for her the phrase meant something quite different. True, she shared Marinetti’s dislike of adjectives, but whereas Marinetti declares that “[o]ne must abolish the adjective to allow the naked noun to preserve its essential color,”¹⁴ Stein, to the contrary, held adjectives to be too close to nouns. “After all,” she writes, “adjectives effect nouns and as nouns are not really interesting the thing that effects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting” (*LIA*, 211). Verbs and adverbs are a little better because “they have one very nice quality and that is that they can be so mistaken. . . . Nouns and adjectives never can make mistakes can never be mistaken but verbs can be so endlessly both as to what they do and how they agree or disagree with whatever they do” (*LIA*, 211-12). Take a sentence like “Return a pigeon seated” in “Arthur a Grammar” (*HTW*, 58). Is “return” a verb or a noun? And what about “Cared for horses are either up or down?” (*HTW*, 58).

But the most “varied and alive” parts of speech, for Stein as for Wittgenstein, are the small words, the connectives that make the sentence fluid and open—prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and especially pronouns:

Pronouns are not as bad as nouns because in the first place practically they cannot have adjectives go with them. That already makes them better than nouns. Then beside not being able to have adjectives go with them, they of course are not really the name of anything. They represent some one but they are not its or his name. In not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something than if they were as a noun is the name of anything. (*LIA*, 213-14)

A pronoun, it seems, is a way of getting away from the confinement of the label, of a fixed name (“they may be born Walter and become Hub, in such a way they are not like a noun. A noun has been the name of something for such a very long time” [*LIA*, 214]), whereas the pronoun opens up all sorts of possibilities for poetry. Traditionally, poetry was conceived as the naming game; its mission was “to know how to name earth sea and sky and all that” (*LIA*, 233). But by the end of the nineteenth century, these names had taken on a fixity that had made it impossible “to feel anything and everything that for me was existing so intensely” (*LIA*, 242). Hence the struggle in *Tender Buttons*, “with the ridding myself of nouns, I knew nouns must go in poetry as they had gone in prose if anything that is everything was to go on meaning something” (*LIA*, 242).

This case against the noun (and later in the essay, against all punctuation marks except the period) has generally been construed as no more than Stein’s attempt, however charming and witty, to justify her own arbitrary word play.¹⁵ True, the sweeping historical argument—the notion that poetry from Homer through the nineteenth century had been one thing (e.g., “caressing nouns”), a thing which the twentieth century now had to undo—must be taken with a grain of salt. What Stein really means when she makes the case for the superiority of pronouns (and prepositions, conjunctions, etc.) to nouns, may be glossed by Wittgenstein’s remark, cited above, that “[p]hysics does not use these words” (*PI*, #410). Physics,

that is to say, can rely largely on the naming or noun function: $e=mc^2$; its use of pronouns is relatively minimal. But this is not the case in ordinary discourse. "You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed," Wittgenstein noted commonsensibly, and added "That is a grammatical remark."¹⁶ Consider, in this regard, the pronouns and prepositions in the following sentences, sentences Stein cites as examples of "successful" emotional balance:

He looks like a young man grown old.

It looks like a garden but he had hurt himself by accident.

A dog which you have never had before has sighed.

Once when they were nearly ready they had ordered it to close. (*LIA*, 226)

These short declarative sentences have a Wittgensteinian cast: nonsensical as they look at first glance, they begin to make sense when we see how they are used. #1, for example, seems ridiculous because every old man was once a young man, but we can conceive of a situation in which X tells Y she is surprised that Z seems suddenly to have aged so much, whereupon Y might reply, "He looks like a young man grown old." Yeats's "Girl's Song," for that matter, ends with the stanza, "And that was all my song— / When everything is told, / Saw I an old man young / Or young man old?"¹⁷ In #2 the odd feature is the conjunction "but"; again we could make up contexts that would make this sentence quite plausible, for instance: "Did he fall down on the pavement and break his leg?" "No, it looks like a garden but he had hurt himself by accident." In #3, the seemingly irrelevant subordinate clause ("which you have never had before") makes sense if the speaker is, say, a dog trainer, who is explaining the particular habits of a dog to its new owner. And #4 allows for all sorts of narrative possibilities. The "they," might, for instance, own a restaurant, and once, when they were nearly ready to go to a wedding, they ordered "it" (the restaurant) to close for the evening. And so on.

The indeterminacy of pronouns here and in some of Wittgenstein's examples is no doubt motivated, at least in part, by the felt need to encode all overt references to sexual identity;¹⁸ it is a common practice in the love poetry of W. H. Auden and, later, in the writing of John Ashbery. But since many homosexual writers of Stein's time—Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf, to take just two prominent examples—had no use for this particular pronominal mode, it remains to be specified just how the "theories" put forward in "Poetry and Grammar," and even more complexly in the pieces collected in *How to Write*, operate in the Stein text.

"Thank You for the Difference in Me"

Wittgenstein's discussion of *identity* in the *Philosophical Investigations* provides a useful context for Stein's own "experiments" with language:

But isn't *the same* at least the same?

We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself. I feel like saying: "Here at any rate there can't be a variety of interpretations. If you are seeing a thing you are seeing identity too."

Then are two things the same when they are what *one* thing is? And how am I to apply what the *one* thing shews me to the case of two things? (*PI*, #215)

Repeat the same and it is no longer the same. This common-sense discrimination forms the basis of Stein's mode of repetition, a mode that is, after all, an extreme form of *literalism*.¹⁹ Stein herself, for that matter, thought of *Tender Buttons* and related compositions as essentially "realistic" in the tradition of Flaubert. In the "Transatlantic Interview" with Robert Bartlett Hass (1946), she explains: "I used to take objects on a table, like a tumbler or any kind of object and try to get the picture of it clear and separate in my mind and create a word relationship between the word and the things seen."²⁰ And her mentor William James praised *Three Lives* as "a fine new kind of realism."²¹

But how does this relationship work, given the obvious fact that Stein's portraits, whether of persons or objects, do not describe what is seen in any recognizable way? Here again Wittgenstein provides us with a point of entry. "A main source of our failure to understand," he observes, "is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words. . . . A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions'" (*PI*, #122). Such "seeing as" or "seeing something as something" (*PI*, 213) depends, I think, on our willingness to read Stein both *literally* as well as *contextually*, examining why she puts up a particular "fence" or "boundary line" around certain words and why others are excluded. "Dislocations" of specific words and phrases are, after all, ways of *locating* others.

"But isn't *the same* at least the same?" Consider, for example, the following passage from "Arthur a Grammar":

Right.

Right right right right left.

Right left right left I had a good job and I left.

Right left right left right I had a good job and I left.

Told grammar.

Grammar.

What is it. Who was it.

Artichokes.

Articles.

A version.

He merely feels.

Does he.

Does it.
 He merely feels does it.
 He merely feels does he.
 Makes.
 In prints it.
 Prints prints it.
 Forgotten.
 He has forgotten to count.
 He has forgotten how to count.
 Aid and alike.
 Of account.
 Howard Howard.
 Arthur Arthur.
 Rene Crevel.
 Grammar.
 Our account.
 On our account. (*HTW*, 50-51)

Stein's mock catalogue begins with an allusion to the World War I infantry marching chant "Right, left, right, left, I had a good job and I left. . . ." Verbs, remember, "can be mistaken," as the pun on "left" indicates: such ambiguities are part of a "Told grammar." And, in case you think you know what grammar is, try referring to it as a "who," not a "what."

Nouns, Stein says repeatedly, are not "interesting"—not at least if you think of them as names. But suppose you break them down into their components:

Artichokes
 Articles
 A version

Phonetically, these three three-syllable units sound alike; the first two are almost identical, "artichokes" sharing the same stress pattern and all but three of its letters—*h*, *o*, *k*—with "articles," a plural noun that otherwise has no direct relationship to it, although of course artichokes are articles to be found in the garden or (cooked) on the dinner table. And then line 3 gives us an example of an article in "a," but, coming as it does after the two nouns, one naturally tries to make the next word conform by eliding the space between "A" and "version." And that gives us *aversion*—not exactly a version of things to be expected in this particular catalogue.

Pronouns, Stein believes, "have a greater possibility of being something" than nouns. "He merely feels. / Does he. / Does it. / He merely feels does it. / He merely feels does he." Here the range of possibilities is generated by the period. He

merely feels rather than thinks? Or should we complete the sentence? He merely feels rotten? Does he? Does it hurt? Any number of scenarios are written into these childlike constructions. "In prints it" differs from "Prints prints it" in that the first "prints" may be a noun and the sentence therefore lopped off: "In prints it. . . ." And further: when spoken, "In prints it" is all but indistinguishable from "imprints it." A related "possibility" arises in the semantic contrast between "He has forgotten to count" and "He has forgotten how to count," as well as in the variations between "Of account," "Our account," "On our account," the meaning shifting each time.

Now consider the proper names:

Howard Howard

Arthur Arthur

Rene Crevel

"Howard" and "Arthur," as their repetition suggests, have no individual identity; they are used for structural purposes in specific sentences, as in "How is Howard and how are Arthur and Harold" (*HTW*, 57). "Howard" is no more important than "how"; "Arthur" becomes part of the verb "are" or "Arthur is an author" (*HTW*, 58), and so on. But "Rene Crevel" designates a real person, the young Surrealist writer who frequented Stein's salon. "Of all the young men who came to the house," recalls Alice in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "I think I liked René the best. He had french charm. . . . He was young and violent and ill and revolutionary and sweet and tender. Gertrude Stein and René are very fond of each other" (*ABT*, 223). So "Rene"²² gets extra space: he has a family name "Crevel" as well as a first name, in contrast to Arthur and Howard and Harold. His name, moreover, is not as readily absorbable into the sound structure and grammar of the composition.

"The results of philosophy," we read in the *Philosophical Investigations*, "are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language" (*PI*, #119). It is these "bumps" that Stein takes on in "Arthur a Grammar," and the related "essays" in *How to Write*. Such Wittgenstein puzzles as "Why can't my right hand give my left hand money?" (*PI*, #268) are matched by the implicit question: How is it that we know that the "account" of "Our account" (e.g., bank account or narrative) is not the same as the "account" in "On our account," where "account" means "behalf"? Or again: Why does it sound strange to say "Told Grammar" or "Grammar will"?

In asking such questions, Stein takes us to the heart of her inquiry into the nature of grammar. Indeed, in the passage above, language is not at all "anarchic" or "non-referential"; it merely exposes, in what we might call a hyperreal fashion, the implications contained in phrases, word groups, words, and morphemes. Ironically, then, Stein's essay-poem is what it proclaims itself to be: a treatise on grammar—grammar, that is to say, in its relation to human life ("Arthur"). Like Wittgenstein, Stein displays an almost allergic reaction to what she takes to be the

misuse of words and phrases: "Forgotten. / He has forgotten to count. / He has forgotten how to count." "Being alone with English and among people who can't read a word of her work" (*ABT*, 66), Stein is sensitive to every preposition, even as Wittgenstein, writing in German but lecturing in the English of his adopted Cambridge, wonders whether the verb "is" in "The rose is red" is the same "is" as that in "twice two is four" (*PI*, #558). Attention to such questions of grammar, both writers insist, is a serious business—perhaps *the* serious business.

"He has forgotten to count. He has forgotten how to count": it is interesting to see how Stein's "destruction of syntax" differs from that of her Futurist contemporaries. Marinetti, as a page from *Les mots en liberté futuristes* (1919) will show (see figure 1), was committed to what we might call linguistic mimesis, that is, to the principle that linguistic and visual signs can directly represent and express material sights and sounds. *Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto* (originally titled "Montagnes + vallées + routes + Joffre"), for example, uses dramatic typographic effects (especially the "LEGER / LOURD" opposition of giant phallic M's and "female" V's and W's), inathematical symbols, and elaborate onomatopoeia to represent what the page itself designates as the "Verbalisation dynamique de la route," the frenzy and excitement of General Joffre's passage through the mountains and valleys. Thus the overscale S-curves on the left, curves that evoke the shape of the trenches, move from "la BELLE FRANCE" (with "BELLE" divided by +, -, and x signs) to the confrontation with "GUERRE" and "PRUSSIENS" at bottom left, as if to show the explosion at the Franco-German border. "Mon AMiiiiii," "MaAA x AAapetite," "ta ta ta ta ta": the complex visual arrangement of these words is designed to convey the actual "feel" of battle. The destruction of the linguistic order, as Johanna Drucker remarks, stands for the destruction of human life at the front.²³

From a Wittgensteinian perspective, such correspondence between word and thing, visual layout and verbal referent, reduces meaning to the process of naming. Words, Wittgenstein argues throughout the *Investigations*, are not to be viewed as pointers designating such and such objects; their meaning depends on their function in the specific context of action we call the language-game. And in this respect Stein, as we have seen, was a thorough if unconscious Wittgensteinian; the substitution of the equal sign (=) for the word "is," she would have posited, cannot change the fact that "is" sometimes means "equals" but sometimes not. To understand Stein's own take on Marinetti's expressive model, we might look at a short composition she wrote in 1916, a year after Marinetti produced *Après la Marne*. This composition belongs to no fixed genre (being part portrait, part prose poem, part private diary) and has no fixed form, its five pages ranging from short rhyming couplets (e.g., "To make her shine. / We entwine") to paragraphs bearing titles like "SHE WAS. NOT ASTONISHING" or "ANOTHER CHANCE." It is called *Marry Nettie*, and subtitled *Alright Make It a Series and Call It Marry Nettie*.²⁴

Forms of (Everyday) Life

In the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Alice describes the summer of 1915

when “to forget the war a little,” she and Gertrude Stein went to Mallorca, where they remained until the following spring:

And we went to Palma thinking to spend only a few weeks but we stayed the winter. First we went to Barcelona. It was extraordinary to see so many men on the streets. I did not imagine there could be so many men left in the world. One’s eyes had become so habituated to menless streets, the few men one saw being in uniform and therefore not being men but soldiers, that to see quantities of men walking up and down the Ramblas was bewildering. We sat in the hotel window and looked. I went to bed early and got up early and Gertrude Stein went to bed late and got up late and so in a way we overlapped but there was not a moment when there were not quantities of men going up and down the Ramblas. (*ABT*, 152-53)

This strangely “men-full” Spanish world (the word “men” occurs seven times in the paragraph) is the backdrop for the little-known *Marry Nettie*, written during Stein and Toklas’s Mallorcan stay. The title alludes, of course, to Marinetti, of whom Stein writes in the *Autobiography*:

It was about this time [1912] that the futurists, the Italian futurists, had their big show in Paris and it made a great deal of noise. Everybody was excited and this show being given in a very well known gallery everybody went. Jacques-Emile Blanche was terribly upset by it. We found him wandering tremblingly in the garden of the Tuileries and he said, it looks alright but is it. No it isn’t, said Gertrude Stein. You do me good, said Jacques-Emile Blanche.

The futurists all of them led by Severini thronged around Picasso. He brought them all to the house. Marinetti came by himself later as I remember. In any case everybody found the futurists very dull. (*ABT*, 153)

Futurism, this passage makes clear, was something of a bone of contention between Stein and Picasso, she evidently having been annoyed that Marinetti and his friends were brought to her salon and were so much fussed over. Her good friends Apollinaire and Picabia, let us remember, were strongly influenced by Futurism as was the early Duchamp—this despite the claim, in Marinetti’s first manifesto (1909), that the Futurists “will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.”²⁵ No doubt, Stein would have loved to see the loud, bombastic, charismatic Marinetti put down, but she bided her time.

Marry Nettie, *Alright Make It a Series and Call It Marry Nettie* begins as follows:

Principle calling.
They don’t marry.
Land or storm.
This is a chance.
A Negress.
Nurse.

Three years.

For three years.

By the time.

He had heard.

He didn't eat.

Well.

What does it cost to sew much.

A cane dropped out of the window. It was sometime before it was searched for. In the meantime the Negress had gotten it. It had no value. It was one that did bend. We asked every one. No one would be intended or contented. We gave no peace. At last the day before we left I passed the door. I saw a bamboo cane but I thought the joints were closer together. I said this. Miss Thaddeus looked in. It was my cane. We told the woman who was serving. She said she would get it. She waited and was reasonable. She asked if they found it below as it was the cane of my Thaddeus. It was and plain. So there. We leave.

There is no such thing as being good to your wife. (UD, 309)

What language game is being played in this oblique and seemingly opaque sentence series? The name *Marinetti* is not just a word to be punned upon here,²⁶ for the opening section immediately evokes a comic but also mercilessly satiric portrait of the impresario of Futurism, the proponent of *parole in libertà*, the advocate of technology, violence, war, and free love. Indeed the text cleverly replaces one word (“Marinetti”) by two (“Marry Nettie”), as if to say that the domineering *chef d'école* of Futurism must be replaced by two women in dialogue: “Marry who. Marry Nettie. Which Nettie. My Nettie. Marry whom. Marry Nettie. Marry my Nettie” (UD, 313).

Consider, to begin with, the grammar of Stein's composition. In anticipation of the argument she would later make in “Poetry and Grammar,” the text of *Marry Nettie* depends precisely on those parts of speech abjured by Marinetti in his “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature”—conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, adverbs, and especially the dreaded pronoun “I,” which Marinetti railed against as a vestige of the “old” psychology (*LMM*, 92-95). Conversely, Stein avoids the prescribed infinitive, with its supposed “elasticity of intuition” (*LMM*, 92), and her nouns tend to be abstract rather than concrete. For Marinetti, as I noted above, lyric was synonymous with a sequence of powerful, concrete noun pairs or triads, as in “man-torpedo-boat” or “piazza-funnel.” Stein refuses such pairing: aside from “Land or storm” (line 3), of which more in a moment, her thirteen-line opener has only six nouns: “Principle,” “chance,” “Negress,” “Nurse,” “years,” and “time,” none of them graphic or particularized.

“One must,” declared Marinetti, “destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random just as they are born.”²⁷ One of the great ironies of Stein's *Marry Nettie* is that she is the one who actually destroys syntax; Marinetti's roll calls of

analogous nouns seem quite tame by comparison. Whereas Marinetti's aim, in works like *Zang Tumb Tumb*, is to render the sound of things by the look of things, the aural by the visual as in "uuuuuuuurlaaare" (see figure 2), in Stein's text, such mirror effects give way to unfinished sentences ("For three years," "By the time"), ambiguous referents ("They don't marry," "This is a chance," "He had heard," "It was my cane"), and unanswered questions ("What does it cost to sew much"). Even more remarkably, Stein begins her composition with a play on Marinetti's demand for a poetry that is "an uninterrupted sequence of new images, or it is mere anemia and greensickness."²⁸ "You want an uninterrupted sequence?" her narrator seems to be asking. Well, "Alright make it a series and call it **Marry Nettie.**" But hers is a "series," not of nouns in parallel constructions but of short linear units, each with a slightly different grammatical form and seemingly unrelated to the unit that comes before or after.²⁹

"Principle calling," the "series" begins, immediately making a tongue-in-cheek allusion to Marinetti's grandiose pronouncements, an allusion which is also a pun on Marinetti's insistence on being the "principal" player in all Futurist events. "They don't marry" (line 2) most immediately refers to the soldiers fighting in the war; "they don't marry" because they die instead. But it also refers to Marinetti's call for honest lust in place of romantic love, his attack, for example, on the dancing couple of "Down with Tango and Parsifal" as having the air of "two hallucinated dentists" (*LMM*, 77). Similarly, "Land or storm" (line 3) alludes both to the war, Marinetti's desired "hygiene," as well as to the frenetic travel of the impresario known as the "caffeine of Europe," as well as to the celebration of aggressive military campaigns in the manifestos. And "This is a chance" (line 4) pokes fun at Marinetti's blatant opportunism, even as the "chance" is also the poet's own.

Now we come to the lines "A Negress. / Nurse." Anyone familiar with Marinetti will recall the passage in the first manifesto where the poet describes the accident in which his new motorcar capsizes in a muddy ditch:

Oh! Maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water! Fair factory
 drain! I gulped down your nourishing sludge; and I remembered
 the blessed black breast of my Sudanese nurse.³⁰

The nurse, for that matter, is mentioned frequently in Marinetti's writings, always as an emblem of the exotic, "violent" East (specifically, Egypt) where Marinetti grew up. Stein turns this Sudanese nurse into an American "Nettie" ("Nettie" was, in Stein's day, a common Southern name, especially for "colored girls"), for whom marriage is being proposed. But by whom and how? We only know that "A Negress. Nurse" has somehow been around "For three years. By the time," but we don't, at this point, know by what time and what her role is. Perhaps she has managed to get away, has made "an egress." The "series" of terse, staccato sentence units ("He had heard. / He didn't eat"), in any case, now culminates in a pun on "sew" (the nurse's job?) / "so." "What does it cost," the line implies, "to talk so much?" Or "shout so much," or whatever other appropriate verb we want

nel treno *fogliame vibrante dell'olfatto* odore
 fecale della dissenteria + puzzo melato dei
 sudori della peste + tanfo ammoniacale
 dei colerosi + fetidità zuccherina delle gan-
 grene polmonari + odore acidulo dei feb-
 bricitanti + odori di cantina + piscio di
 gatto + olio-rancido pane-caldo + aglio +
 incenso + paglia-fradicia + stagni + frittura +
 vinacce + odori di topo + tuberosa + ca-
 volo-marcio **zang-tumb-tumb tata-
 tatatata stop**

uuuuuuuurlaaare degli
 ammalati nel **errrrrrrepitare** delle **palle**
 fischi **schianto** di vetri rotttti sportelli-ber-
 sagli Adrianopoli interamente accerchiata treno
 abbandonato dai meccanici e dai soldati
 rabbbbbia degli shrapnels bulgari
 fame rapacità mordere mordere i minareti-

to insert into the sentence. And at this point, "Marry Nettie" shifts from "verse" to "prose" with a "description" of a cane that has been "dropped out of the window," where "In the meantime the Negress had gotten it. It had no value."

In the photographs (and some paintings as well) of Marinetti and his *cénacle* (see figure 3), the black derby hat, heavy black overcoat, cigarette dangling from the lips, and the cane held by a black gloved hand become Futurist insignia. *Marry Nettie* plays on this image, presenting us with a situation where the cane, which "had no value" because, Stein seems to suggest, Futurist art had no value, was "dropped out of the window." The magic wand passes on to someone else. To whom? To the Negress, of course, the Nettie of the title. "It was one that did bend": someone else (Nettie) could appropriate it. But soon the real owner, a Miss Thaddeus, turns up and claims it, Miss Thaddeus quite possibly representing one of the American spinster ladies, like the Misses Cone from Baltimore, who tries to come between the "marrying" of Gertrude and Alice. "There is no such thing as being good to your wife."

Thus far, then, Stein's poetic composition is a comic and sometimes devastating send-up of Marinetti's values; it elegantly and wittily deflates its "subject" without making a single overt statement about him. But, someone is sure to object, if Stein wants to produce a satire, why does she need to be so obscure? Or, to make the opposite objection, if she wants to be so obscure, why am I, as her reader, "translating" the passage back into straightforward, "normal" English? Isn't this a violation of her poetic intentions?

My response to the first objection is that Stein's fabled obscurity is, ironically enough, a function of what we might call her hyperrealism. She does not, as the more familiar satirist would, belittle her subject by exposing his foibles or mocking his pretensions. Rather, she stages the subject's self-exposure. Here, as in her portraits of Picasso and Matisse, Stein uses Marinetti's own words and gestures to deprive the artist of his identity. Consider, for example, the shift from short line units to "normal" prose which accompanies the appropriation of the "dropped" cane by the negress. From Marinetti to Nettie. Or, more properly, in view of the fact that "They don't marry" (line 2)—a reference to the various single guests at the Mallorca hotel whom the narrator maliciously observes, from Marinetti to Gertrude and Alice, who can't legally "marry," but are "marry-nettied" all the same.

But what of the second objection? Why is it not enough to say, of the passage in question, that it represents Stein's refusal to "mean," her dislocation or disruption of patriarchal language by means of what Marianne DeKoven and others have described as an "irreducibly multiple, fragmented, open-ended articulation of lexical meaning," whose "primary modes are dissonance, surprise, and play"?³¹ Why violate the *jouissance* of Stein's "pre-Oedipal" language? Because, I would suggest, not all "dislocations" are of equal value. To assume that Stein chooses her words more or less randomly, that she is merely being "playful," is to ignore the careful contextualization that makes such play possible. No two words, after all, are used precisely the same way. Suppose, for example, that in



Figure 3: Luigi Russolo, Carlo Carrà, F. T. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, and Gino Severini in Paris, 1912 (reprinted from Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla, *Futurism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1978], 36).

line 1 of “Marry Nettie,” we substituted “Conviction calling” for “Principle calling.” The pun of “principle” / “principal” would be lost. As for “calling,” no synonym (e.g., “shouting,” “announcing,” “heralding”) has precisely the resonance of this ordinary word, which may be present participle or noun. A “principal calling”—it is the artistic vocation Marinetti claimed for his “revolutionary” movement.

Having submitted this vocation to comic critique, Stein now develops the “Marry Nettie” relationship between the “we” who are Gertrude and Alice. First, the ladies go shopping:

She asked for tissue paper. She wanted to use it as a respirator. I don’t understand how so many people can stand the mosquitoes.

It seems unnecessary to have it last two years. We would be so

pleased.

We are good.

We are energetic.

We will get the little bowls we saw to-day.

The little bowls we saw to-day are quite pretty.

They will do nicely.

We will also get a fan. We will have an electric one.
Everything is so reasonable.

It was very interesting to find a sugar bowl with the United States seal on one side and the emblem of liberty on the other.

If you care to talk to the servant do not talk to her while she is serving at table. This does not make me angry nor annoy me. I like salad. I am losing my individuality.

What could be “simpler” than the childlike, regressive grammar of this paragraph? “We would be so pleased,” “The little bowls we saw to-day are quite pretty,” “We will also get a fan. We will have an electric one”—it seems like the mere recording of the banalities and niceties of everyday “polite” chitchat. The “sugar bowl with the United States seal on one side and the emblem of liberty on the other” is purchased, evidently by Stein herself, and then reappears in the section, some two pages later, titled, “A New Sugar Bowl With a Cross On Top”:

We said we had it. We will take it to Paris. Please let us take everything.

The sugar bowl with a cross on top now has sugar in it. Not soft sugar but the sugar used in coffee. It is put on the table for that.

It is very pretty. We have not seen many things. We want to be careful. We don't really have to bother about it. (UD, 311)

But why should the reader care about a silly sugar bowl with the Statue of Liberty on it? And why does it matter that the bowl “now [back in Paris] has sugar in it. Not soft sugar but the sugar used in coffee”? And what is the significance of the social decorum that dictates such things as “If you care to talk to the servant do not talk to her while she is serving at table”?

“The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity,” notes Wittgenstein. “(One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes). . . . we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful” (*PI*, #129). The Stein paragraph I have just cited will strike many readers as merely boring. Who cares whether or not a nameless female customer (“she”) “asked for tissue paper” that she wanted to use as “a respirator”? Who cares that there are so many mosquitoes about?

A clue as to what Stein is up to here may be found in the concluding sentences, "I like salad. I am losing my individuality." Like "I have a pain," "I have three dresses," Stein's parallel grammatical units mask an important semantic difference. "I like salad"—these are the polite words of a lady in a dining-room, when served by the waitress. So oppressive is the need to say these things, to observe the niceties we have just witnessed, that the speaker shifts gears to "I am losing my individuality." And indeed we have just witnessed this loss: in the sugar bowl/electric fan encounter, it's not clear whether the "I" is Gertrude or Alice or a third speaker who is overheard. Nor does it matter, the point being that, for all the foreigners sitting out the war on the Mallorca hotel scene, individuality is what is lost. Although "All languages" are spoken here (UD, 310), a nagging estrangement has set in: "They see English spoken." Note that this sentence subtly deviates from its model, "They hear English spoken." To "see" English spoken is to see a sign on a shop window or in a restaurant or hotel: "English spoken." That's how one sees it. And such seeing is not without its attendant anxieties:

We will go out in the morning. We will go and bring home fish.
We will also bring note-books and also three cups. We will see
Palma. Shoes are necessary. Shoes with cord at the bottom are
white. How can I plan everything? (UD, 310)

So meaningless do the rituals become that we "overhear" vapid statements like: "Sometimes I don't mind putting on iodine and sometimes I do," which makes disinfecting one's wounds sound like an "informed" choice to commit an act of real consequence.

The world of "Marry Nettie" is thus one of social ritual and boredom, of niceties and conventions, of proper behavior and meaningless chores. The hotel food is tasty ("It is very edible," on the model of "It is very reasonable") but "She" (who?) "came upstairs having been sick. It was the effect of the crab." The "issue" of the day is whether "tissue paper" can serve as a "respirator" (note the rhyme), a protection against mosquitoes, or whether towels do or do not "dry down here" as well as they dry up at the Count's place. As a result, confusion sets in: "Was I lost in the market or was she lost in the market" (UD, 311)—a curiously Wittgensteinian question, for obviously, if two people go to a market and lose one another, both are equally "lost" or "found," as the case may be.

The loss of "individuality" gradually leads from boredom to anxiety and a degree of claustrophobia. The section called "We Blamed Each Other" begins: "She said I was nervous. I said I knew she wasn't nervous. The dear of course I wasn't nervous. I said I wasn't nervous" (UD, 311). The war is always in the background: "Do we believe the germans. We do not" (UD, 312). And again, "May the gods of Moses and of Mars help the allies. They do they will." As the days go on, the heat evidently becomes more oppressive and "we" no longer go out or have tea. "We will not have tea. We will rest all day with the electric fan. We will have supper. We can perspire. After supper. This is so humorous."

But what has happened to Marinetti? The section I have just cited (“We Will Walk After Supper”) is followed by one called “We Had An Exciting Day,” which begins: “We took a fan out of a man’s hand.” This droll gesture acts as a gentle slap on Marinetti’s wrist, a comic dismantling of the pretentiousness Stein discerns in Futurist poetics. Thus, “we” women (specifically, Gertrude and Alice) remove the fan, a traditional emblem of femininity, from the “man’s hand” that tries to control it. But more importantly, given the declaration, on the first page of *Marry Nettie*, that “We will also get a fan. We will have an electric one,” the fan taken out of a man’s hand represents Stein’s assertion that Marinetti and his friends no longer have a corner on technology. On the contrary, electricity, celebrated in countless paeans by the Futurists, now belongs to “us.” But its use has to be redefined: Stein wholly subverts the paratactic mode of Futurism (or, for that matter, Imagism and Vorticism), using syntactic context and impersonal pronouns (“They,” “this,” “he,” “it,” “What”) in a series of short, staccato sentences that, far from creating a constellation of revelatory images, undercut one another. The technique is to take ordinary language (“We said we had it. We will take it to Paris. Please let us take everything”) and create a “narrative” in which nothing really changes except our own “Capacity to see something as something” (*PI*, 213).

As *Marry Nettie* moves to its conclusion, Gertrude and Alice become increasingly detached from the other guests: “You see plenty of french people. You see some foolish people. You hear one boasting. What is he saying.” It no longer matters too much, for what counts is their own “marriage”:

YOU LIKE THIS BEST.
 Lock me in neatly.
 Unlock me sweetly.
 I love my baby with a rush rushingly.

After this love scene, “Marry Nettie” concludes with a kind of chant in which *parole in libertà* are nicely replaced by the punning play on Marinetti’s name, its dissolution making way for the “I” who speaks:

Marry who. Marry Nettie. Which Nettie. My Nettie.
 Marry whom. Marry Nettie. Marry my Nettie.

I was distinguished by knowing about the flower pot. It was one that had tuberose. I put the others down below. That one will be fixed.

I was also credited with having partiality for the sun. I am not particular. I do not like to have it said that it is so necessary to hear the next letter. We all wish to go now. Do be certain that we are cool.

Oh shut up. (UD, 313)

“Marry who. Marry Nettie. Which Nettie. My Nettie.” Stein’s droll chant has finally turned the grand impresario into a *marionette*. And over against Marinetti’s own insistence on the particularity of the image, Stein presents her *own* particularity: “I was distinguished by knowing about the flower pot,” “I put the others down below,” “I was also credited with having partiality for the sun,” and finally, the double-entendre of “I am not particular.” Then too, the flower pot the narrator is “distinguished by knowing about” is the “one that had tuberoses.” Is it a mere coincidence that in the page from *Zang Tumb Tumb* illustrated above (see figure 2)—a page Stein might have certainly seen at a Paris exhibition or heard declaimed by Marinetti—we find *tuberosa* in the following context?

grape pressings + smells of mouse + tuberose +
cabbage-rot zang-tumb-tumb tata-
tatatatata stop ³²

Like the fan Gertrude and Alice have taken “out of a man’s hand,” the tuberoses, removed from the smells of the battlefield, are now, so to speak, in her own flower pot.

But the permutations of the “Marry who” sentence have an interesting way of qualifying the identity of Stein’s “I.” As Wittgenstein put it in the passage from the *Investigations* cited above, “Then are two things the same when they are what *one* thing is?” (*PI*, #215). Each permutation of “the same” word group—here *Marry Nettie*—creates difference: the relationship of two people is always shifting. Is it correct to say “Marry who” or “Marry whom”? It all depends. “I do not like to have it said that it is so necessary to hear the next letter.” There are no prescriptions that fit every situation. The *same* is not the same. And so the text ends on a note of impatience with the line “Oh shut up.”

Is Stein addressing Toklas here? One of the other guests who has annoyed her? The chambermaid? Or Marinetti himself, the performance artist who never shuts up? The implied “you” may be any or all of these—in this sense the Stein text is indeterminate. But her indeterminacy, as I have argued elsewhere,³³ is by no means equivalent to nonsense or automatic writing. Indeed, her “ordinary” language constructions, like Wittgenstein’s, are always in dialogical relation to the language of the world in which they exist, providing a powerful satire of its pretensions. “A great many philosophical difficulties,” remarks Wittgenstein, “are connected with that sense of the expressions ‘to wish’, ‘to think’, etc. . . . These can all be summed up in the question: ‘How can one think what is not the case?’”³⁴

Take the layeredness of *Marry Nettie*. From a modernist literary perspective, it functions as Stein’s own counter-Futurist manifesto, her very covert and witty proclamation of difference and subversion. Words, her text suggests, can be torn open and realigned so as to uncover relationships that Marinettian parataxis had tended to ignore. From a historical perspective, the piece provides us with an

image of the boredom and malaise experienced by those “private” citizens who tried to escape the realities of wartime France—indeed, in a broader sense, the malaise of any group of people marking time in a comparable situation. And from a personal perspective, *Marry Nettie* is “about” the day-to-day relationship, under the strained circumstances of the Mallorcan idyll, of a never-named Gertrude and Alice—a relationship that is loving but also tense, a “marriage” made in the face of the “they” who “don’t marry.”

Ironically, then, Stein’s text can, as feminist critics have suggested about related texts, be construed as an anti-patriarchal, anti-authoritarian, non-linear and oblique lesbian fiction. But in Stein’s case, such specific gender construction is never the whole story. It would be misleading, for example, to assume from *Marry Nettie* that Stein was the enemy of Futurism; on the contrary, many of the paintings and writings she most admired—say, Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* or Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*—had close links to Futurist aesthetics. Nor can we assume that Stein’s oblique upstaging of Marinetti represents the larger resentment she felt to male artists in general. Her most important role model—perhaps her only real model—was, after all, the aggressively male Picasso. Indeed, *Marry Nettie* being not a tract but a poetic construct, she is much less interested in ideology than in what she calls, in “Composition as Explanation,” “using everything.”

“Using everything” suggests a further irony. There is, after all, one thing Stein does seem to have learned from Futurist practice. Look at the opening page—for that matter, at any page—of *Marry Nettie* (figure 4). If the page design is not quite that of, say, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (figure 2), it isn’t entirely unlike it either. Lineated passages alternate with conventional paragraphs, sentences are often set off and surrounded by white space as in “There is no such thing as being good to your wife” (UD, 309), and repeated units are arranged in a column as in

Oil.

Oil.

so as to form visual configurations. Most important, short blocks of text, whether lineated or in paragraph form, are preceded by titles in capital letters: “HOT WEATHER,” “PLEASE BE QUICK,” “WHY DO YOU LIKE IT,” “WHOM DO YOU SAY YOU SEE,” and so on.

Such attention to visual poetics was not part of Stein’s early practice: neither *Three Lives* nor *The Making of Americans*, nor even the early portraits exhibited any sort of break with conventional layout by means of typography, spacing, irregular margins, and so forth. Not till 1914, when she produced *Tender Buttons* and *Pink Melon Joy*, was the standard print block of the conventional book called into question. And by this time Futurist typography, collage, and manifesto format were well known in Stein’s Paris. *Marry Nettie* is thus more Marinettian than Stein cared to admit.

Still, it is fair to say that Steinian grammar was never primarily visual: for her,

Do we believe the germans.

We do not.

SPANISH PENS.

Spanish pens are falling. They fall there. That makes it rich. That makes Spain richer than ever. Spanish pens are in places. They are in the places which we see. We read about everything. This is by no means an ordeal. A charity is true.

WHY ARE WE PLEASED.

We are pleased because we have an electrical fan.

May the gods of Moses and of Mars help the allies. They do they will.

WE WILL WALK AFTER SUPPER.

We will not have tea. We will rest all day with the electric fan. We will have supper. We can perspire. After supper. This is so humorous.

WE HAD AN EXCITING DAY.

We took a fan out of a man's hand. We complained to the mother of Richard. Not knowing her we went there. They all said it. It was useful. We went to the ball room where there was billiard playing and reading. Then we accepted it. He said it was changed from five to seven and a half.

NOT VERY LIKELY.

We were frightened. We are so brave and we never allow it. We do not allow anything at last. That's the way to say we like ours best.

PAPERS.

Buy me some cheese even if we must throw it away. Buy me some beets. Do not ask them to save any of these things. There will be plenty of them. One reason why we are careful is that carrots are indifferent. They are so and we forgot to say Tuesday. How do you do. Will you give me some of the fruit. It is thoughtless of me to be displeased.

HOT WEATHER.

I don't care for it. Why not. Because it makes me careless. Careless of what. Of the example of church. What is church. Church is not a question. So there is strength and truth and rocking.

as for Wittgenstein, what mattered was how people actually put words and sentences together and how they understood one another. "We were sure," we read half-way through *Marry Nettie*, "that steam was coming out of the water. It makes that noise" (UD, 311). A wonderfully droll pseudo-explanation that may be glossed by the following proposition from the *Investigations*:

Of course, if water boils in a pot, steam comes out of the pot and also pictured steam comes out of the pictured pot. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the picture of the pot?
(PI, #297)

So much for being "sure" of what we hear and see. But certainty, in any case, is not at issue. "Language," Wittgenstein notes, "can only be important because of the use made of it. It has no sense to say that language is 'important' or 'necessary' to communicate our meaning. But it may be important for building bridges and doing similar things."³⁵ Or as Stein puts it in *Marry Nettie*, "That's it. Beds. How glad I am. What was I worried about. Was it the weather, was it the sun, was it fatigue was it being tired. It was none of these. It was that wood was used and we did not know. We blamed each other" (UD, 311).

Not until such later avant-garde movements as Fluxus, Oulipo, or Language poetry have the implications of Steinian poetics been fully realized. But by that time, the two avant-garde poles—signification as expressive (that is, visualized) form, signification as grammatical construction—had come together. In the Fluxus exhibit currently touring the U.S. there is an ordinary little wooden box that bears on the cover the label "Closed on Mondays." The box itself might be a little chest by Balla, containing, say, brightly colored geometrical designs, or it might be a Dada ready-made. But the inscription is Wittgensteinian. Why, we can hear him ask, can't a box, like a typical museum, be closed on Mondays? Is it open the rest of the week? Gertrude Stein, herself the creator of two prose poems called "A Box" (see *Tender Buttons*), would have enjoyed this particular use of the word "closed." "A touching box," we read in her portrait "One. Carl Van Vechten," "is in a coach seat so that a touching box is on a coach seat so a touching box is on a coach seat, a touching box is on a coat seat, a touching box is on a coat seat. A touching box is on the touching so helping held" (UD, 274-75).

"A combination of words," as Wittgenstein put it with reference to "Milk me sugar," "is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation." But why? And how does a "coach seat" relate to a "coat seat"? At the end of the twentieth century, we are still puzzling over these questions.

NOTES

1. Gertrude Stein, "Arthur a Grammar," in *How to Write* (hereafter cited as *HTW*), ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (1931; New York: Dover, 1975), 57, 59. My title "Grammar in Use" is found in the same essay on p. 54.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (hereafter cited as *PI*), 3d ed., trans. G. E. M.

Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1968), #496. References to Wittgenstein are to the number of the proposition, indicated by “#” unless, as in the case of Part II, the page is cited.

3. The first sentence comes from *Tender Buttons* (1913-14), the second from *What Happened, A Five Act Play* (1913), the third and fourth from *Pink Melon Joy* (1915). The original edition of *Tender Buttons* (Paris: Claire Marie, 1914; hereafter cited as *TB*) has been reprinted by Sun & Moon Press (Los Angeles: n.d.). For *What Happened* and *Pink Melon Joy*, both first published in *Geography & Plays* (1922; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), see Ulla E. Dydo, ed., *A Stein Reader* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993). The *Reader* (hereafter cited as *UD*) provides us with the most authoritative texts available for each Stein piece selected, as well as with Dydo’s excellent headnotes; it is the single most important book anyone interested in Stein should consult. On “Roast potatoes for” and the related “Tender Buttons,” see the excellent analysis of grammatical form and language in Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21-43.

4. Anon., review of *Tender Buttons*, in *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 6 July 1914; cited in Ray Lewis White, *Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1984), 9.

5. As the poet Lyn Hejinian puts it in a fascinating essay called “Two Stein Talks” (*Tembler* 3 [1986]: 128-39), “The incorrectness of the dangling preposition attracts one’s attention.”

6. Bettina L. Knapp, *Gertrude Stein* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 127-28.

7. The most convincing work on the sexual coding in Stein’s work is that of Catharine R. Stimpson: see “Gertrude Stein and the Transposition of Gender,” in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1-18; “The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein,” *Poetics Today* 6.1-2 (1985): 67-80; “The Mind, the Body, and Gertrude Stein,” *Critical Inquiry* 3.3 (Spring 1977): 489-506. See also Pamela Hadas, “Spreading the Difference: One Way to Read Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 24 (1978): 57-75; Elizabeth Fifer, “Is Flesh Advisable: The Interior Theater of Gertrude Stein,” *Signs* 4 (1979): 472-83.

In *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), Marianne DeKoven follows Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic model, distinguishing Stein’s *écriture féminine* from patriarchal writing: “Conventional language is patriarchal not because it is male, but because it exaggerates, hypostasizes, exclusively valorizes male modes of signification, silencing the female presymbolic, pluridimensional modes articulated by experimental writing. These modes are female only because they are pre-Oedipal” (xix); such pre-Oedipal modes “attack the cultural hegemony of sense, order, linearity, unitary coherence” (7). A related case is made by Harriet Chessman, whose *The Public Is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) discusses the ways “difference” may subvert the authoritarian identity of the Lacanian Father.

The most elaborate treatment of the larger gender issue in Stein’s work to date is Lisa Ruddick’s *Reading Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). Ruddick reads pre-World War I Stein (whom she takes to be the significant Stein) as a case of “feminine gnosticism.” *Tender Buttons*, for example, “represents Stein’s fully developed vision of the making and unmaking of patriarchy,” where patriarchy is defined as “sacrifice,” “crucifixion,” or “live burial.” “Once one sees male dominance as dependent on sacrifice, one is in a position to undo sacrifice and to transcend patriarchal thinking” (191).

8. Stein never met Wittgenstein. She might, of course, have known him (or known of him) through Alfred North Whitehead, one of Stein’s “three geniuses” (see Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* [1933; hereafter cited as *ABT*], in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten [1945; New York: Vintage, 1990]), whom she and Alice B. Toklas met during their trip to England in July 1914. When war broke out between England and Russia on 1 August, Evelyn Whitehead insisted that the two ladies stay with them at their country house in Wiltshire until they were out of danger. The visit lasted for six weeks, during which Stein took frequent walks with Whitehead and discussed philosophy. Later, Evelyn Whitehead visited Stein at the rue de Fleurus.

Wittgenstein had been a visitor to Whitehead’s Wiltshire cottage exactly a year earlier, in August 1913. But despite Bertrand Russell’s advocacy of Wittgenstein in this period, Whitehead kept his distance. As Whitehead’s biographer Victor Lowe explains it, Whitehead disliked what he took to be the Austrian philosopher’s absolutism, his insistence that one *must* not ask certain questions, and he felt that Wittgenstein drove science and philosophy, the two disciplines he himself had tried to reconcile, further apart by making philosophy a very special kind of linguistic activity. See Victor Lowe, *Alfred North*

Whitehead: The Man and his Work, II: 1910–1947, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 29-31, 277-78. The dislike was mutual: Wittgenstein never took Whitehead seriously.

After Stein's death, when Toklas was asked by Allegra Stewart whether Stein had ever read Wittgenstein, Toklas insisted that she hadn't. Santayana, James, Whitehead—these, she said, were Stein's masters. But Wittgenstein was an entirely unknown quantity.

9. Note, incidentally, that the usual explanation that, as a lesbian, Stein left the repressive U.S. for the "freedom" of France is only a partial one. Wittgenstein's Vienna was probably less strait-laced than the England of the 1910s, and yet Cambridge was an easier place for him to have a private life. It is more a case of going away, of living far from one's family where one can be anonymous than a case of leaving a repressive society for a free one. In Wittgenstein's case, the reasons for leaving Vienna were, of course, less consciously articulated than Stein's; on the other hand, he never felt "at home" in Cambridge as she felt at home in Paris.

10. Françoise Collin, "L'Écriture sans rature," in *Gertrude Stein, encore* (Amiens: Trois Cailloux, in' hui, 1983), 107-08. My translation.

11. Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," *Lectures in America* (1935; Boston: Beacon Press, 1985; hereafter cited as *LLA*), 209-10.

12. F. T. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (11 May 1912), in *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings* (hereafter cited as *LMM*), ed. R. W. Flint, trans. R. W. Flint et al. (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), 92-93. The original reads: "La poesia deve essere un seguito ininterrotto"; "legato per analogia"; "Esempio: uomo-torpediniera, donna-golfo, folla-risacca, piazza-imbuto, porta-rubinetto" (F. T. Marinetti, "Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista," in *Teoria e invenzione futurista* (hereafter cited as *TIF*), ed. Luciano De Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), 41-42. In *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), I argue that the English Vorticists, including Ezra Pound, derived much of their aesthetic from *parole in libertà*.

13. F. T. Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax—Imagination without Strings—Words in Freedom" (1913), in *Futurist Manifestos* (hereafter cited as *FM*), ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. Robert Brain et al. (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 95-106, esp. 104-05. The original reads: "tre o quattro colori diversi d'inchostro, e anche 20 caratteri tipografici diversi, se occorra. Per esempi: *corsivo* per una serie di sensazioni simili o veloci, *grassetto tondo* per le onomatopoeie violente, ecc" (Marinetti, "Distruzione della sintassi—Immaginazione senza fili—Parole in libertà," in *TIF*, 57-70, emphasis in original).

14. Marinetti, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," in *LMM*, 92. The original reads: "Si deve abolire l'aggettivo, perché il sostantivo nudo conservi il suo colore essenziale" (*TIF*, 41). See also "Destruction of Syntax," in *FM*, 103: "Everywhere we tend to suppress the qualifying adjective because it presupposes an arrest in intuition, too minute a definition of the noun." The original reads: "Noi tendiamo a sopprimere ovunque l'aggettivo qualificativo, poiché presuppone un arresto nella intuizione, una definizione troppo minuta del sostantivo" (*TIF*, 64-65).

15. See, for example, Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford, 1970), 255-56: "The lectures [*Lectures in America*] were Gertrude Stein's earnest effort to explain and justify the perplexing sprawl of her literary evolution." Stein's efforts to find "a way of naming things . . . without naming them," "sounded surprisingly like automatic writing. . . . Her desire to escape from staleness was commendable. . . . But the actual creation was arbitrary and really only approximate."

16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), #717.

17. *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 515.

18. See Stimpson, "The Mind, the Body, and Gertrude Stein," 499-503.

19. See UD, 2. See also Terry Castle, review of Ulla E. Dydo, *A Stein Reader*, in *Times Literary Supplement* 18 February 1994, 4. The remarkable thing about Stein's descriptive language, says Castle, is that it is "grounded in actuality": "the perplexing *non sequiturs* must all be read as revivifying gestures, as ways of forcing the reader to 'begin again,' to see the world in a new and more immediate way."

20. Gertrude Stein, "A Transatlantic Interview," in Robert Bartlett Haas, ed., *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), 25.

21. See *The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein*, ed. Donald Gallup (New

York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 50. Stein had sent James a copy of *Three Lives* when it was published in 1909 and asked her former teacher what he thought. James responded: "You know how hard it is for me to read novels. Well, I read 30 or 40 pages, and said 'this is a fine new kind of realism—Gertrude Stein is great!' I will go at it carefully when just the right mood comes." Since James died the next year, he did not comment further.

22. In "Arthur a Grammar," Stein leaves off the acute accent on the second "e" of "René," for the same reason that she does not use question marks and exclamation points. Structurally, she argues, such punctuation marks are unnecessary, for the sentence should carry its own intonation contour without such props.

23. Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 105–40. Drucker's excellent study is the fullest treatment to date of the semiotics of Marinetti's typography.

24. First published in 1955 in *Painted Lace and Other Pieces (1914–1937)*, volume 5 of the 8-volume Yale Edition of the *Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*, the 1917 text is reprinted in a corrected version in UD, 308–13. In the Yale Edition, the subtitle is printed as the first line of the text. All further reference are to Dydo's text.

25. *LMM*, 50. The original reads: "Noi vogliamo glorificare la guerra—sola igiene del mondo—il militarismo, il patriottismo, il gesto distruttore dei libertari, le belle idee per cui si muore e il disprezzo della donna" (F. T. Marinetti, "Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo," in *TIF*, 10).

26. In *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, Bridgman writes, "Gertrude Stein played upon the name of the leader of the Futurists, Filippo Marinetti, although she made no other reference to him in the portrait" (154). This view is echoed by Dydo, who says in her headnote, "The Italian futurist Marinetti is not the subject of *Marry Nettie*. Rather, the name offered Stein the pun. In this piece done in Mallorca, there is no futurism and no serial composition" (UD, 308).

27. *LMM*, 92. The original reads: "Bisogna distruggere la sintassi disponendo i sostantivi a caso, come nascono" (*TIF*, 42).

28. (*LMM*, 93). The original reads: "La poesia deve essere un seguito ininterrotto di immagini nuove senza di che non è altro che anemia e clorosi" (*TIF*, 42).

29. Dydo supplies another reason for the reference to "series": "In late March 1916 Carl Van Vechten wrote that if Stein came to America she would be received like Jenny Lind, the famous Swedish soprano. On 18 April Stein answered she was making 'so much absorbing literature with such attractive titles and even if I could be as popular as Jenny Lind where oh where is the man to publish me in series' (*The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*, 53). She wanted a publisher to take her on and print her *seriatim*" (UD, 308).

30. (*LMM*, 48). The original reads: "Oh! materno fossato, quasi pieno di un'acqua fangosa! Bel fossato d'officina! Io gustai avidamente la tua melma fortificante, che mi ricordò la santa mammella nera della mia nutrice sudanese" (*TIF*, 9).

31. De Koven, *A Different Language*, 76.

32. The original reads:

vinacce + odori di topo + tuberosa + ca-
 volo-marcio zang-tumb-tumb tata-
 tatatata stop (*TIF*, 689; emphasis in original; my translation)

33. See "Poetry as Word-System: The Art of Gertrude Stein," in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (1981; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 67–108; *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 190–93; "'A Fine New Kind of Realism': Six Stein Styles in Search of a Reader," in *Poetic License: Essays in Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 145–59; "Ninety-Percent Rotarian: Gertrude Stein's Hemingway," *American Literature* 62.4 (December 1990): 668–83.

34. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations,"* 2d. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 30.

35. *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–32: From the Notes of John King and Desmond Lee*, ed. Desmond Lee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 61.