Gertrude Stein's Melodies: In Anticipation of the Loop

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Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend* (1948) offers an apt perspective on the notoriously unmelodious developments in the classical music of the first half of the twentieth century. In the novel narrator Serenus Zeitblom, an old-fashioned humanist academic, desperately seeks to come to terms with the new music and musical theories of the novel's protagonist, Leverkühn, whose ideas are based on the work of Arnold Schönberg, and the birth of serial, twelve-tone music accounts for his rejection of harmony in favor of polyphony in the following terms:

> I find that in a chordal combination of notes one should never see anything but the result of the movement of voices and do honor to the part as implied in the single chord-note—but not honor the chord as such, rather despise it as subjective and arbitrary, so long as it cannot prove itself to be the result of part-writing. The chord is no harmonic narcotic but polyphony in itself, and the notes that form it are parts. (74)[1]

Leverkühn's refusal to honor the "chord as such," his substitution of polyphony *as* dissonance for the narcotic effects of tonality, and his contempt for "subjective" appropriations of music point to modernism's ambivalent relationship with the affective power of music.[2] When Leverkühn prefers the part (the isolated note) over the wholeness of the chord, he argues for an understanding of music as an affectless field of expression in which there is little room for a notion like melody, which, traditionally, connotes tunefulness and plenitude. Indeed, the exchange of affect and expression for a "chilly, rationalistic wisdom" is exactly what Oscar Bie—unaware of the ideological connotations twentieth-century history would bestow on melody—deplores about modernist music, which he finds "unable to admit even the semblance of melody" in the July 1916 issue of *The Musical Quarterly* (Bie 402).

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If modernism is defined by its aversion to linearity, unicity, identity, and closure, and its fascination with the antipodal categories of disjunction, fragmentation, alienation, and process, then melody belongs to the former series. Melody develops in time and necessarily involves repetition and/or variation as well as changing patterns of duration that undergo various structural and textural changes. In order to qualify as a melody a musical segment must be perceived as a single entity by the listener because (and despite the fact that) it is repeated throughout the piece in identical or slightly different forms. In other words, the effects of the melody must be cumulative and detectable in a way that allows the listener to memorize it and appropriate it in a durable way. The main criteria required for such an appropriation of a melodic segment would thus seem to be (1) its (relative) simplicity and continuity *within* the segment/unit or, in the case of so-called "complex" melodies, its capacity to "detach" itself from other more narrative, impressionistic, or abstract parts; and (2) its repetition throughout the piece, which guarantees its "memorability" and ensures a perceptual response to a certain degree of regularity, familiarity, stability, and continuity. (It is necessary to repeat the melodic segment at least once to be able to isolate it from the rest of the piece; as such it comes close to the function of the leitmotiv or "refrain" [from the Old French "refraindre," "to repeat"]). These features are basically what distinguishes, say, Deep Purple's clear-cut theme in "Smoke on the Water" from the more disjunctive tactics of Boulez's *Marteau sans maître*, in which the complex lacings and transitions between the musical lines defeat the listener's attempts to isolate them and figure out where they begin and where they end. In the case of the Deep Purple classic, the "Smoke on the Water" passage is the "clou-motive . . . around which the rest of the melody is diluted, as if resting and waiting for the return of the motive" (Stefani 26). Melody, in other words, marks the affective rather than the analytical memory. It stands out as the "familiar, friendly face of music" (Stefani 21), the dimension of music which everyone can hum, sing, or dance to.

Just as a Boulez or Schönberg piece does not make you pick up your dancing shoes, so modernist literature itself hardly lodges itself readily in your mind. Modernist writing, in its attempts to emulate musical models, has tended to privilege the "vertical" relationships afforded by harmony (or disharmony/dissonance, for that matter), placing the emphasis on simultaneity rather than linearity, which includes the "horizontal" development of melody. It appears that what survives of melody in both modernist music and writing comes in shreds. As Christopher Butler notes, the patches of expressive melodicity modernist experimental music retains "seem to lack conventional relationships to one another" (48) due to the absence of identifiable tonal reference points (in Schönberg) or to rhythmic disjunctions which seem "detached from melodic reasoning" (Butler 48). Similarly, when for instance James Joyce cites and alludes to

popular songs in *Ulysses*, these turn into fleeting and isolated points of anchorage in strange surroundings. When Gertrude Stein takes on board melody, however, she makes us revisit the musical fragmentation championed by Leverkühn and analogously practiced by Joyce. I argue that the persistence and transformations of "melodicity"—by which I stress the functioning of melody as opposed to its commoditized end result—and of the concurrent notion of "memorability" can be detected in the very texture of some of the most radical experiments of the modernist literary avant-garde.

Gertrude Stein's musical illiteracy did not stop her from composing what she called "sonatinas." Since she never wrote them down, we know very little about these peculiar piano pieces except that they were improvised on the white keys of the piano only. The composer Virgil Thomson, Stein's friend, claimed that "Satie's piano music and Stein's *Tender Buttons* had changed his life" and seems to refer to Stein's music in his "Piano Sonata No. 3, on white keys for Gertrude Stein." Thomson's dedication may also be a reference to Stein's fondness for Erik Satie (Dickinson 398). Upon hearing *Socrate* performed for her by Thomson, Stein labeled herself "a Satie enthusiast" (Dickinson 399). The sheer melodic and rhythmic simplicity of *Socrate*, reflecting the composer's desire to make the piece sound "white and pure like antiquity," may have inspired some of Stein's own compositional constraints (*Grove* unpag.).[3] Stein herself, in sketching her piano playing in *Everybody's Autobiography*, likens the black keys to chords and harmony ("black keys are too harmonious and you never want to do a chord" [Stein, *Everybody's* 236]). Although this explanation does not appear to make much sense, there is a Steinian logic to it: the combination of white and black keys (as opposed to the white keys with which you can improvise an infinite number of melodies based, say, on the sole C Major scale) suggest more complex and sophisticated forms of chordal and harmonic simultaneities. Stein, as Bryony Randall has recently noted, did not share the typical modernist valorization of simultaneity over succession (104). The white keys, one can think along with Stein, stretch out on an uninterrupted horizontal plane and appear to invite improvisation in the continuous present—the time dimension Stein wanted her writing to express.[4] What the white keys stand for, then, is an ever-developing melody which knows neither beginning nor end.

Going by these "white key" sonatinas, it would seem Stein's writing encourages actual melody-making. Virgil Thomson took on this challenge by setting a couple of Stein pieces to music. Even a quick look at the score of Thomson's 1929 score for Stein's "Portrait of F.B," however, reveals that Thomson's take on melody differs from Stein's (Dickinson 402). Thomson's neoclassicism (not to speak of his fondness for popular songs and hymns) confers on Stein's words the memorable "melodicity" they arguably lack on the page. The appeal of melody, for Stein, lay not in the

notion's connotations like tunefulness or regular repetition, although like her modernist peers she too sprinkled her work with shreds of popular songs and Mother Goose fragments, but in its going on—the white keys stretching out. The capacity for Stein's work to be memorized and "appropriated" by readers, not surprisingly, is often defeated not just by its unorthodox use of syntax and semantic obscurity but also by the sheer length of her texts. As Peter Dickinson puts it, "because of the length of her writings, Stein herself is only memorable in patches: 'Pigeons in the grass, alas' or 'A Rose is a Rose is a Rose'" (403). It is such patches Thomson set out from in their successive collaboration, the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*.[5] Stein's 1927 libretto, Steven Watson notes, struck Thomson as overwhelming. Since Stein had not assigned parts to individual singers the text struck him like "one compact mass of words" (47).

In a rare instance where she commented upon the meanings of the libretto, Stein, zooming in on the opera's most famous passage, "Pigeons on the grass alas," indirectly accounts for the difficulties readers like Thomson experience in emotionally, affectively, or indeed "melodically" appropriating the "mass of words" that make up her texts:

> That is simple I was walking in the gardens of the Luxembourg in Paris it was the end of summer the grass was yellow I was sorry that it was the end of summer and I saw the big fat pigeons in the yellow grass and I said to myself, pigeons on the yellow grass, alas, and I kept on writing pigeons on the grass, alas, short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass pigeons on the grass pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass, alas pigeons on the grass, and I kept on writing until I had emptied myself of the emotion. If a mother is full of her emotion toward a child in the bath the mother will talk and talk and talk until the emotion is over and that's the way a writer is about an emotion. (quoted in Watson 48)

The peculiar cathartic function of repetition in Stein thus would seem to lead to a gradual move toward a kind of writing whose "abstract" character—far from being a mere attempt to emulate the strategies of pictorial Cubism, as is so often argued—enacts the potential of repetition to gradually "purge" words of their denotative and connotative meanings. Thomson's attempts to "mainstream" and affectively reactivate the "impressive obscurity" of Stein's libretto (and reestablish a linear continuity which is missing in her writing) are in tune with his conscious decision to write an opera that would exchange the demands of modernist classical music for the cadences of the American language (Watson 47). As Watson indicates, Thomson felt at the time that "modernist music—saturated with dissonance, descended from the pre-World War I triumvirate of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Debussy—had arrived at its end point." In Thomson's words:

> I had a moment of truth if you wish in which I said, "This is old-fashioned and there is very little profit to be derived in trying to continue it beyond the recent masters." What I had better do is to write as things come into my head rather than with a preoccupation of making it stylish and up to date, and it was by the discipline of spontaneity, which I had come into contact with through reading Gertrude Stein, that made my music simple. (quoted in Watson 49–50)

What remains scattered throughout the writing, and therefore difficult to appropriate affectively or physically, is foregrounded in Thomson's adaptation of Stein's texts. Thomson drew on vast repertoires of popular traditions ranging from marches to Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, American hymns, and children's songs—and the crowds loved him for it. After attending the premiere of the opera, Carl Van Vechten wrote Stein that he had not "seen a crowd more excited since Sacre du Printemps," and even Wallace Stevens, who was very skeptical at first, was carried away by the show and declared that "the opera immediately becomes a delicate and joyous work all around."[6] Thomson's "disciplined spontaneity," which he claims to have learned from Stein, was thus complemented and strengthened by an apparent simplicity which was "arrived at through the most elaborate means" (Watson 50). Yet his "simple" music leaves little room for the purging spiral that is Stein's text. Where Thomson celebrates the baroque gamut of things coming into his head, Stein scrutinizes her spontaneous input via relentless, repetitive "talk and talk and talk." Whatever we may think of Thomson's "transformations," "democratization," or "mainstreaming" of Stein's text, the least one can say is that it neutralizes, to some extent, Stein's proto-Cagean, Warholian aesthetics of boredom, a category which Fredric Jameson, writing about Raymond Roussel and video art, considers as an essential part of cultural production and reception.[7] For Jameson it "can always be used productively as a precious symptom of our own existential, ideological, and cultural limits, an index of what has to be refused in the way of other people's cultural practices and their threat to our own rationalizations about the nature and value of art" (72). By converting Stein's libretto into a saleable commodity, a successful Broadway show, Thomson deprives it of one of its most subversive qualities, namely that of eliciting "boredom and panic" on the part of the reader, two responses which are, in Jameson's words, "appropriate reactions and a recognition of the meaning of that particular aesthetic act" of "outright aggressivity" (73). If not exactly through Thomson's music, which turns Stein's text into a merry myriad of American melodies, then, how can we understand Stein's investing in melody?

I argue that the melodicity of Stein's writings is inextricably linked with her use of the literary loop. Stein's experiments with the loop, which must be distinguished from more orthodox forms of repetition,

consolidate her position both as an odd fish in literary modernist waters and a precursor of developments in minimalist music.[8] An example is the "Pigeons on the grass alas" passage of "Four Saints in Three Acts":

> Pigeons on the grass alas.
> Pigeons on the grass alas.
> Short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass. Pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass alas pigeons on the grass.
> If they were not pigeons what were they.
> If they were not pigeons on the grass alas what were they. He had heard of a third and he asked about it it was a magpie in the sky. If a magpie in the sky on the sky can not cry if the pigeon on the grass alas can alas and to pass the pigeon on the grass alas and the magpie in the sky on the sky and to try and to try alas on the grass alas the pigeon on the grass the pigeon on the grass and alas. They might be very well they might be very well very well they might be.
> Let Lucy Lily Lily Lucy Lucy let Lucy Lucy Lily Lily Lily Lily Lily let Lily Lucy Lucy let Lily. Let Lucy Lily.
> (Stein, "Four Saints" 604–5)

As this passage shows, one of the most striking features of Stein's work is her decision to incorporate repetition as a key structural feature of her prose. This method would seem to confirm Jameson's thesis that one way of neutralizing the deadening effects of repetition is to incorporate it into the very texture of the writing. As Kenneth Rexroth has written, "Gertrude Stein showed, among other things, that if you focus your attention on 'please pass the butter,' and put it through enough permutations and combinations, it begins to take on a kind of glow, the splendor of what is called 'an aesthetic object'" (Kostelanetz 15). As Stein herself confesses, detailing her portraitist ambitions to fathom a person, she was "enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them" (*Writings* 272). Her poetry thus appears as one example of how modernist aesthetics—despite its obsessive fear of repetition, routine, and habit and its equally obsessive emphasis on formal innovation—appropriated repetition and reiteration "as a kind of homeopathic strategy whereby the scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over, 'acted out,' and symbolically neutralized" (Jameson 18). Yet Stein's use of repetition differs from that of most of her contemporaries in that it is not an expression of the alienating ennui and repetitiveness of modern life, as it is described and decried in countless modernist works, from Eliot's *Waste*

Land (1922) to Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936). For Stein, repetition had a liberating effect.

Like many of Stein's poems, prose poems, and portraits, "Pigeons on the grass alas" invests in a literary use of the loop as a structuring device which returns upon itself and thereby undermines traditional expectations regarding narrative, descriptive progression, and closure. Indeed, Stein's celebrated repetition-with-variation technique necessarily implies a "returning" or "revisiting" effect on previous compositional segments, a technique which simultaneously anticipates and exceeds the repetitions, replications, variations, and demultiplications displayed in post-WWII musical minimalism. The loop, far from constituting a mere technique meant to produce circular, nonlinear effects, is a constraint which is both procedure and process, one that creates a self-generating dynamic that strives for a constant renewal and actualization of text and sound. The loop, in other words, tends to use melody against itself; through continuous repetition of simple, familiar phrases, it wards off closure and problematizes affective appropriation or "remembering" (a word which implies firm boundaries between the past and the present). As Stein herself put it in her own peculiar "looping" expository style:

> You see that in order to do this there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition, remembering is also confusion. . . . In doing a portrait of anyone, the repetition consists in knowing that that one is a kind of a one, that the things he does have been done by others like him that the things he says have been said by others like him, but, and this is the important thing, there is no repetition in hearing and saying the things he hears and says when he is hearing and saying them. . . . It is not repetition if it is that which you are actually doing because naturally each time the emphasis is different just as the cinema has each time a slightly different thing to make it all be moving. (*Writings* 295)

A Stein portrait that aptly demonstrates how the loop thwarts the deadening effects of memory and repetition is "If I Told Him," of which this is the opening section:[9]

> If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him.
>
> Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it.
>
> If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him would he like it would he like it if I told him. (*Look* 230)

While the comparison with Napoleon points to Picasso's status as the "emperor" of modern art, the speaker's hesitancy suggests that he might not be pleased by the "truths" revealed in the portrait, and which are subsequently expressed in the form of unfinished sentences and unanswered questions. The rhythmic pattern used here is rather fast, and it is possible to read the stuttering, panting cadences of "If I Told Him" as a stylistic device that conveys the speaker's confusion and excitement and would thus seem to fulfill a predominantly mimetic function. But what is at stake in Stein's loops is more than just the reduction of language and the subject to a moment of repetition due to bewildered enthusiasm. Stein's looping prose is perhaps best understood in the light of Deleuze's notion of variation as a feature which is "not added to repetition in order to hide it, but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition *par excellence*" (Deleuze xiv). Such is indeed the effect of the loop, which necessarily returns us to a previous segment to which it retrospectively confers the quality of being "repetitive" by virtue of its difference from previous and later segments. Indeed, a notable consequence of the literary loop is that the segment to which the reader "returns" can no longer be read as a primary text—it can only be *reread* (and *reappropriated*) in the light of the further developments it undergoes in the subsequent paragraphs of the piece. As the theme of resemblance becomes incorporated into the very structure of the portrait ("exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact a resemblance, exactly as resembling . . ." [Stein, *Look* 230]), the ghost of difference returns with a vengeance, opening up a space in which the portraitee's identity and personality can only come to exist in the form of provisional textual moments and displacements.

The "philosophical paradox" of repetition, from Kierkegaard to Freud and beyond, is indeed that "it can as it were only take place 'a second time'" (Jameson 19). This is particularly true of the pedestrian speech and small talk (and, more specifically, kitchen talk) that runs throughout Stein's oeuvre and whose unobserved sonic and semantic resources her poetics seeks to foreground and investigate. Everyday language is by nature (and by necessity) repetitive, memorizable and "singable": it is always grounded in the forms and fabrics of words and sentences already spoken and does not seek to conceal the redundancies, deficiencies, and overlaps that are typical of casual conversation. Stein's loop displays a tendency to reappropriate banal and insignificant details and imbue the simplest shreds of language with a sense of unbalance and unpredictability. Of course, it is only retroactively that this semantic and structural shift occurs, after the process of repetition has neutralized the uniqueness, autonomy, and "originality" of the opening statement by returning to it and "reconvert[ing] it into repetition the second time round" (Jameson 19).

The idea of the loop as a generative constraint also brings into focus another characteristic of Stein's prose: a strong and reductionist impulse

that has come to be associated with musical minimalism, which itself has been marked by a return to simple, memorable melodies. In fact, the most famous loop Stein ever produced is also the most minimalist and melodic one. Her famous sentence, "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," which first crops up in the 1913 poem "Sacred Emily," published in the 1922 collection *Geography and Plays*, was later converted into a mandala-like letterhead whose vertiginous rotation volatilizes the very notion of repetition and reestablishes, instead, a sense of circular, endless continuity. Of course, the obvious analogies with minimalist music should not obscure the fundamental differences between the two media. Still, Stein's use of repetition echoes certain features of, say, Terry Riley's *In C* or Steve Reich's *Different Trains*, not to mention the use of tape loops (sometimes combined with delay effects and playback at different speeds creating varying pitches) inaugurated by Riley, Reich (*Come Out* 1966), and a few others in the 1960s. As for her mandala letterhead, it is a linguistic (near-) equivalent of the tape loop, a piece of tape spliced end to end, which can be passed endlessly through the tape player's reels. Lastly, her desire to capture and manipulate conversation "as it happens" also anticipates the works of certain sound poets working with "live" tape machines who, like Larry Wendt, started experimenting with small microprocessor circuits in the late 1970s as possible "means of manipulating speech material in real time which would have the flexibility of tape manipulation" (Wendt 16).

A book-length study of Stein's loops would have to include other examples which show affinities with other, more specific forms of generic repetition. Stein's explicit engagement with patriarchal culture in "Patriarchal Poetry," for example, contains the following litany-like list of culinary precepts:

> Patriarchal poetry and not meat on Monday patriarchal poetry and meat on Tuesday. Patriarchal poetry and venison on Wednesday Patriarchal poetry and fish on Friday Patriarchal poetry and birds on Sunday Patriarchal poetry and chickens on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and beef on Thursday. Patriarchal poetry and ham on Monday patriarchal poetry and pork on Thursday patriarchal poetry and beef on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and fish on Wednesday Patriarchal poetry and eggs on Thursday patriarchal poetry and carrots on Friday patriarchal poetry and extras on Saturday patriarchal poetry and venison on Sunday Patriarchal poetry and lamb on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and jellies on Friday patriarchal poetry and turkeys on Tuesday. (*Writings* 572)

The litany itself is of course a dominant mode in post-WWII minimalist music, from John Cage's *Litany for the Whale* (which calls upon the

traditional invocations-and-answers structure of Christian liturgy) to Steve Reich's psalmodic *Tehilim* (1981; the title comes from the Hebrew word for "psalm"). Poised between (religious/spiritual) petition and repetition, however, the musicality of Stein's poem is inextricably linked with the poem's political agenda, which distinguishes her from her minimalist epigones in that, as Krzysztof Ziarek has suggested, "the repetitiveness of grammar, its insistence on following rules," may reflect for Stein "the cultural order which links stability with the figure of the father and with patriarchal power—the order of sameness, repetition, and predictability that erases difference" (166). For Ziarek, this would seem to indicate that one of Stein's concerns is to combat the "phallocratic complicity of traditional grammar with the grammar of culture," using the list as a means both to expose the arbitrary nature of hierarchical rules of representations and undermine it from within (166). "The end result," Peter Quartermain concludes in his own exegesis of the poem, is that "the hierarchies are ironed out, and we read the language paratactically, nonpatriarchally" (36).

In addition, any attempt to describe the conditions of the succession and accumulation of macro- and micro-loops in Stein's poetry would have to rely on a detailed analysis of the frequencies of the looped units, which would also have to be classified according to their length and structural nature (line, segment, motif, fragment, riff, theme, etc., are not interchangeable terms). It would also need to differentiate between various degrees of continuity, contiguity, difference, and equivalence, and account for different but related ways of modulating repetition (such modulating effects comprise various processes of selection, addition, omission, permutation, subtraction, substitution, variation, recombination, replication, and demultiplication). Such a detailed analysis exceeds the concerns of this essay, which has limited itself to considering the loop through the prism of the relationship between constraint and possibility, as well as that of closed and open form in the context of modernism's love-hate relationship with melody and melodicity.

I conclude, then, on the note that Stein's literary, "pre-technological" use of the loop paves the way for some of the most important attempts to integrate the lessons of serialism and post-tonal music into popular culture. The influence of Stein on post-WWII composers and its role in facilitating the establishment of new relationships between experimental and popular art is well attested from Thomson to Cage (who composed a set of three songs to texts by Stein as early as 1933 and confessed that he "could only listen to music by Satie and Thomson" [Dickinson 399]); to computer-processed sound poetry (Charles Amirkhanian, Larry Wendt); to Soft Machinist Hugh Hopper's *1984* (1972); to Robert Wilson's 1996 multimedia stage adaptation of "Four Saints . . ." (twenty years after his collaboration with Philip Glass, another musician influenced by Stein, on

Einstein on the Beach); and on to the recent looping complexities of electronic music with bands such as Autechre and drum'n'bass mavericks such as Thomas Jenkinson a.k.a. Squarepusher. The loop is not merely a motif for understanding contemporary literature and music: it is a research field in its own right. By reversing the logic of temporal understanding and consumption of the artwork, the loop reactivates the space where complex or elusive melodicity might have gone unnoticed. With each splicing of the textual tape, it is the ghost of melody which returns with a vengeance, allowing a new stylistic economy to delineate itself, building a narrative of tidal, post-serial, and post-metrical complexities and perplexities.

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NOTES

1. See also Vargish and Mook 133.

2. Leverkühn elaborates: "The more discordant a chord is, the more notes it contains contrasting and conflicting with each other, the more polyphonic it is, and the more markedly every single note bears the stamp of the part already in the simultaneous sound-combination" (Mann 74).

3. Allegedly, to achieve this "whiteness," Satie claimed that he had resolved to eat only white foods while composing the piece. Satie's *Menus Propos Enfantins* (1913) also makes a systematic use of the white notes.

4. Most Stein studies make an attempt at elucidating Stein's concept of the continuous present. Stein herself presents the notion in "Composition as Explanation" (*Writings* 520–29). For a contextualized account of Stein's take on time see, among others, Kern 85 and passim.

5. The story of the Thomson-Stein collaboration is complex. Dydo offers a good summary of the project, beginning in 1927 when "Stein and Thomson somehow reached a loose understanding about what they wanted to do—and then they did it separately" (174). Stein completed her libretto in 1927 and Thomson finished his score in 1928. The opera premiered on February 8, 1934, at the Hartford Atheneum (Dydo 174).

6. Carl Van Vechten to Gertrude Stein, Hartford, 8 February 1934, quoted in Gallup 275; Wallace Stevens to Harriet Monroe, February 12, 1934, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, 267, quoted in Watson 279.

7. The extent to which and conditions in which Stein's text was "mainstreamed" by Thomson is of course subject to discussion. I am grateful to Sarah Posman for her astute comments on an earlier version of this essay. As she rightly points out, via Daniel Albright's analysis of "Four Saints . . . ," a number of aspects of Stein's "radical experiment" were in tune with Thomson's adaptation (Posman 93–94).

8. See Belloï and Delville 206–7.

9. "If I Told Him. A Completed Portrait of Picasso" (1923) is Stein's second portrait of the Spanish painter. The first, simply titled "Picasso," was published in 1912 in *Camera Work*.

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