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Learning from Cézanne: *Stein's Working with and through Picturing*

One of the many anecdotes told in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is the story of how Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) learned about Cézanne (1839–1906) from her brother Leo (1872–1947), who had seen some of Cézanne's paintings at Charles Loeser's villa in Florence in the summer of 1903; Loeser had been told about Cézanne's work by the latter's close friend Claude Pissarro. At the turn of the century, Cézanne was known only by a small circle of friends, critics, and fellow artists.¹ This was soon to change, however—due to a large exhibition of Cézanne's paintings at the Salon d'Automne of 1904, but also because of the Steins, who bought their first Cézanne in 1904 from Vollard.² On Saturday nights at 27, rue de Fleurus, the Steins' collection of contemporary art could be inspected by the crowd of visitors,³ and Leo would extemporize on modern art, explaining Cézanne's aesthetics and comparing his work to that of other artists.⁴ In those early days in Paris, Gertrude Stein left the terrain of art criticism to her brother. Later, in 1904, the Steins bought “a big Cézanne,” namely, a portrait of the artist's wife. This painting was a major inspiration for Stein's writing. As she herself put it: “[I]n looking and looking at this picture Gertrude Stein wrote *Three Lives*.”⁵

Paul Cézanne,
La Conduite d'eau
(detail, see fig. 1).

In an interview she gave in the last year of her life, Stein recollected her beginnings as a writer and emphasized her indebtedness to Cézanne:



Everything I have done has been influenced by Flaubert and Cézanne, and this gave me a new feeling of composition. Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself, and Cézanne 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, and it impressed me so much that I began to write Three Lives under this influence and this idea of composition, and I was more interested in composition at that moment, this background of a word-system, which had come to me from this reading that I had done. [. . .]

After all, to me one human being is as important as another human being, and you might say that the landscape has the same values, a blade of grass has the same value as a tree. Because the realism of the people who did realism before was a realism of trying to make people real. I was not interested in making the people real but in the essence or, as a painter would call it, value. One cannot live without the other. This was an entirely new idea and had been done a little by the Russians but had not been conceived as a reality until I came along, but I got it largely from Cézanne. Flaubert was there as a theme. He, too, had a little of the feeling about this thing, but they none of them conceived it as an entity, no more than any painter had done other than Cézanne.⁶

Stein gives Flaubert and the Russian writers their due as precursors of modernist literature, but she singles out Cézanne's idea of composition as the true artistic watershed and celebrates him for his egalitarianism: "one thing was as important as another thing." Stein may allude here to Théodore Duret's well-known remark that for Cézanne "a few apples and a napkin on a table assume the same grandeur as a human head or a view by the sea."⁷ More specifically, Stein refers to Cézanne's technique of modeling through colors of equal value. Destroying the effect of different levels of illusionistic space, a flatness is created that contributes to the play with the hierarchy of figure and ground characteristic for Cézanne's paintings.⁸ In the late works, the brushstrokes form color patches built up into a network of repetitions and resemblances that traverses the contours of the

represented objects. As a consequence, figure and ground merge, and the mimetic illusion of the picture becomes incoherent, while the brushmarks display rhythms which may or may not trace the contours of the motif.⁹ The compositional and the representational order engage in a process of exchange,¹⁰ for “[t]he general principle at work in [Cézanne’s] art is analogy: one thing is made to look like, or somehow be like, another, despite the differences and dissimilarities that otherwise obtain.”¹¹ The taches are interrelated, and yet remain distinct, often separated by white intervals. The “unfinishedness” of Cézanne’s paintings is an integral element of the pictorial organization. At the same time, the zones of white canvas show (and signify¹²) the processual character and conceptual openness of Cézanne’s pictures and provoke an activity of the viewer that Stein, in her comments quoted above, calls “reading.”

Cézanne famously coined the term *réalisation* to characterize his artistic aim, which he once described as attempting “to see like a newborn child.”¹³ Stressing aspects of process and movement, *réalisation* has been widely and controversially discussed by critics, art historians, and fellow artists. Did Cézanne’s impressionist aims inhibit “his observing an object as a differentiated part of a whole ‘sensation’ of nature,” as Richard Shiff claimed?¹⁴ Or were the distortions of the paintings conceptually motivated, amounting to a “drama of pictorial integration” that stages the “mosaic of decisions that determine [the painting] becoming a work of art,” as William Rubin argued?¹⁵ Did Cézanne attempt “to paint the primordial world” as an “emerging order” of “objects in the act of appearing,” as phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote?¹⁶ Or did Cézanne’s “relentless attentiveness to the data of the senses” bring about “a dissolution of unity, a destabilization of objects,” which displaces the body of the viewer “into a stream of change, of time,” as Jonathan Crary maintained?¹⁷ Stein’s appreciation of Cézanne’s art never wavered, but what consequences she drew from it varied over time. In the first part of my essay, I will show how Stein used Cézanne’s picturing as a foil for her literary experiments. In the second part, I will analyze Stein’s portrait of Cézanne both as a homage to the artist and a modernist *paragone*.

There are two artistic strategies which Stein discovered in looking at Cézanne’s paintings. Cézanne paid close attention to the cognitive processes involved in perception and decided to present the processes rather than represent the results. This mode of presentation is a self-referential mode of picturing: it makes the viewer experience the production of a picture as the transformation of sensation into visual

signs by a synthesizing act of the imagination. Cézanne's paintings suspend this act of imagination and thereby make it visible—as a lack that keeps the correlation between visual sense data and visual meanings open and variable. “Looking and looking” at Cézanne's pictures, Stein submitted to this experience of picturing again and again. She had studied philosophy and psychology with William James and had conducted psychological experiments at the Harvard Psychology Lab. For her, the cognitive act of the synthesizing imagination translated into the habitual act of integrating sense data into visual signs respectively, which in turn relied on visual schematizations also formed through habit. Cézanne's artistic imagination was no different from any other painter's or indeed anyone else's, but his eye-opening insight consisted in finding a way to visually (re)present picturing (which for Stein turns the canvas into something akin to a text in that it requires reading). At the same time, Cézanne's picturing could serve as a model for her writing only in a limited way since the reader deals with several sorts of sense data simultaneously: in order to create meaning, visual data (consisting of letters, but also of blanks and typographical signs) must be recognized as referring to words and sentences, as culturally coded schematizations of sound “images.” But of course words and sentences are not sound “images.” Not all words are referential: pronouns refer to recursive processes, conjunctions create logical connections, tropes interlink words with other words; and then there is grammar as a normative set of schematizations which turns the temporal sequentiality of sounds into larger recognizable patterns. Looking and looking at Cézanne's paintings as experiments with picturing, Stein set herself the aim of making the reader aware of the process of imagination as a habitual process of integrating sense data through pattern recognition. But she also came to see herself as outperforming Cézanne's picturing; since in writing, the suspension of the synthesizing act allows for a variety of different experiments—with sound, with time, and with grammatical and logical order.



In the interview quoted above, Stein described Cézanne's artistic innovation as an egalitarian composition, a conceptualization that reflected her own concerns in writing *Three Lives* (finished in 1906 and published in 1909). In the life stories of lower-class women that make up the volume, the protagonists are treated by the narrator as contemporary social types defined on the basis of class and gender, and in the

case of “Melanctha,” also race. The quoted dialogues of the characters are studded with dialect phrases and repetitive speech patterns, and their behavior is shown to mainly consist of unconscious habits. There thus appears to be a profound disparity between each servant-woman’s consciousness and the narrator’s consciousness, as the latter articulates a panoramic knowledge of society while the servants are confined to a very constrained social world. But the narrator’s characterization of the protagonists as social types is undermined by a compositional use of repetition: the repetitive speech patterns occur in both the servants’ and their mistresses’ discourse—and in the narrator’s discourse as well. Initially, such repetitions appear as an ironical mimicking of a servant’s way of speaking; after all, *Three Lives* was inspired by Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* (1877) and his ironical use of free indirect discourse which fuses the narrator’s and the characters’ voices. But in *Three Lives*, this merging of voices also occurs in passages clearly marked as narrative commentary, and the irony turns against the narrator’s authority and unmasks it as pretentious and self-aggrandizing. As the differences among the characters and between the characters and the narrator become blurred, the narrator’s psychological insight appears to be built on a lack of self-reflexivity and an unconscious complicity with social privilege.¹⁸ Compositionally, the repetitions in *Three Lives* function like the color patches in Cézanne’s paintings, for they dissolve the hierarchy of narrative levels. As a consequence, the narration is turned into a decentered textual field organized by a network of similarities and nodal points of heightened intensity. There is the *representational* meaning of the repetitions bound up with the concepts of character, gender, race, and class, and there is a *self-referential* meaning of the repetitions as literalizations of mimetic imitation. In addition, repetitions figure *rhetorically* as acts of confirmation, as instructive demonstrations, or as ironical gestures. And there is a *performative* meaning of repetition as iteration that works against the linearity of the life story, and its conventional form as a process of development, by exposing the insistence of desires as intertwined with social conditions that give them their form through habit. The lack of imaginative synthesis thus throws several distinct strata of textual signification into relief that lend themselves to different discursive regimes of meaning.



A different view of Cézanne’s art can be culled from an entry in one of Stein’s notebooks from 1909: “I believe in reality as Cézanne or Caliban

believe in it. I believe in repetition. Yes. Always and always, must write the hymn of repetition.”¹⁹ The parallelism of the first and the second sentence highlights two artistic credos from which Stein deduces her conclusion. The pairing of Cézanne with Caliban indicates that in 1909 Stein read, as did Merleau-Ponty many years later, Cézanne’s *réalisation* as an effort to disclose a primordial form of reality.²⁰ The allusion to *The Tempest* explains why: Prospero taught Caliban to speak and conceptually divide up the world. Caliban’s acquisition of language is bound up with his subjection to a master, which is why he famously claims to have only learned to curse. But Caliban also appears to possess a gift for poetry, as is shown when he lovingly describes his island home as “full of noises / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. / Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments / Will hum about mine ears.”²¹ To speak means to use signifiers employing a limited and differentially organized spectrum of sounds, and to subject oneself to the performative force of language, which shapes human perceptions by filtering them through a differentially organized conceptual grid. Having learned to speak, Caliban cannot return to his former state of nature, but he retains a sensitivity to the “noises, sounds, and sweet airs” of nature.

Walter Pater famously wrote that “all art constantly aspires to the condition of music.”²² Stein reconfigured this symbolist idea under the auspices of Cézanne and Caliban. This evocation of an undifferentiated multitude of aural perceptions can be related to two types of Stein’s portraiture. The first is concerned with the psychological analysis of character and bound up with a technique she called “talking and listening.” If Cézanne showed through picturing how a force field of visual and tactile sensations is filtered and streamlined into signs organizing the perception of objects, Stein showed that listening is more than a decoding of the meaning. Since speaking means to represent a subject for another subject, listening can be extended to the force field of speech as both coded and uncoded sound production in order to register a subject’s preference of certain patterns of words, rhythms, tones of voice, and structures of emphasis. Stein’s portraits of Matisse and Picasso (both 1912) are built on this insight.

In *Tender Buttons* (1914), a collection of texts which Stein characterized as “portraits of things,” she employs different strategies: the meaning of words is no longer determined by syntax and context, because the words are arranged into contingent sequences; the phonetic and syllabic components of the words are made productive, generating “poetic” similarities; puns and anagrams make use of the visual

dimension of writing to create uncoded forms of creating coherence. The result is the “noise” of a chaotic agglomeration of words, alternating with moments of “harmonies of sweet airs,” when rhymes, rhythms, or puns suggest possible paths to construct reference and coherence. When such texts are read aloud and the reader’s body is turned into an instrument that “hums about her ears,” the portrayed object “appears” flitteringly until it is once again dissolved in the noise. Again, Walter Pater may be quoted here, who came close to Cézanne’s concept of picturing when he wrote, “‘To see the object as in itself it really is’ has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatsoever: and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression at it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.”²³ Held together by acoustic, rhythmic, and semantic recurrences, the texts in *Tender Buttons* neither represent nor categorize the things they “portray,” but present verbal equivalents of the things in question by weaving interlocking chains of words around the object’s name, visual *gestalt*, and affective content.²⁴



Only in her lecture “Pictures,” written for her reading tour across the United States in 1933–34, did Stein describe Cézanne’s paintings (and his mode of picturing) in some detail. Starting with her responses to paintings in her early youth, Stein reviews her aesthetic self-education by going through a long list of painters and museum collections. These snippets of memory are presented as elements of a process of retrospective self-reflection: Stein tries to understand the aesthetic principles that inform her value judgments when “looking at oil paintings.” She remembers that she “liked Rubens landscapes because they all moved together,” and that she “liked Titians because they did not move at all.” Paintings by Velasquez “bothered” her, “because they were too real and yet they were not real enough,” while El Greco “excited” her, because “there the oil painting neither moved nor was it still nor was it real.”²⁵ Stein obviously responded in a relaxed and rather indifferent manner to paintings whose representational strategies could be unequivocally defined. In contrast, there were paintings that provoked emotions in Stein ranging from slight irritation (“bothered”) to ambivalent intensity (“excited”). She attributed these responses to the contradictory structures or structural imbalances of the paintings in question. It is the process of reception she is concerned with. Looking and looking is more than just looking: it indicates a growing intensity,

of being provoked to look again and again, a process of being challenged and getting involved in one's own receptivity to the power of the painting.

Stein formulates her judgments by applying the same small number of conventional criteria of art criticism to each painting. The resulting repetitions and syntactic parallelisms emphasize the methodical nature of her comparative analysis. They also provide the background to mark the deviations from the steady interconnecting flow of remembrance and reflection when she shows how the memories of her ambivalent responses to the paintings of Velasquez and El Greco influence the level of affectivity of her discourse in the present. The review culminates in Stein's encounter with Cézanne's works, which is staged as an enigmatic yet ultimately pleasurable experience (a presentation that fits Kant's definition of the sublime as an experience that unsettles the synthesizing power of the imagination).²⁶ Stein first presents the reader with a train of thought set in motion by Cézanne's "pictures" and then switches her terminology by addressing them as "oil paintings":

And then slowly through all this and looking at many many pictures I came to Cézanne and there you were, at least there I was, not all at once but as soon as I got used to it. The landscape looked like a landscape that is to say what is yellow in the landscape looked yellow in the oil painting, and what was blue in the landscape looked blue in the oil painting, and if it did not there still was the oil painting, the oil painting by Cézanne. The same thing was true of the people there was no reason why it should be but it was, the same thing was true of the chairs, the same thing was true of the apples. The apples looked like apples the chairs looked like chairs and it all had nothing to do with anything because if they did not look like apples or chairs or landscape or people they were apples and chairs and landscape and people. They were so entirely these things that they were not an oil painting and yet that is just what the Cézannes were they were an oil painting. They were so entirely an oil painting that it was all there whether they were finished, the paintings, or whether they were not finished. Finished or unfinished it always was what it looked like the very essence of an oil painting because everything was always there, really there.²⁷

Even after many decades, the memory of Stein's first encounter with Cézanne's paintings is so powerful that it disrupts the order of her discourse—or so she makes the reader feel, by using the colloquial interjection “there you were.” But this disruption is immediately reintegrated: repeating her words, but changing the pronoun and the verb form to the first person, she turns the interjection into a self-reference and thus performatively highlights her resumption of reflexive self-control. Stein's account for the stunning quality of Cézanne's paintings is threefold. At first she stresses their similarity with other pictures: like the painters before him, Cézanne uses color mimetically, which is why his paintings resemble the objects they represent. However, with some of his paintings, the search for such resemblances fails, and in other paintings, the illusionistic effect is destroyed or at least much reduced by their unfinishedness. Trompe l'œil can thus definitely be ruled out—and yet the paintings outperform even the most exact painterly representations by making their objects intensely present to the viewer. Cézanne's apples may or may not look like apples, but they are apples.

On the one hand, Stein explains Cézanne's works in a similar manner as the paintings by Velasquez and El Greco, namely, by negations and paradoxes: conceptual thought can only register the paintings' refusal to conform to the established conventions of picturing. But Stein also comes up with positive descriptions: “the apples *are* apples,” and “everything was always there, really *there*.” With the help of verbal gestures such as tonal emphasis and the repetition of the deictic term “there,” Stein stresses a unique ontological effect of Cézanne's paintings, links it to their indexical structure, and ends with a paradox: by pointing the viewer's attention to the referential meaning in the real world, and at the same time to the “oil paintings” as artistic productions, Cézanne exposes the painting as an overdetermined zone of picturing which stages and prolongs the cognitive processes of visual perception by withholding a stable image. Cézanne's picturing created an epiphany for Stein by making her understand that the presence of recognizable objects in the world is the result of acts of imagination that are continuously performed by every subject but rendered visible and readable as such for the first time by Cézanne's oil paintings.



In the lecture, Stein continued her analysis of Cézanne's work with an abridged version of her portrait of Cézanne (written in 1923).²⁸ It is reprinted below in its full length:

CÉZANNE

*The Irish lady can say, that to-day is every day.
Caesar can say that every day is to-day and they say that
every day is as they say.*

*In this way we have a place to stay and he was not
met because he was settled to stay. When I said settled
I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant
settled to stay Saturday. In this way a mouth is a mouth.
In this way if in as a mouth if in as a mouth where, if in
as a mouth where and there. Believe they have water too.
Believe they have that water too and blue when you see
blue, is all blue precious too, is all that that is precious too
is all that and they meant to absolve you. In this way
Cézanne nearly did nearly in this way Cézanne nearly did
nearly did and nearly did. And was I surprised. Was I
very surprised. Was I surprised. I was surprised and in that
patient, are you patient when you find bees. Bees in a
garden make a specialty of honey and so does honey.
Honey and prayer. Honey and there. There where the grass
can grow nearly four times yearly.*

Obviously this portrait neither characterizes Cézanne as a person nor describes his paintings. It shares some general features with many other texts by Stein. The sentences are decontextualized, their grammatic structure is simple and often fragmentary, and the punctuation is irregular. Repetitions abound: they occur on the level of sounds, syllables, words, combinations of words, and sentences, creating recursive structures of self-quotation, mirror effects, series of emphatic confirmations, rhymes, and rhythmic movements. There are also some specific features of the text that can be readily observed at a cursory glance. The deictic phrase “in this way” occurs five times; it is used anaphorically and thus forms a prominent element of the text’s internal structure. The color “blue” is mentioned three times, but this series remains restricted to a single sentence; “blue” also marks the only manifest reference to Cézanne’s art. The word “bees” occurs twice, and “honey” four times. In the absence of conventional meaning, some words suggest themselves to be grouped together into semantic clusters: “water” — “blue” — “see” [“sea”], for example, or “bees” — “honey” — “grass.” The words “mouth,” “say,” “honey,” and “water” form a third cluster that intersects with the other two and constitutes a common ground of orality, which again self-referentially

stresses the importance of sound, and hence the linguistic materiality of Stein's portraiture as compared to Cézanne's.

Then there are names and personal pronouns: "Caesar" and "Cézanne," "he" and "we" and "I" and "they" and "you." Together, they form a matrix of relations among subjects as the basic structure of the portrait. "He" and "I" presumably refer to Cézanne as the portrayed subject and to Stein as the portraitist, respectively. "We" is an ambiguous term. It refers to the community to which the speaker (presumably Stein) belongs, but may or may not include "the Irish lady," "Caesar," and "they," and probably excludes the subsequent "he." Linked with "Cézanne" by alliteration, "Caesar" means Stein herself (who would thus occasionally assume an external vantage point toward herself and talk about herself in the third person, as she did ten years later in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*). For Stein not only called herself "Caesar" in her posthumously published erotic texts, but because of her haircut and her regal demeanor, she reminded many of her friends of a Roman emperor. In an act of rebellion against the traditional regime of power, Caesar famously crossed the Rubicon River and inaugurated a new era of world history; he thus provided Stein with an image for herself as a heroic transgressor of artistic conventions (and of sexual conventions as well, since Caesar's alleged homosexual behavior was a subject of gossip in antiquity). Linked with Cézanne by alliteration, "Caesar" casts Stein in the role of the ruling figure of modernism whose artistic achievements are prepared by her precursor Cézanne.

Playing with the similarities and differences of the sounds of the names, the pairing of Cézanne and Caesar suggests that the portrait will present Stein's view on the similarities and differences between the work of the two artists, giving Cézanne precedence and Stein prominence in the history of modernism. The first paragraph has expository character. While the "Irish lady" (probably an allusion to Joyce's character Molly Bloom—*Ulysses* had appeared in 1922) can say that "to-day is every day," "Caesar"/Stein can say that "every day is to-day." While Joyce turned a presentation of a single day in Dublin into a timeless monument of modern writing, Stein's Caesarean maxim was that every day constitutes a "to-day," another chance to throw the dice and break the regime of tradition. The paragraph ends with the statement "[t]hey say that every day is as they say," which either confirms Joyce's and Stein's conviction of the truth of their vision and underlines their performative potency as artists or stresses their difference from the anonymous crowd content with knowledge of everyday life. Cézanne is not mentioned in the first paragraph, but his name is

present in several acoustic allusions—in the alliteration with “Caesar,” and in echo of the first syllable in the reiterated verb form “say”: there are echoes of *Cézanne* in what Joyce and Stein *say*.

Given this reading of the first paragraph, it may be expected that the second paragraph will address and elaborate the argument inscribed in the first paragraph, namely, that *Cézanne’s* work influenced contemporary avant-garde writing. This would require Stein either to describe and discuss some of his work (which is evidently not the case) or to transpose (the structure of) *Cézanne’s* work into her writing as a kind of quotation or allusion. The portrait would then refer to *Cézanne’s* work but be a work of Stein’s; while presenting *Cézanne’s* mode of picturing, it would also articulate Stein’s difference from it. The deictic phrase “in this way” occurs five times in the text and may be understood self-referentially, that is, as a strong hint addressed to the reader to regard the composition of the portrait as the key to the problem of defining contemporary writing both as a consequence of *Cézanne’s* work and as a move beyond its limits. Many sentences are incomplete or constructed by a montage of decontextualized words, but the gaps can be filled by the reader—tentatively to be sure—by moving forward or backward in the text in the attempt to find connections or clues by closely observing semantic, syntactic, and, most importantly, acoustic similarities. Dorrit Cohn once stated that all interior monologues “conform to two principal tendencies: syntactical abbreviation and lexical opaqueness,”²⁹ and Stein’s portrait displays both characteristics.

“In this way we have a place to stay and he was not met because he was settled to stay.” A chain of rhymes links the sentence to the first paragraph (“day” — “say” [“Cé”] — “way” — “stay”), which suggests that the pronoun “we” refers to the group of contemporary avant-garde writers who conceive of every day in a new way. This reference would then signal a shift of perspective from an external to an internal angle, and Stein would now be speaking as a member of the group in question. The text oscillates between distance and proximity, between objectivity and self-reflection based on Stein’s personal involvement in the matter. The group of “we” is situated in the present and thus juxtaposed to “him,” who is referred to in the past tense. This contrasting reading is supported by the verb “to settle,” which means to occupy a permanent dwelling place, while “to have a place to stay” signifies some temporary lodging. In sum: “we” are alive and still on the move, while *Cézanne* cannot be met because he belongs to the past. He had died in 1906, and at the time of the creation of the portrait, his claim

to fame had indeed been settled, and he had been assigned an outstanding but fixed place in the history of art.

These statements are reiterated in the following sentences. Engaging in an interior monologue which amounts to a dialogue with the reader, the speaker recursively reiterates her previous remark and quotes it to both confirm and revise it: "When I said settled I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant settled to stay Saturday." The supplement in the third repetition of the phrase "settled to stay" comes as a surprise and retroactively transforms the semantic architecture of the sentence. "He was settled to stay Saturday" no longer signifies Cézanne's immobility, but rather the opposite by indicating a short rest. Stein's weekly soirées on the rue de Fleurus (where she and Alice B. Toklas and her artist friends had a place to stay) took place on Saturdays. Cézanne, a recluse, who had withdrawn from Paris to his hometown, Aix-en-Provence, and whom Stein never met, is thus posthumously integrated into the circle of artists around Stein. It is in their work that he lives on.

The next sentence seems cryptic at first: "In this way a mouth is a mouth. In this way if in as a mouth if in as a mouth where, if in as a mouth where and there." Again, repetitions and variations are used and establish a recursive structure by which a statement is confirmed and at the same time thoroughly revised. "Mouth" can be readily decoded as a metonym for language and speech. The two sentences performatively elaborate and metatextually theorize the point Stein had just made by adding the word "Saturday" to a sentence that is otherwise repeated identically (and had been previously defined as complete by punctuation). Verbal statements are never identical but change their meaning subtly or radically with each occurrence; all it takes is shifting the emphasis, replacing or adding or leaving out a word, framing a sentence by a conditional conjunction ("if"), or changing the context of a word ("where and there").³⁰ But "mouth" can also be used as a metaphor or a catachresis (e.g., "the mouth of a river"), and this latter term may cataphorically refer to the noun "water" in the next sentence: "Believe they have water too." It is unclear whom the imperative "believe" addresses. Is it the reader? Or is Stein talking to herself in an unsignaled interior monologue in which the first-person pronoun is elided? Perhaps "they" (contemporary writers such as Joyce and herself) "have water too" because they are, like Cézanne, engaged in a new mode of (re)presentation.

The enigmatic phrase "they have water too" is repeated as the beginning of the next sentence and engenders another performative

instance of self-reflection and revision. As the sentence continues, “water” is semantically connected with “blue” while “too” is reiterated several times and rhymes with “blue” and with “you,” a (once again ambiguous) pronoun. “Believe they have that water too and blue when you see blue, is all blue precious too, is all that that is precious too is all that and they meant to absolve you.” This is a sentence made up of many internal rhymes and intersecting rhythms. Its meaning hinges on the segmentation the reader chooses. But in any event, the color blue is at the center, a decision of Stein’s that is highly motivated in a portrait of Cézanne since blue is the dominant color of many of his paintings, and many viewers have commented on this fact. While Cézanne himself linked his use of blue to his effort “to give the feeling of air,”³¹ most viewers have ascribed symbolic or atmospheric value to it.³² But to Stein such interpretations (by an anonymous crowd of “they”) rather appeared as attempts to “absolve” Cézanne (presumably from the sin of deviating from the norm of mimesis). “Believe they have that water too and blue when you see blue” is a complex construction indeed, though its beginning once again stages the point that was made by the previous sentence. The repetition is almost identical; but the deictic demonstrative pronoun “that” has replaced the definite article, the phrase “and blue” has been added, and the subclause “when you see blue” follows as an afterthought and spells out the conditions for the truth claim of the main clause. If the pronoun “they” again refers to “to-day’s” writers, the sentence addresses their capability to (re)present the visible world as Cézanne could. They have “that water too” and they have “blue when you see blue” — but of course they cannot represent blue water visually as a painter can by using color; they have to use the *words* “blue” and “water.” The remainder of the sentence, “is all blue precious too, is all that that is precious too is all that,” ponders the question of the putative symbolic value of the color blue in Cézanne’s paintings, with the repetitions/the mirroring/the chiasmic permutations performatively indicating both the intensity and inconclusiveness of Stein’s ruminations, and the nature of the problem she is struggling with: mimesis, imitation, representation as reduplication, the founding concept of Western aesthetic theory. This reading is supported by Stein’s “Pictures” lecture quoted above, which Stein used as a frame for her portrait of Cézanne. There “blue” is discussed as the point of convergence between visual perception and conventional visual representation, and as the point of divergence between conventional representation and Cézanne’s picturing: “what was blue in the landscape looked blue in the oil painting, and if it did not there still was the oil painting, the oil painting by Cézanne.”

The overall strategy of Stein's portrait of Cézanne reminds one of Cézanne's taches with their double function of referentiality and self-referentiality. But it is also becoming evident that the text possesses more possibilities to realize such a structure than a painting does. In the next sentence of the portrait (once again introduced by the deictic term "in this way") Cézanne is finally mentioned. "In this way Cézanne nearly did nearly in this way Cézanne nearly did nearly did and nearly did." Because of the elliptic structure of the sentence, it is unclear what it was that Cézanne did, but because of its grammatical structure, it is clear that Stein emphasizes both Cézanne's passionate effort and his closeness to certain results he, however, did not achieve. As before, repetitions, mirrorings, and permutations abound and revolve around the crucial word that is lacking. With the series of repetitions, Stein may wish to highlight Cézanne's long struggle with motifs, such as the Mont Sainte-Victoire, and/or his consistency in committing himself to his aesthetic project of *réalisation*. At the same time, the series of repetitions also stages Stein's own signature device as a writer. But what was it that Cézanne "nearly did"? And is what he nearly did something that Stein in contrast did do? Presumably it is the step into modernism, which she claimed to have accomplished in *Three Lives* because of her encounter with Cézanne's paintings, when she grasped Cézanne's strategy of leaving parts of the canvas unfinished in order to highlight the painting's materiality and at the same time make the viewer aware of her imaginative investment in the painting by her effort of filling in the blanks.

In the next sentences, Stein stages the overwhelming experience of looking and looking at his work by repeating a phrase that straddles the border between a statement and an incredulous question by dislodging the personal pronoun "I" from its usual position in the sentence: "And was I surprised. Was I very surprised. Was I surprised." Only with the fourth attempt is she able to break away from the series and return to the regular grammatical form of the statement: "I was surprised." But she does not explain why she was surprised; she leaves that to be deduced from the mode of her coming to terms with that experience. The changing intensities and grammatical forms of this unsettling surprise correspond to the previous statement: "Cézanne nearly did." The symmetry suggests that the text works backward to indicate the process of recollection and notes the mode of handling the surprise before mentioning the surprise itself. But the sentence that brings the normalization of Stein's state of exception is longer than I just quoted it. It runs, "I was surprised and in that patient, are you patient when you

find bees.” Stein calls her own statement—that she was surprised and patient—retroactively into doubt when she adds the rhetorical question. Cézanne’s paintings obviously piqued her, provoked her to imitate him and outperform him to do what he only came close to doing.

The final sentences of the portrait are dedicated to a demonstration of Stein’s achievement by engaging in a playful painting with words. This is the limit case of the concept of picturing, for Stein does not produce a picture at all. Instead she refers to paintings by Cézanne as objects of her desire and admiration, and the reason for desire and admiration is their staging of picturing. In these final sentences, many words are semantically interconnected, and there are repetitions and rhymes, but the meaning is at first entirely opaque: “Bees in a garden make a specialty of honey and so does honey. Honey and prayer. Honey and there. There where the grass can grow nearly four times yearly.” But the group “bees”—“garden”—“honey”—“grass” suggests an idyllic landscape, perhaps in the South of France, where it is warm and where grass grows four times a year: the landscape that Cézanne painted numerous times. As Stein tells the story in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, at their very first visit to Cézanne’s gallerist, Vollard, in the fall of 1904, Gertrude and Leo Stein wanted to buy such a landscape, but Vollard was reluctant and only showed them some small studies. But the Steins insisted:

They said what they wanted was one of those marvelously yellow sunny Aix landscapes of which Loeser had several examples. Once more Vollard went off and this time he came back with a wonderful small green landscape. It was lovely, it covered all the canvas, it did not cost much, and they bought it.”³³

1
Paul Cézanne,
La Conduite d’eau
(The spring house),
ca. 1879. Oil on
canvas, 23 ⁵/₈ × 19 ¹/₁₆ in.
(60 × 50 cm).
The Barnes Foundation,
Philadelphia, BF129.

The Steins wanted oil paintings; Vollard showed them studies. They wanted a yellow painting; he gave them a green one—which turned out to be a good thing after all, as it was satisfactory to the as yet untutored taste of the Steins (it pleased the eye and did not appear unfinished), and to their limited budget as well. The self-ironical narrative tone highlights the Steins’ naïveté before Cézanne taught them to “look.”

The Cézanne portrait’s final sentences probably refer to this scene, that is, to the painting the Steins bought, to the kind of painting they would have liked to buy, and to the kind of study Vollard initially offered them. Figure 1 shows *La Conduite d’eau* (ca. 1879), which



the Steins bought, and figure 2 shows a watercolor of Mont Sainte-Victoire from circa 1902–1906 as an example of a “yellow” study Volland might have offered them. I include them here as illustrations that highlight the difference between Cézanne’s picturing and the lessons Stein drew from it. For “grass” is semantically, metonymically, and perceptually connected to the word “green,” while “bees” and “honey” are connected to the word “yellow” (the portrait may have referred to this scene right from the beginning, since the latent word “green” connects the final sentence to the first where the “Irish lady” figures prominently). The memory of the first purchase of a painting by Cézanne thus serves as an internal frame to the portrait. With the next two short fragmentary sentences — “Honey and prayer. Honey and there” — Stein alludes to Cézanne’s collection of sense impressions of nature, which he condensed in the honey (colors) of his landscapes (“there”) in order to express his religious reverence of nature. But since only a text, not a painting, may be said to be taken into the mouth and tasted (when read aloud), “honey” may also refer to Stein’s portrait as a sweet concoction made from a collection of her thoughts about Cézanne’s paintings.

And then there is the color of sound: “there where the grass can grow nearly four times yearly” contains the words “grass” and “grow,” whose visualization as “green” is supported by their changing vocals. The rhyme “nearly” — “yearly” realizes the acoustic materiality of the words in a harmonious repetition, “sweet airs,” to quote Caliban (and indeed, the latent word “ear” is realized in both “nearly” and “yearly”). And with this latter strategy as a cue, the reader can continue to play with words and colors and discover anagrams in the last sentence, for the letters that make up the words “grass,” “grow,” “nearly,” and “yearly” can be rearranged to form the words “green” and “yellow” — but also “orange” and “grey.”



Literary portraits must work around the problem that they lack the perceptual concreteness of portrait paintings. Some authors stress physiognomic details as clues to the interiority of the portrayed person (relying on physiognomic theories such as Lavater’s or on conventional semiotics of the face). More often, literary portraits are organized anecdotally: on the basis of a personal encounter of the portraitist with the portrayed person, the portraitist recollects impressions of the other’s face, posture, and demeanor, then moves on to observations



2
Paul Cézanne,
Mont Sainte-Victoire,
ca. 1902–1906.
Watercolor and pencil
on paper, 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.
(42.5 × 54.2 cm).
The Museum of
Modern Art, New York.
Fractional gift of
Mr. and Mrs. David
Rockefeller (the donors
retaining a life interest
in the remainder).

of the other's behavior and speech, and integrates such evidence into a general judgment of character or perhaps treats these things as clues to the invisible interiority of the portrayed person. The subjective factor is crucial for any literary portrait, as it testifies to the impact of the portrayed person's presence on another subject and the way this presence is given meaning. What is thus at stake in a literary portrait is the encounter itself—which is communicated to others by one of the two persons involved who reveals his or her prejudices, perceptual acumen, impressionability, naïve admiration, or hostility in the process. The literary portrait thus prevents the reader from making the conventional shortcut from text to referential reality. Instead, the reader is aware of witnessing one person representing the impression and impact of another person. The subject matter of a literary portrait is not the portrayed subject but an intersubjective relation between the portrayed subject and the portraitist; but since it is the portraitist who attempts to read the character of the other person, the primary subject of a literary portrait is indeed the portraitist (who may, however, prefer to efface herself).

Stein never met Cézanne. Her portrait concentrates on Cézanne's paintings and her responses to them. The portrait refers to Cézanne's paintings as Stein first saw them and as she later learned to see them, and it is mindful of Cézanne's aesthetic principles (as she constructed them), while at the same time presenting Stein's own aesthetic principles, which she developed as a consequence of her "looking and looking" at Cézanne's paintings. The portrait is thus a homage to Cézanne—but also a profession of Stein's artistic self-confidence. It is constructed to render her surprise at the initial encounter with Cézanne's paintings, to present her understanding of this surprise, to demonstrate the consequences of this understanding for her own work, and to emphasize the difference of the artistic media. The reader is to tentatively fill the lacunae—to register the figural aspects of words, to make rhymes and rhythmical patterns audible, to observe repetitions, and to discover anagrams for words signifying different colors—in order to realize Stein's indebtedness to Cézanne's picturing, but also so as to recognize her moving beyond the limit of picturing as an artistic goal for literature.

- 1 Cf. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1986), 35.
- 2 In later years, Gertrude and Leo Stein gave different accounts about who made the first purchase and when it was made. See note 34 below. One of Stein's early Portraits, "Monsieur Vollard et Cézanne" (1912) commemorates the purchase; Cf. Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, 35. The portrait is reprinted in Stein, *Portraits and Prayers* (New York: Random House, 1934) 37–39.
- 3 For the collection, cf. Janet Bishop, Cécile Debray, and Rebecca Rabinow, eds., *The Steins Collect* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).
- 4 Cf. Leo Stein's letter to Mabel Dodge, quoted in James R. Mellon, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 63–64.
- 5 Cf. Stein, *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 39. Stein's admiration for Cézanne has often been commented on; cf., e.g., Jayne L. Walker, *The Making of a Modernist* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); or Tamar Darb, "To Kill the Nineteenth Century: Sex and Spectatorship with Gertrude and Pablo," in Picasso's "*Les Femmes d'Alger*," ed. Christopher Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 55–76.
- 6 Robert Bartlett Haas, "A Transatlantic Interview," in *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 11–35 (quote on pp. 15–16). Stein characterized Picasso's cubist painting in exactly the same terms as Cézanne's painting, namely, as a composition in which "each thing was as important as any other thing." Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (1938; New York: Dover, 1984, 12). In a recently published collection of essays on Cézanne's reception in the arts and sciences, Stein is not mentioned: cf. Torsten Hoffmann, ed., *Lehrer ohne Lehre: Zur Rezeption Paul Cézannes in Künsten, Wissenschaften und Kultur, 1906–2006* (Munich: Fink, 2008).
- 7 Théodore Duret quoted in Richard Shiff, "Sensation, Movement, Cézanne," in *Classic Cézanne*, ed. Terence Maloon (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1998), 22.
- 8 I would like to thank Monika Wagner (Hamburg), Martin Wagner (Hamburg), and Karin Gludovatz (Berlin) for their advice on Cézanne.
- 9 Yve-Alain Bois characterized Cézanne's brushstrokes as a "musical form of notation." "Cézanne: Words and Deeds," *October* 84 (1998), 31–43 (quote on p. 39).
- 10 Richard Shiff, "Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch," in *The Language of Art History*, ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129–82 (esp. 152ff.). Shiff also discusses the implicit political allegory of "collaboration, reciprocity and social bonding" of Cézanne's paintings but concludes that the "literalness of Cézanne's art" resists "the distancing act of interpretation" (168–69).
- 11 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 12 Cf. Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 123.
- 13 Jules Borély, "Cézanne at Aix," in *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran, trans. Julie Lawrence Cochran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 19–24 (Cézanne quoted on p. 23).
- 14 Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 213.
- 15 Cf. William Rubin, "Cézannisme and the Beginning of Cubism," in *Cézanne: The Late Work*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 151–202 (quoted material on p. 189).
- 16 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" [1945], in *Symbolic Anthropology*, ed. Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, David M. Schneider (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 91–105 (quoted material on pp. 95–96).
- 17 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 298.
- 18 Cf. my analysis of "The Good Anna" in "A New Kind of Realism: Flaubert and Stein," *Comparative Literature* 61, 4 (2009): 388–99.
- 19 Unpublished notebook, Yale Collection of American Literature (YCAL).
- 20 Cézanne had called himself a primitive, and contemporary critics such as Gustave Geffroy, Maurice Denis, and Georges Lecomte defended Cézanne's

primitivism on the grounds of the intensity of his sensations, or, conversely, on the grounds of the naïveté of his conceptualization. As a deviation from academic conventions, Cézanne's primitivism made sense to both the impressionists and the symbolists. Cf. Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, 168–73.

21 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 3.2.147–50.

22 Cf. Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," *The Renaissance* (1910; Chicago: Academy, 1977), 130–54 (quote on p. 135). The essay was originally published in 1877.

23 Pater, preface to *The Renaissance*, xvii–xxv (quote on p. xviii).

24 Cf. my analysis in "Tender Buttons: Stein et ses portraits des choses (1914)," in *Carrefour Stieglitz*, ed. Jay Bochner and Jean Pierre Montier (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 339–48.

25 Stein, "Pictures," in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 57–90 (quoted material on pp. 72–73).

26 Cf. Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avantgarde," in *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (1988; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 89–107.

27 Stein, "Pictures," 76–77. Stein regarded abstract painting as "pornographic"; cf. Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937; New York: Vintage, 1973), 127.

28 In the lecture, Stein dropped the first half of the second paragraph of the portrait so that it begins with the sentence "In this way Cézanne nearly did." With this cut, the portrait focuses on Stein's first encounter with Cézanne and thus serves as a companion piece to the lecture.

29 Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 94.

30 This argument has an equivalent in Cézanne's paintings, which he constantly reworked by adding more dabs of color. Cézanne's techniques "must have seemed incomplete by their very nature, because the suggestion is that more can always be added," writes

Richard Shiff. "Cézanne's Blur, Approximating Cézanne," in *Framing France: The Representation of Landscape in France, 1870–1914*, ed. Richard Thomson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 59–80 (quote on p. 67).

31 Cf. Cézanne to Emile Bernard, Apr. 15, 1904, in *Letters*, ed. John Rewald (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976), 301.

32 The German Symbolist poet Rilke was particularly eloquent about Cézanne's use of blue: cf. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne* (1952; Frankfurt: M: Insel, 1983), 27, 36, 40, 43, 48. William Rubin calls it "the antinaturalist overall blueness," which he links to "the *stimmung* quality of Symbolist paintings." "Cézannisme," 162.

33 Stein, *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 36. Leo Stein remembered the purchase of the painting differently: he claimed to have bought the painting by himself (at the suggestion of Bernard Berenson), before he saw Charles Loeser's collection in the summer of 1904; cf. Leo Stein, *Appreciation: Painting, Poetry, and Prose* (1947; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 155. The different accounts have produced considerable confusion concerning the date of the purchase and the identity of the painting itself. In his introduction to Leo Stein's *Journey Into the Self*, Van Wyck Brooks puts the year of Leo Stein's first Cézanne purchase at 1902 (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950) xi. Jayne L. Walker gives the date as 1904: *The Making of a Modernist*, 2. In her biography *Sister Brother. Gertrude and Leo Stein* (New York: Putnam's, 1996) Brenda Wineapple reconciles the siblings' diverging accounts by having Leo buy *Landscape with Spring House* in the spring of 1903, and Leo and Gertrude buy *The Conduit* in the fall of 1903 (cf. 210–11). But the two titles refer to the same painting.

