Women's Studies, 38:84–99, 2009
Copyright © Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
ISSN: 0049-7878 print / 1547-7045 online
DOI: 10.1080/00497870802525705

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

REMAKING SENSE: GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE NAMES OF THE FATHER

MERRILL COLE
Western Illinois University, Macomb

Gertrude Stein perplexes and perplexes again the reader's making of sense. In her 1927 *Patriarchal Poetry*, numerous, and indeed sometimes numbered, sentences seem to point toward a final sum of meaning, a totalization that rarely arrives, or arrives in ambiguity and contradiction.[1] Often critics reading Stein, myself included, pull phrases out of sentences and out of context, in order to assign them a meaning. Thus, if a sentence appears to head to a certain conclusion, but then veers away from it, as so many of Stein's sentences do, the critic turns that part of the sentence seeming to make a statement into a sentence that is not Stein's. If such parsing is necessary for any critical reading of Stein's texts, and if Stein herself is veritably the poet of parsing, she nonetheless suggests that parsing is patriarchal: "Patriarchal means suppose patriarchal means and close patriarchal means and chose" (571). Patriarchal poetics would arrest and demarcate meanings, so that we do not complicate mockery with applause, confuse paternal prerogative with lesbian eroticism, or mistake the masculine for the feminine. Linguistic propriety insures that we recognize divisions of property, that we know to whom meaning belongs. Patriarchal poetry must come to its conclusions, for the final discharge of meaning, as Jacques Derrida would have us discern, is the proof of potency.[2] Yet even as Stein pushes past phallocentric closure, she hardly refuses patriarchal poetry.

[1] Unlike *The Geographical History of America*, a work that playfully subverts numbered chapter headings by placing the numbers out of order and by switching among Roman headings, Arabic numeral headings, and spelled-out number headings, *Patriarchal Poetry* contains whole paragraphs composed primarily of spelled-out numbers.

[2] Cf. Derrida's *Dissemination*, especially.

Address correspondence to Merrill Cole, Department of English and Journalism, Western Illinois University, 1 University Circle, Macomb, IL 61455-1390, USA. E-mail: M-Cole@wiu.edu

According to Lisa Ruddick, the word, "'antipatriarchal'" (648), crystallizes "what was both inspiring but also limiting about the psychoanalytic poststructuralisms of the eighties and early nineties" (647). Though still wishing to affirm the antipatriarchal potential of Stein's "experimental texts," Ruddick would now call attention to "the social and institutional frameworks" inevitably mediating Stein's reception.[3] To some contemporary readers, however, contextualizing Stein's supposed antipatriarchal effects does not suffice as a corrective to critical excess. Objecting to the conception of Stein's writing as the unimpeded flow of pre-Oedipal semiosis, a babbling bliss before or beyond the imposition of sense, readers like Charles Bernstein and Margaret Dickie emphasize the *intentional* dynamics in Stein's more difficult productions. Dickie finds Stein carefully articulating "a language that could both express and conceal lesbian eroticism" (27), which paradoxically facilitates a cosier relation to male authority than feminist critics had previously allowed. The ability "to mimic and deflate" patriarchal discourse, according to Dickie, enables Stein "to find a place for herself in the tradition of patriarchal poetry" (1). While this might seem a radical new departure in Stein criticism, Dickie actually returns us to its beginnings: a statement of Stein's protégé, Virgil Thomson, quoted in Carl Van Vechten's 1946 introduction to the *Selected Writings*, conveys a similar idea: "To have become a Founding Father of her century is her own reward for having long ago, and completely, dominated her language" (xi). Thomson's witticism, simultaneously poking fun and praising, is itself a register of Stein's influence.

While Dickie demonstrates that Stein herself writes patriarchal poetry, rather than simply protesting against masculine tradition, it does not follow that Stein "identifies with the patriarchy," as Dickie contends (53). Stein's intervention depends on shaking up patriarchy's confidence in identification. Dickie's counterclaim against French Feminism-inflected readings recenters interpretation on the ego and its imaginary investments, locating a conflicted personality behind the text, responsible for its

---

[3]I would argue that it is a mistake to conflate psychoanalytic theory *in toto* with the versions of Lacan popular in the United States during the time period to which Ruddick alludes. More recent Lacanian analyses have been quite attentive to society and its institutions.

experimental qualities. Dickie maintains that Stein's "coded language" provides a means "to conceal her subject from an audience unaware of the code and further afford[s] her an opportunity to switch codes or obscure references as her bravado battle[s] with her uncertainties about what she" encodes (19). Thus "double-talk in her language reflects deeply divided feelings." (23) I would follow Ulla Dydo, however, in arguing that "the need to conceal sexual references fails to explain" Stein's language (18). In her 2003 *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises,* Dydo examines how Stein destroys "referential leads" and "prevents the intrusion of incidental personal detail" in order to bring attention to the composition itself (18). Radical decontextualization undercuts patriarchal certainties of time, person, and place. It also complicates our efforts to place Stein's writing in historical and social context, for such situating depends upon a way of knowing that Stein eschews: it would be more effective to historicize Stein's principled resistance to history than to chase referential leads.[4] More than challenging how we make sense, Stein holds forth something other than sense, a beyond of meaning that is not nonsense.

By perplexing our sense-making, Stein deters us from forming an image of her; which is to say, from imagining her identity. Identity, as she conceives it, depends upon recognition; when we fail to recognize Stein in what we read, we also, if only in the moment of reading, cannot secure our own identities.[5] For a completed image of the other confirms the self. In the 1936 "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them," she writes,

---

[4]Stein's insistence on the "now" places her squarely in a modernist tradition that begins with Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Rather than dismiss her stance as critically naïve or presentist, the task at hand, it seems to me, is to interrogate the complex model of temporality she advances—a daunting task that this short article can only begin to tackle.

[5]Stein's conceptualization of identity deserves comparison to the early Lacan. In "The Mirror Stage," Lacan defines the titular concept as "a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body image to a form of its totality" (4). Identifying with the mirrored image, the infant conflates the totality it sees with itself. In his first seminar, Lacan elaborates that this imaginary relation requires assuming the position of the other: "the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his [*sic*] body" (79).

> The thing one gradually comes to find out is that one has no identity that is when one is in the act of doing anything. Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially you are not that when you are doing anything. (355)

In the dismissal of identity and memory in *Patriarchal Poetry*, Stein does not replace an Oedipal language with a pre-Oedipal one, for she puts the vocabulary, technique, and intent of the patriarchal tradition into play. She neither abandons herself to bland indeterminacy, nor performs automatic writing. Although she mobilizes the varieties of wordplay that Sigmund Freud associates with the dream-work, her writing prompts, rather than records, the unconscious.[6] The unconscious would thereby be the effect of writing, not its prediscursive cause. Stein's assiduous disarticulations of patriarchal poetry are also different articulations of what poetry can do. Ellen E. Berry questions,

> In seeking to reread Stein from a feminist perspective, to uncover and preserve her difference, have we merely replayed what [Susan Rubin] Suleiman calls "the eternal Oedipal drama of transgression and the Law—a drama which always, ultimately, ends up maintaining the latter? In describing Stein's and our own enactments of these plots of struggle and escape have we again positioned ourselves in the same old story, reinscribing the Oedipal plot as the-effort-to-escape-it? (5)

Stein indeed reinscribes the Oedipal plot, but so as to frustrate its plotting. *Patriarchal Poetry* never abandons its titular terms; and at certain junctures, Stein appears to indicate that her subject has no "outside": "Patriarchal Poetry as if as if it made it be a choice beside" (587). We could understand that patriarchal poetry appears to offer choices, but really does not. Or we could interpret this to mean it may seem that we have a choice besides patriarchal poetry, but we do not. The next sentence, with each word capitalized, suggests a monolithic entity: "The Patriarchal Poetry" (587). Later in the poem, nonetheless, we find "Patriarchal Poetry in pieces" (594).

The bipolarity of the patriarchal and the antipatriarchal belongs to the imaginary order of identity, the realm in which the subject is confirmed by her image in the mirror. It is not

---

[6]Cf. *The Interpretation of Dreams.*

enough to say, however, that Stein ushers us into the maturity of the symbolic realm, for she brings something else into play. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire emerges in the failure of signification—precisely the failure that Stein effects when she makes the symbolic stutter, when she presents patriarchal poetry whole *and* in pieces. Desire manifests itself in the interruption of the ego's coherence; that is to say, in failures or lapses of identification. Attending to the breakages, slippages, and suturings of language, Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a way to theorize Stein's poetics. In "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them," she opposes "human nature" to "the human mind" (356). "[H]uman nature," the realm of identity, recognition, and memory, bears an obvious resemblance to what psychoanalysis calls "the ego." "[H]uman mind," Stein asserts, is "[t]he thing in itself of which the human nature is only its clothing" (358). While Stein's "human mind" is not the same as the subject of the unconscious, and while her rejection of the unconscious is well known, both Stein and Lacanian psychoanalysis locate their interests beyond the regimes of sameness. Stein points to a paradox of the present moment: because the moment is not of itself, because it has no self-identity, it always holds the promise of interrupting our fixations. As Stein's designation, "human mind," suggests, this also means freeing us to think.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (*Four*), Jacques Lacan considers how Paul Cézanne overturns the relation "between eye and mind" with "*those little blues, those little browns, those little whites*, those touches that fall like rain from [his] brush" (110). It is no longer a question of the mind ordering what the eye has perceived, nor of the mind projecting previously formed images onto the field of perception and the canvas: quite otherwise, the painter lays down not his vision but his gaze, not what he sees but how he sees. Beyond the representation of external nature or the mimesis of internal states of feeling, his paintings, in a certain sense, look back at us, as traditional portraits are sometimes said to do. They would captivate our gaze, elicit our desire.[7] "What occurs in [the] strokes" of a painter like Cézanne

[7]The gaze, as Lacan repeated often in his later seminars, is an object-cause of desire, like the lips, the rim of the anus, and other borderline bodily zones.

or Henri Matisse, Lacan says, "is not choice, but something else": "A sovereign act . . . since it passes into something that is materialized and which, from this sovereignty, will render obsolete, excluded, inoperant, whatever, coming from elsewhere, will be presented before this product" (114). This act, in its utmost attention, is a forgetting of all else, an emptiness admitting desire. In her 1912 portrait of Cézanne, Stein, hardly depicting the painter by means of literary realism, rehearses his sovereign gesture, thus rendering a likeness of Cézanne that does not depend on his name, his face, his history, or the description of his landscapes. Here, Stein writes, "[b]elieve 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." Stein's insistence materializes in phonemes, rather than in blocks of blue. She seems not, however, to find the painter's gesture completely realized, for she continues, "[i]n this way Cezanne nearly did nearly in this way Cezanne nearly did nearly did and nearly did." This is perhaps because, as she says, "he was settled to stay" (494).

If the sovereign act unsettles identity, if it perforates the field of meaning, it does not thereby put an end to patriarchy. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, we cannot circumvent the names of the father, because these names constitute symbolic reality. Rather than attempting such an escape, Stein appropriates the name, "Patriarchal Poetry," and repeats it over and over again. "[I]f you love a name," she writes in the 1935 "Poetry and Grammar," "then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently more persistently more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody who loves" (327). The connection of poetic naming to love is not straightforward. Stein does not displace her titular terms in order to designate a rival lesbian aesthetic mirroring what it would supplant. In "Poetry and Grammar," she insists that poetry "is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that" (327). The effect of such naming is to change the thing named. Stein does not concern herself with refixing reference, or resignifying, in *Patriarchal Poetry*; she instead makes the referential function dance by ever returning to her subject, by constantly beginning again.

Holding open the space between the thing designated and what designation adds to that thing, she brings a certain surplus, a not-anything in excess of signification, to our attention. While we could understand this non-substantial surplus as the addition of intentional desire to language, it is also a subtraction of sense.

> Patriarchal poetry is the same as patriarchal poetry is the same as patriarchal poetry is the same as patriarchal poetry is the same as patriarchal poetry is the same.
>
> Patriarchal poetry is the same. (577)

The tradition of patriarchal poetry is narrative. It explains, she says, "to them by for them" (578). It tends to repeat the same story, a story that teaches us how social relations and gender divisions do not change. Against this economy of the selfsame, of a numbingly redundant identity refusing to budge, Stein insists. Insistence is her sovereign gesture. In "Portraits and Repetition," she asserts that repetition entails description. Repetition asks us to remember what we think we know. It narrates the return to the self. Insistence, Stein writes, "in its emphasis can never be repeating because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything the same way because emphasis can never be the same not even when it is most the same that is when it has been taught" (290–91). What Lacan terms "repetition" would appear to correlate with Stein's concept of insistence, for he notes "the most radical diversity constituted by repetition itself." "Repetition," he writes, "demands the new. It is turned toward the ludic": it makes signification a game, of which the pleasure consists not in finally making sense, but in opening spaces between words and meanings (*Four* 61).

In Stein's *Patriarchal Poetry*, the traditional forms of versification play across the text in permutation. Poetry's numbers—that is to say, its metrical systems—those ideal regulating templates almost never explicitly enumerated for the reader, even if some poems cleverly allude to them—become in Stein an insistent counting, which mocks the practice of versification. This is what she calls "Patriarchal Poetry relined" (593):

> One little one little two little two little one little two little as to two little as to two little as to one little as to one two little as to two two little two. Two little two little two little one little two one two one two little two. One little one little one little two little two little one little two one little two. (589)

The echo of "John Brown Had a Little Indian" is more than derisive in that it serves to emphasize the pleasure of counting—a pleasure that many skilled readers of traditional verse share, but which such verse authorizes only as an ancillary task to appreciating something else—perhaps, how sound-patterning serves to complete the poem's meaning. The subordination of sound to sense by means of an abstract system is antithetical to Stein's operation. We can also hear *T O O Little*, not enough, emerge from Stein's numerical repetitions: this pun, an excess of sense, remarks the impoverishment of patriarchal poetics. Without providing a sum total, she connects the project of poetic counting to some of the larger strategies of patriarchal culture. There is a militarism involved in a poetry, that is, as she says, "obtained with seize" (600):

> Patriarchal Poetry left left.
> Patriarchal Poetry left left left right left. (606)

Karen Ford observes that the final sentence of Stein's poem, "Patriarchal poetry and twice patriarchal poetry" (607), "achieves a satisfying balance between refutation and celebration. This terse little line says, 'two cheers for patriarchal poetry,' as though praising it, and 'patriarchal poetry, going once, going twice,' as though auctioning it off" (116). Stein links the sense of patriarchal poetry for sale, of patriarchal poetry as a commodity subject to the numerical abstraction of exchange-value, with a suggestion of its militaristic violence:

> Assigned to patriarchal poetry too sue sue sue sue shall sue sell and magnificent can as coming let the same shall shall shall shall let it share is share is share shall shall shall shall shell shell shall share is share shell can shell be shell be shell moving in in in inner moving move inner in in inner in meant meant might might may collect collected recollected to refuse what it is is it. (578)

Depending on whether we take words as nouns or as verbs, we can construct a narrative in which a woman named Sue learns to share something with patriarchal poetry. We can also hear a pleasing echo of the tongue-twister, "she sells sea shells by the seashore." Yet patriarchal poetry may have assigned her to sale, and the "share" may be her reduction to a certificate of exchangeable property.

Again, "sue" may be the activity of claiming the right to another's property by legal means. Property can also be had by martial means, for if a "shell" can be a seashell, a pleasant and suggestive object inside of which we recall the sound of the sea, "to shell" can mean to bomb, to devastate, as a prelude to appropriating by force.

In the 1926 "Composition as Explanation," Stein registers the rapid change effected by The Great War. "Composition" in this essay means literary exposition; but it also signifies, as she says, "how everybody is doing everything." (520). Stein explains, "[e]ach period of living differs from any other period of living not in the way life is but in the way life is conducted and that authentically speaking is composition" (523).Truly contemporary authors are the ones "composing of the composition that at the time they are living is the composition of the time in which they are living" (523); to put this in less self-reflexive terms, composition is contemporary when it accords with "how everybody is doing everything," not with how everyone fondly remembers behaving. Although Stein makes composition a question of how we compose reality, she does not advocate that writing provide historical context or that it picture everyday life, for that would involve remembering what has passed. Such an imagined reality would serve to reassure the self.[8]

"Patriarchal poetry," Stein claims, "more than wishes," but what does patriarchal poetry really want (578)? She poses a partial answer:

> Patriarchal in investigation and renewing of an intermediate rectification of the initial boundary between cows and fishes. Both are admittedly not inferior in which case they may be obtained as the result of organization industry concentration assistance and matter of fact and by this this is their chance and to appear and to reunite as to their date and their estate. They have been in no need of stretches stretches of their especial and apart and here now. (571–72)

Stein deploys bureaucratic jargon to parody patriarchy's concern with order and property, as well as to poke fun at a complacency that is in "no need of stretches." It is not that Stein begrudges respect for patriarchy's rectification and industry. "It is," she writes, "very well and nicely done in Patriarchal Poetry which is

---

[8]I might ask whether many contemporary historicist readings do not serve the same purpose.

begun to be begun and this was why if when if when when did they please themselves indeed" (588). Her praise is ironic, for patriarchal poetry pleases by reassuring the masculine ego. As she says, "[t]here is not only no accounting for tastes but very well identified extra coming out very well identified as repeated verdure and so established as more than for it" (588). Repetition establishes a pleasing identity. The words, "identified as repeated verdure," suggest the self-confirmation that comes with land ownership. This is what Lacan calls the "*belong to me* aspect of representations" (*Four* 81).

The name is the first guarantor of self, the prelude to all recognition. It is also a function of the proper name to mark the borders of one's property, whether subjective or objective:

> Patriarchal poetry needs rectification and there about it.
> Come to a distance and it still bears their name. (576)

To give things names is to order them, and to keep one's name is a prime concern. As Stein notes, patriarchy always shows concern for "history" and "origin" (576). As with other nouns, however, Stein gives proper names the license not to stay themselves; as *A Novel of Thank You* would have it, "[e]verybody can change a name they can change the name Helen to Harry they can change the name Edith to Edward they can change the name Harriet to Howard they can change the name Ivy to Adela. This makes it impossible for all of them to say what they mean" (qtd. in Dydo 38).

The question that Stein poses in *Patriarchal Poetry*, "Is he fond of him" seems rhetorical (605). Nevertheless, "let him have him have him defend"; that is, let it remain among men, is not a satisfying answer (568). How a woman enters the scene of male homosocial pleasure involves hesitation, even if such entry appears tantamount to the possibility of poetry.[9]

---

[9]In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.' In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia" (1).

> She asked as she came down should she and at that moment there was no answer but if leaving it alone meant all by it out of it all by it very truly and could be used to plainly plainly expressed. She will be determined determined not by but on account of implication implication re-entered which means entered again and upon.
>
> This could be illustrated and is and is and is. There makes more than contain contained mine too. Very well to please please.
>
> Once in a while.
>
> Patriarchal poetry once in a while.
>
> Patriarchal Poetry out of pink once in a while. (588)

Rather than depart from patriarchal poetry, there is much to gain in entering it "again and upon." The woman writer is not "determined" *by* patriarchal poetry, but determined *to* "implicate" it, in the Latin sense of folding, twisting, and entangling. Patriarchal poetry can please "once in a while," because it can be "out of pink once in a while": if I am correct to assume that here, as elsewhere in Stein's work, pink alludes to the feminine, then, following Dickie, we might paraphrase the passage as meaning that a woman writer can produce patriarchal poetry and that Stein produces it in the poem, *Patriarchal Poetry*: "Patriarchal Poetry she did she did" (598). The phrase, "out of pink," however, should also remind us of the more common locution, "out of ink," which implies that patriarchal poetry might stop altogether.

After a long passage in which the phrase, "[l]et her try" (580–82), insists, Stein addresses the problem of masculine silencing.

> Let her try.
>
> Never to be what he said.
>
> Never to be what he said.
>
> Never to be what he said.
>
> Let her to be what he said.
>
> Let her to be what he said.
>
> Not to let her to be what he said not to let her to be what he said.
>
> Never to be let her to be never let her to be what he said. Never let her be what he said.
>
> Never to let her to be what he said. Never to let her to be let her to be let her to be let her what he said. (582)

"Let her" puns on "letter," as alphabetic unit, or as writing itself. Not letting her be what he said also means not allowing the letters to spell out his meaning. This passage moves forward by negation on top of negation, never seeming to escape the terminal words,

"what he said." In his essay, "Negation," Freud writes that "the performance of the function of judgment is not made possible until the creation of the symbol of negation has endowed thinking with a first measure of freedom from the consequences of repression and, with it, from the compulsion of the pleasure principle" (238). The ego employs linguistic negativity in order to distinguish desire and actuality, fantasy and reality, inside and outside, self and other, male and female. Negation maintains the boundaries necessary for patriarchal order.

If Stein's pile-up of *nevers* and *nots* incompletely disables the function of negation, what immediately follows this passage more radically ruptures the paternal "no":

> Near near near nearly pink near nearly pink nearly near near nearly pink. Wet inside and pink outside. Pink outside and wet inside wet inside and pink outside latterly nearly near near pink near near nearly three three pink two gentle one strong three pink all medium medium as medium as medium sized as sized. One as one not mistaken but interrupted. One regularly better adapted if readily readily to-day. This is this this readily. Thursday.
>
> This part the part the part of it.
> And let to be coming to have it known.
> As a difference.
> By two by one by and by. (582)

Labial excitement suddenly overtakes the negation of "what he said." The pronoun, "he," temporarily disappears. "Nearly," which seems to mean "not quite" in her portrait of Cézanne, here functions as a mark of intimacy. That the passage does not coalesce into a positive lesbian identity is partly because to do so would be to provide a description or explanation of eroticism, rather than its enactment.

The contiguity referenced by "near" and "nearly" might suggest a favoring of metonymic sliding over metaphoric fixation, remembering Roman Jacobson's alignment of metonomy with syntactic displacement, and metaphor with similarity and substitution. Lacan asserts in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* that desire operates metonymically, and one could propose a facile reading of Stein as the poet of metonymic desire. However, the fixations of metaphoric sameness also play a major role in Stein's poem: she does not simply replace metaphor with

metonymy, if that were possible. Although she undoes metaphorical identities, some of her most interesting moves depend upon our ability to see the tenor behind the vehicle, as with "[w]et inside and pink outside." Even if Stein's question near the opening of "Poetry and Grammar," "why write in nouns," appears rhetorical, given that "nouns are not really interesting" (214), later in the essay she indeed tells us why. While Stein forefronts previously undervalued rhetorical modes, I do not follow the many Stein advocates who categorically privilege one strategy, be it metonymy or anti-referentiality. It is not enough to align, as Peter Quartermain does, the paratactic with the antipatriarchal (36). The taking of a side—for instance, being "for syntagmatic relations" and "against metaphors"—rehearses the oppositional logic endemic to patriarchy. It calls forth the name of the father.

In French, "the name of the father" registers a pun: Lacan exploits the fact "le nom du père" sounds like "le non du père"; that is, "the *no* of the father." It is the function of negation that allows the subject access to the symbolic order, though I would suggest that there is only an historically contingent link between this function and the father. In "A Spoken Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung* [*Negation*]," Jean Hyppolite claims that thought is only possible through language's capacity to present "what one is in the mode of not being it" (291). Linguistic negation, in other words, is the very precondition of discourse. Lacan, in his "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar," pluralizes the topic of investigation, thus moving "emphasis from the father to the proper name," as Tim Dean observes (85 n. 36). The patronym situates its recipient as a speaking subject, giving a name from which to speak. The French words, "les noms du père," pun on "les non-dupes errent"; that is, "the non-dupes err." Part of the erring has to do with the slippage of the signifier from one meaning to another, a slippage suggesting how the unconscious can foil the most well-meaning of pronouncements. Lacan's conundrum implies that those believing in the univocal consistency of the father, in his omnipotence, in his infallible answers to the questions of desire, are mistaken. Like the subject, the big *O* Other, the symbolic order, lacks coherence (Dean 205). Yet if we assert ourselves to be non-duped in our knowledge that those with faith in the father's potency are duped, then we repeat the error; which is to say, we too call forth the father.

"Patriarchal poetry," Stein tells us, "makes no mistake" (576): "Patriarchal poetry makes no mistake makes no mistake in estimating the value to be placed upon the best and most arranged of considerations of this in as apt to be not only to be partially and as cautiously considered as in allowance which is one at a time" (585). It would seem for a moment that patriarchal poetry, with its hierarchical system of values, its careful economic plotting, and its meager accommodations, does not err. The phrase, however, begins to permutate through Stein's "most arranged of considerations." "Patriarchal poetry might seem misplaced at one time" (586). "Patriarchal poetry once in a while" (588). "Patriarchal poetry left alone" (588). A problem emerges:

> When she was as was she was as was she was not yet neither pronounced so and tempted.
>
> Not this this is the way that they make it theirs not they.
>
> Not they.
>
> Patriarchal poetry makes mistakes. (593)

Was she tempted by patriarchal poetry's pronouncements, or did it fail to pronounce her? Did it fail to tempt her? Did it fail to pronounce her temptation? Gone in this passage are the either/or equations of binary logic, for simply to state that patriarchal poetry makes mistakes would be to assume the position of the one-who-makes-no-mistakes, which is the position of the father. Beyond the aridity of this logical paradox is the fact that Stein delights in the mistakes made possible by language. Words without error hold little interest. In "Poetry and Grammar," she says she likes prepositions "best of all" because they "can live a long life being really being nothing but mistaken and that makes them irritating if you feel that way about mistakes but certainly something that you can be continuously using and everlastingly enjoying" (315). "Make it a mistake," she advises in *Patriarchal Poetry* (584). Flouting patriarchy's cautious considerations, mistakes offer entry to desire.

In *Patriarchal Poetry*, the pattern of insistence often sets the singular feminine pronoun against the masculine singular, or the indicatively male third-person plural, so that it would be erroneous to assume we can simply switch one gender for the other. The feminine not only eludes patriarchal closure, but keeps

patriarchy from closing in on itself. Is it that patriarchal poetry risks putting us to sleep, or that Stein sets patriarchal poetry to lullaby?

> Patriarchal poetry might to-morrow.
>
> Patriarchal poetry might be finished to-morrow.
>
> Dinky pinky dinky pinky dinky pinky dinky pinky once and try. Dinky pinky dinky pinky dinky pinky lullaby. Once sleepy one once does not once need a lullaby. Not to try.
>
> Patriarchal Poetry not to try. Patriarchal Poetry and lullaby. (606)

"It is a wicked thing to do to Patriarchal poetry, to show its dinky pinky, not to take it seriously," quips Neil Schmitz (126). We might, though, also wish to align "dinky pinky" with "wet inside and pink outside" and consider the figure as clitoral, rather than penile. The diminutive, disparaging in one context, is lover's talk in another. That we can so superimpose a contradictory sense implies neither the identity of feminine and masculine, nor the two genders as mutually exclusive, nor even Stein as patriarch, but rather the ability of the "human mind" to negotiate more than one register at once and think beyond sameness. Our desire does not have to return to the some place.

Works Cited

Bernstein, Charles. "Professing Stein Stein Professing." *A Poetics.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992: 142–49.

Berry, Ellen E. "On Reading Gertrude Stein." *Genders* 5 (Summer 1989): 1–20.

Dean, Tim. *Beyond Sexuality.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination.* Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

Dickie, Margaret. *Stein, Bishop, & Rich: Lyrics of Love, War, & Place.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997.

Dydo, Ulla E. with William Rice. *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises, 1923–1934.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2003.

Ford, Karen. "Gertrude Stein: A Crazy Quilt of Style." *Gender and the Poetics of Excess: Moments of Brocade.* Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* 1930. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Avon, 1965.

_________. "Negation." 1925. *Vol. 19 of The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud.* 24 vols. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953–74: 233–39.

Hyppolite, Jean. "A Spoken Commentary on Freud's *Verneinung.*" *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953–1954.* Ed.

Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. John Forrester. New York: Norton, 1991: 289–97.

Jakobson, Roman and Morris Halle. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance." *Fundamentals of Language. Second Ed.* 1971. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981.

_________. "The Mirror Stage." *Écrits: A Selection.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1977: 1–7.

_________. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. John Forrester. New York: Norton, 1988.

Quartermain, Peter. "'A Narrative of Undermine': Gertrude Stein's Multiplicity." *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe.* New York: Cambridge UP, 1992: 21–43.

Ruddick, Lisa. "Stein and Cultural Criticism of the Nineties." Gertrude Stein Special Issue. *Modern Fiction Studies* 423 (Fall 1996): 647–59.

Schmitz, Neil. "The Difference of her Likeness: Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation.*" *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature.* Eds. Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1988: 124–49.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Stein, Gertrude. "Cezanne." 1912. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903–1932.* Ed. Catharine R. Simpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: The Library of America, 1998: 494.

_________. "Composition as Explanation." 1926. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903–1932*: 520–29.

_________. *The Geographical History of America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind.* 1936. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932–1946.* Eds. Catherine R. Simpson and Harriet Chessman. New York: The Library of America, 1998: 367–488.

_________. *Patriarchal Poetry.* 1927. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1903–1932*: 567–607.

_________. "Poetry and Grammar." 1935. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932–1946*: 313–36.

_________. "Portraits and Repetition." 1935. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932–1946*: 287–312.

_________. "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them." 1940. *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932–1946*: 355–63.

Van Vechten, Carl. "A Stein Song." *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein.* Ed. Carl Van Vechten. New York: Random House, 1946.

Copyright of Women's Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.