

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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September 25, 2014. Stein (I).

paper reminder

- ▶ due October 6
- ▶ late policy
- ▶ we want to talk to you!
- ▶ evidence...

making evidence count

Weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble. Weeble weeble weeble weeble:

Weeble weeble, weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble; weeble weeble weeble. Weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble. (42)

Weeble weeble weeble “weeble weeble,” weeble weeble. “Weeble” weeble weeble weeble. Weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble; weeble “weeble weeble weeble, weeble weeble.” Weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble weeble. Weeble weeble weeble...

review: Conrad as critic of empire

- ▶ symmetry (“And this also”)
 - ▶ quasi-excuse
 - ▶ developmental logic
- ▶ craft (“Rivets!”)
 - ▶ deep relation to artistic professionalism
 - ▶ just doing the job
- ▶ enigma (“halo”)
 - ▶ global system cannot be fully known
 - ▶ political resolution lies outside the fiction

Stein: style

Stein: style

And so Jeff Campbell and Melanctha Herbert sat there on the steps, very quiet, a long time, and they didn't seem to think much, that they were together. They sat there so, for about an hour, and then it came to Jefferson very slowly and as a strong feeling that he was sitting there on the steps, alone, with Melanctha. He did not know if Melanctha Herbert was feeling very much about their being there alone together. Jefferson began to wonder about it a little. Slowly he felt that surely they must both have this feeling. It was so important that he knew that she must have it. They both sat there, very quiet, a long time. (68–69)

Discussion

What are the distinctive stylistic features of this passage? Describe at least four. How do they work?

lexical restriction

Certain words become emblematic, invoking large, open-ended complexes of feeling and association... Each word or phrase increases in significance as it passes through successive contexts... “Wisdom,” “understanding,” “experience,” “excitement”...

(Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language* [1983])

reiteration

And many things happened to Melanctha, but she knew very well that none of them had led her on to the right way, that certain way that was to lead her to world wisdom. (58)

She [Jane] taught her how to go the ways that lead to wisdom. (59)

And slowly she began to see clear before her one certain way that would be sure to lead to wisdom. (60)

ellipsis or euphemism

Melanctha came here very often and watched the men and all the things that were so busy working. The men always had time for, “Hullo sis, do you want to sit on my engine,” and, “Hullo, that’s a pretty lookin’ yaller girl, do you want to come and see him cookin.”

All the colored porters liked Melanctha. (55)

ellipsis (2)

Melanctha all her life did not know how to tell a story wholly. She always, and yet not with intention, managed to leave out big pieces which make a story very different, for when it came to what had happened and what she had said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha never could remember right. The man would sometimes come a little nearer, would detain her, would hold her arm or make his jokes a little clearer, and then Melanctha would always make herself escape. (57)

aspect, duration (1)

Then slowly, between them, it began to be all different. Slowly now between them, it was Melanctha Herbert, who was stronger. Slowly now they began to drift apart from one another. (61)

aspect, duration (2)

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 is the thing seen by every one living in the living they are doing, they are that composing of the composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living.

(“Composition as Explanation” [1926])

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)



Alvin Langdon Coburn. *Gertrude Stein*.
1913. Wikimedia Commons.

1874 b. Allegheny, in Jewish middle-class family; raised in Oakland

1893 Radcliffe; studies with William James

1897–1901 Johns Hopkins medical school

1900–2 affair with May Bookstaver (fictionalized in *Q.E.D.*, not pub.)

1903 moves in with brother Leo in Paris

1904 Steins collect painting (Cézanne &c.)

1905–6 writes *Three Lives* (uses *Q.E.D.*);

friendships with Matisse, Picasso; salons

1907 meets Alice B. Toklas

1909 *Three Lives* published

1910– lives with ABT

1914 *Tender Buttons*

1925 *The Making of Americans*

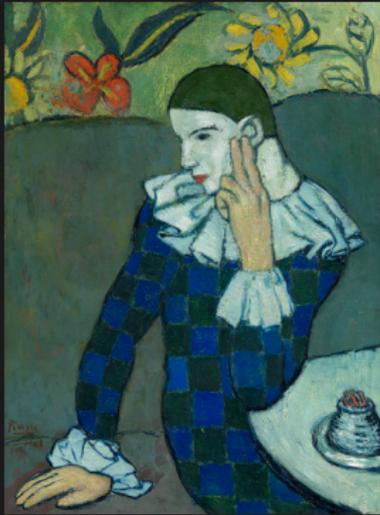
1933 *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

the Paris scene

So Paris was the place that suited those of us that were to create the twentieth century art and literature, naturally enough.

(Stein, *Paris France* [1940])

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)



Seated Harlequin, 1901; *Gertrude Stein*, 1905–6; *Still Life with a Bottle of Rum*, 1911.

Metropolitan Museum, New York.



Gertrude Stein had written the story of Melanctha the negress, the second story of *Three Lives* which was the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature.

(Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* [1933])



Henri Matisse (1869–1954). *Le bonheur de vivre*. Oil on canvas, 1905–6.

Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia. (Wikipedia)



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painterly analogy

Discussion

What does the form of “Melanctha” have to do with painting? Think about Picasso’s different styles, or Matisse’s, or any other aspect of visual art. Find textual examples.

the present

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.

(“Composition as Explanation”)

teaser: the twentieth century?

[“Melanctha” was] the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature.

(Gertrude Stein)

The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

(W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903])

next

- ▶ finish “Melanctha”
- ▶ commonplace