

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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September 29, 2014. Stein (2).

logistics

Paper

- ▶ due October 6
- ▶ office hours

commonplacing

- ▶ always from the reading assigned for Monday
- ▶ formal constraints to exercise your analytic imagination

review (I)

- ▶ Stein's difficult/experimental style
- ▶ lexical restriction
- ▶ reiteration
- ▶ ellipsis/euphemism
- ▶ aspect to the max
- ▶ shifting focalization

discourse/focalization

Focalization

Who sees? (can be distinct from who narrates)

Indirect (**reporting verb** + **complement clause**)

Slowly **he felt that surely they must both have this feeling.**

Free indirect (no reporting verb, **clause in past tense**)

It **was** so important that he knew that she must have it.

(can rewrite as indirect by adding **reporting verb** + **that**)

He felt that it was so important...

(can rewrite as direct by adding quotes and changing tense)

He thought, “It is so important that I know that she must have it.”

review (2)

- ▶ Stein and modern painting
- ▶ Paris as the scene
- ▶ Picasso's "struggle" and breakthrough as a model
- ▶ foregrounding the medium

sources of 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” [1926])

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])

standard violations

Jeff did not talk so much now about what he before always had been thinking. Sometimes Jeff would be, as if he was just waking from himself to be with Melanctha, and then he would find he had been really all the long time with her, and he had really never needed to be doing any thinking. (90)

“I know what you mean now by what you are saying to me now Jeff Campbell....You ain't got no kind of right feeling for all I always been forgiving to you.” (106)

dialects

variety any form of a language seen as systematically distinct

dialect variety distinguished by pronunciation, grammar, lexicon
governed by rules known implicitly by its speakers
differences relate to geographical, occupational,
generational, subcultural, or other sociocultural
categories

standard the socially and culturally predominant variety
considered prestigious or “proper”
rules used as standards of social judgment

dialect writing circa '1900

“Once 'pon a time,” he resumed, “Mr. Man had a gyarden so fine dat all de neighbors come ter see it. Some 'ud look at it over de fence, some 'ud peep thoo de cracks, an' some 'ud come an' look at it by de light er de stars.”

(Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus)

Stein creates a mask of dialect in “Melanctha”...What Stein does...is to create a dialect in which conventions of verbal verisimilitude are played against themselves so that the speech seems simultaneously concrete and highly artificial.

(Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* [1994])



vanguardism

THREE LIVES

STORIES OF THE GOOD
ANNA, MELANCTHA AND
THE GENTLE LENA

BY
GERTRUDE STEIN



THE GRAFTON PRESS

NEW YORK

MCMIX

race/form

When Stein uses this same style of repetition not only in the narration but also in the dialogue, the characters are then given these same characteristics of being child-like and unrefined. It brings about questions regarding the role of race in *Melanctha*... (“RJ317”)

race/form

When Stein uses this same style of repetition not only in the narration but also in the dialogue, the characters are then given these same characteristics of being child-like and unrefined. It brings about questions regarding the role of race in *Melanctha*... (“RJ317”)

Discussion

How does race shape the *form* of “*Melanctha*”? What view or representation of the life of black people in Baltimore is embedded in the story’s language and modes of narration? Is this the same as the aspects of that life that are overtly mentioned?

Seek evidence in the text.

the veil?

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro...

(Du Bois)

love story (I)

love story (1)

They they began not to wander, and Melanctha would spend long hours with Jane in her room, sitting at her feet and listening to her stories, and feeling her strength and the power of her affection...

She loved Melanctha hard and made Melanctha feel it very deeply. (60)

love story (1)

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Melanctha Herbert's love had surely made her mad and foolish. She thrust it always deep into Jem Richards. (132)

love story (2)

And Melanctha always loved very well to make him feel it... She would so well and freely, and with her pure, strong ways of reaching, she would give him all the love she knew now very well. (90)

What was it that now really happened to them? What was it that Melanctha did, that made everything get all ugly for them? What was it that Melanctha felt then, that made Jeff remember all the feeling he had had in him when Jane Harden told him how Melanctha had learned to be so very understanding? (91)

love story (3)

Discussion

What does “Melanctha” do with narrative conventions about love? What understandings of desire are implicit in the way the story is put together?

next

- ▶ *Portrait* at least through chap. 2