



Journal of

STEPS

for Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 48

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Recommended Citation

ALSajee, Yasmeen AbdulRaheem and AIDouri, Hamdi Hameed (2023) "Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons as Cubist Poems: An Analytical Study," *Journal of STEPS for Humanities and Social Sciences*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 48.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.55384/2790-4237.1276>

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Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons as Cubist Poems:

An Analytical Study

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Received: 21/11/2022

Accepted:04/02/2023

Abstract

Tender Buttons is a compilation of poems published by American writer Gertrude Stein in 1914. It is an experimental piece. In it, Stein describes commonplace items using descriptors that are not often associated with them. Each poem examines a unique perspective on a common thing. "Objects", "Food", and "Rooms" are the three sections of the book. The Cubism Stein employs reflects the experimental character of Stein's collection. Her poetry are packed with rhythm, repetition, and sound. This research deals with Tender Buttons as Cubist poem. It analysis these poem and sheds light on the Cubist elements that is found and used by Gertrude Stein.

Keywords: Tender Buttons, Gertrude, Cubism, Objects, Rooms, Food

1-Gertrude Stein

From 1903 until her death, Gertrude Stein lived in Paris. Today considered as a great figure of Anglo-Saxon modernism, she has yet long been placed in the spectacular horizon of letters and the arts without being recognized as a writer. In her lifetime, Stein emerged as a literary curiosity. Her eccentric position due in part to the nature of her work, was reinforced by the distance she maintained with groups or literary enterprises of her time. Her work is complex because she is engaged in a powerful innovative and "experimental" momentum, although this adjective makes little sense in literature.

At the start of her career, she took a series decision with regard to language that she will never explain clearly. The essential, crazy experience that we can have on reading Stein asks the following question with acuity: at what moment does the act take place? denunciation? Thus, the language will have to bend to personal forms. First of all, an angle of approach will interest her, she will engage in a deconstruction of a very advanced syntax. According to Donald Sutherland, the phrase becomes powdery (Grima,1996: 21).

2- Tender Buttons as a Cubist Poems

Tender Buttons; a text that confirms Stein's cubist style. Then the rest of her work continues the reflection on the paragraph, the poetic and narrative effect. But in the most obscure texts, like “*Ida*”, a theme emerges often close to autobiography: identity of the individual, daily life, American, etc. In her works, Stein sends us back to a desire to write a present continuous or a prolonged present. Where Steinian arguments touch an essential problem, if one manages to read well and to follow her metaphors, it is when she tackles the relationship between time and writing. About the poems by *Tender Buttons*, she wonders precisely if the writer should deliver all at once what he knows about the subject. Should one bring the fruit all at once of a knowledge that one built little by little, by groping on a certain period of time? Yes, since doing it all at once will be one’s literary utopia.

The feeling of here and now is too precious to be troubled by the memory or the idea of the future. In “*Ida*”, resistance to memory and memory begets the narration and makes it choose something that resembles intuition. In her efforts to define her business of the present continuous, she always describes a movement by which one would transport oneself into the object to coincide with what is unique and therefore inexpressible.

I wish now to wish now
that it is now That I will tell very well
What I think not now but now (Stein, 1971:42)

She always chooses intuition, experience impenetrable to rationality discursive, direct vision of the mind by the mind. Steinian writing attaches itself exclusively at the instant, this point of duration without duration that she wants to make exist at full force for every second, every tenth of a second, every thousandth of a second until it no longer exists. But how to say everything at the same time? The solution does not appear to us not literary. The realization of this wish is a matter of action, contemplation or visual perception. For to write is already to be separated. However, Stein undertakes this task. Her intuitive writing manages to make us coincide with the world. The moment must become a probable place, not this point pushed by the past, pulled towards the future. So, to hell with beginnings, middles and endings (Grimal,1996:23).

It is logical that Stein does not hesitate to embark on a poem, a story, a narration from which all time problems will be eliminated. For example, "Ida" subordinates any possibility of narration to the whole saying of existence. The thinner the meaning, the more buzzing the sound. The unit's smallest of the word and the sentence already fallen into a form of explanation, that is to say, organized with the beginning, the middle and the end that it refuses. The paragraph is a large span of time without a hierarchy of elements driven by their own movement. Texts thus influenced by the characteristic that must necessarily set up a continuous present; they stretch elastically time, make the moment last. Repetition is the only satisfactory figure of permanent presence. The progressive form, just like the pronoun one, is the most manageable instrument. Stein chooses the sound elements, easily usable and modifiable, which operate a kind of fascination. In the texts, we witness a pure quantity of sound. Yes, Stein's aesthetic approaches have rather focused on these sonorities, it delimited a grammatical field (Brugiere,1995: 19).

Stein thus writes the suspense, the state of consciousness, since the world makes the Stein's repetitious machine is having fun with happiness and good mood via repeating phrases in each line and even in this same line, which is why

her poetry is an excellent example of cubist poetry. The crackle of words within the sentence occurs after the swell of the paragraphs. It restores the word's independence since, in his perspective, the word is the sole object that is a part of man. As a result, the ing-one feature provides the repeat a second smear and frees the sentence from heavy convolutions; it cuts, organizes in cascades on the page, clarifies sounds, and extends vocabulary. Its spread uproots the mind and reading word. Every sound, every word, and every phrase is elevated to an outstanding level by the sound continuity. Letting world remain, let nothing begin or end, and it will be thus as long as there are words or even a single word. It is in this disposition that the writing Stein meets cubism, she confirms her literary desires, because cubism allows infinite reading (Brugiere,1995: 21).

In 1908, the term cubism was coined by Louis Vauxcelles. He goes with a group of painters who will not gather on the move and will not publish a manifesto. In 1914, Stein published *Tender Buttons*, poetic texts which one immediately calls cubist. She abandons the portrait of individuals to capture the portrait of things. There is of course no legitimacy to speak of cubist literature, but it is impossible to ignore that the cubists, and the painting of the early twentieth century in general, exerted an immense fascination with literature. On the French side, Apollinaire and Reverdy are enthusiastic about the revelation of the plastic arts; on the American side same fascination manifests itself in Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein. It is a very fruitful relationship of envy that literature of the time maintains with painting. Poetry was rarely more admiring and jealous of another art, seeking to imitate what she understood as the greatest freedom. The lessons of modern painting had an impact on Stein's work, already indifferent to literary categories. She could only welcome this type of liberating attempt.

The story of Cubist Stein with America is that of the impetus which linked painting and modern literature. The fascination of cubism in literature arose from the Stein's admiration of Picasso, of her genuine friendship with this artist rather

than of a clear understanding of cubism. She does not perceive cubism as a procedure or movement, but like the courage to ask questions that go beyond technology alone. Picasso is for Stein the only being in relation with the object itself. Therefore, she desires a direct relationship with the world and the time. This is why, once again, she will use repetition. The art of Picasso is an attachment to the object for the object. She rightly thinks that if the cubism does not go to abstraction (although it ruins representation), it is for achieving another type of representation. He wants to grasp reality and at the same time to express the means at our disposal to seize it (Cohen,1966:71).

The cubist painting forces the eye to pass over the entire canvas; Stein, in *Tender Buttons* compels us to read her fragmented little poems, devoid of a center, of frozen time, in order to find the object: guitar, umbrella, potato, etc. All elements of the poem must be considered. Nothing can be privileged or fixed in time. This non-hierarchization does not grant any rest to the intellect. There is no solution to the poem. No reading does discover *Tender Button*. In this circular game participates the title of the poem: it always refers to the search for a signified which is designated but hidden and by the force of signifiers. Yet nothing is hidden, there is no poetic reality hidden behind appearances. For example, the text *Tender Buttons* takes care in the sentence to place the author behind in the world.

But Stein nevertheless remains in an attitude of the roots of meaning which is very familiar for her. Stein's collection acts inside the words, it is written on the words and not with them. The collection consists of three sections of unequal length. *Objects* contains 58 poems, all preceded by a title; *Food*, 51 poems, always in prose. *Rooms*, a massive block of about ten pages divided into paragraphs. The poems in *Objects* and *Food* are quite brief: from three words to about ten lines. The objects in the collection come from a thematic repertoire of cubist still life. We meet "A BOX", "A PLATE", "A BOTTLE OF SELTZER", "A RED STAMP", "A RED COAT", "A PIANO" and etc. in "A RED STAMP";

If lilies are lily white if they exhausted noise and distance and even dust, if they dusty will dirt a surface that has no extreme grace, if they do this and it is not necessary it is not at all necessary if they do this they need a catalogue (ll.1-4).

Then, on the "Food" menu we find: "Roast beef", "mutton", "sugar", etc. In the poems, the title draws towards itself all the effort of comprehension. It is she who finally determines our perception of the text and becomes the unique benchmark of what appears as the absolute. The impression of hiatus in these still life's steiniennes is as disturbing as in the cubist portraits of the same era. There is an irreducible difficulty in the text and in the painting. The texts pose a reading; problem the role of the reader (Eco,1984: 71).

The good reader is not the one who, after decoding, would access to a hidden poetic reality. The signified is so bare, so tenuous that one cannot find an elsewhere, a poetic place, a symbolic depth. Since then, the signifier "umbrella" draws all attention to itself, like the signifier cubist painting. It captures the interest, invested with potentialities that neither linguistics nor semiology can decipher. This demanding aesthetic chooses its subject because of its banality, because it is in itself devoid of interest. The Linguistic subject then takes first place. All strength is given to a new aesthetic relationship which first imposes the sign as arbitrary (Giraud,1979: 53).

First, the aesthetics of Cubism's circularity and the impossible grasp of canvas could only enchant Stein. Especially if this apprehension, always postponed, was not, with her, the fact of deconstruction or of its spraying on the page, but indeed that of "shifted" painting, of schemes of representation and their integration on the board, of the grammar that emerges 'shifted') in the texts and yet integrated. The lines of cubist paintings are not straight, but blurred, approximate. Cubes are very little cubic and abstract; they are full of pictorial materials but according to Stein, she is simply making an essential decision: to consider language as a compound of separate elements and not as a structure.

The texts come alive with shifters that don't shift on anything, adverbs of place which do not refer to any place, personal pronouns which do not apply to anyone. All this why? No doubt to cross the barrier of the arbitrariness of the sign. Gone is the reign of the noun that drew all the attention to itself. The words are too referential to be of valid poetic effect. They must become invisible. Then other elements, sources of ambiguities, arise in the foreground: pronouns, adverbs of time are all equally impenetrable. The polysemy, the automatism of the language are the delights of this writing. But this is only possible thanks to the first step, or the splitting of the sentence. Steinian writing thus poses its indications in the midst of manipulations and criticisms of the elements of language. The Steinian metaphor is on the edge of the void, because it claims to say something, but does nothing (Sutherland,1973:82).

By dint of trying to get rid of names in their current use, by dint of trying to expel them to re-create the real, it is the words themselves that acquire the status of "real thing". Stein herself considers *Tender Buttons* to be a crucial step in her awareness of the status of words as things:

in *Tender Buttons* and then on and on I struggled with ridding myself of nouns I went on with this exceeding struggle of knowing really knowing what a thing was really knowing it knowing anything I was seeing anything I was feeling so that its name could be something, by its name coming to be a thing in itself as it was but would not be anything just and only as a name (Stein,1967:242).

The name becomes "something", the name becomes "thing in itself". Moreover, words are "alive" "Words have the liveliness of being constantly chosen"(Ibid .1932:25), and so punctuation marks and the dots have a certain "look" that Stein says they always have beloved; on the other hand, commas are "servile and dependent" and question marks, exclamation marks and quotation marks are "awful".

Beyond the arbitrariness of such comments, it is very important to note here that it is the materiality of words and punctuation marks which makes them things in themselves. It is not only the visual materiality of a letter, a word, a sign and

their looks, but also of their sonic materiality. Stein stated that she was captivated by the beauty of the noises as they emanated from her and the one who generated them with their shapes and harmony with their weight, and that they forms the foundation of the cubist poetry in *Tender Buttons*. The non-descriptive "portraits" of *Tender Buttons* would therefore be less portraits of objects, food items and places, than portraits of words picture of each word. The word therefore becomes a living thing, the word is body, form, sound, weight and volume. The word is the real that it is not a question of describing but of recreating through the portrait. The question of the re-creation of the real has thus moved from the re-creation of the thing "to recreate the thing" to the portrait of the word considered as a real thing to make a complete picture of each word.

Stein therefore privileges the materiality of the signifier rather than the representation of a signified. The word as a material thing opens up the possibility of an aesthetic presence of which the materiality of the signifier is the form, but a form of presence which does not represent, which does not describe, which does not signify by the concept and by the joint. The word as a material thing "says", "speaks", "resounds", "writes" something which is not of the order of meaning, of thought, of referential language, something which does not communicate. The meaning is however not completely evacuated since Stein insists on the fact that whatever importance one gives to the "weight" and the "volume" of the words, it is impossible to get rid of the meaning.

Priority is given to the substance of the word and not to its meaning, but the association of words, playing on their materiality, never results in a complete absence of meaning. This is indeed the case for all the poems of *Tender Buttons*. Thus, the poem entitled "Orange In", which no more "describes" an orange than it "describing" another food item, ends with the "since" which is repeated sixteen times and "no" fourteen in order to explore the significance:

A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since,
a no since when since a no since when since,

a no since, a no since when since, a no since,

a no, a no since a no since, a no since, a no since (ll.7-9).

Obviously, this passage has in common with the traditional grammatical sentence only to begin with capital letters and to end with full stop. However, if it is difficult to say that this sentence communicates a "message", if it is even difficult to find one (or several) referent(s) that the sentence would denote, it is the game of the sound material, from the repetition of the four words ("a", "no", "since", "when"), which creates different semantic possibilities: should we understand that there are no beginnings ("no since when")? Is it an affirmation of the power of negation ("A no")? Of "non-sense" ("no sense", "non sense")? Of repeated nuisance ("nuisance ", phonetically close to "no since", which is also phonetically close to "new sense", new meaning)? D'innocence ("no sins", no sin, "a no since" phonetically close to "i-nno -cence")? Pure rhythm and musicality? It is in any case the free play of sounds which, in and through their repetition, makes it possible to update and condense all these different semantic possibilities from the four words "a", "no", "since", "when".

By employing a new shape and new purpose in her cubist poetry, Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* can be able to combat the masculine Definity and confinement that they have placed on women and language in these same ways. *Tender Buttons* is more than the absurdity it appears to be on first reading; it is a highly unified, clear statement against submission to any paradigm. Stein has been often regarded as the spearhead of literary cubism, but it is critical to understand her connection with the movement before assuming her motivations. Too frequently, commentators have portrayed her work as imitative of Picasso, and hence his connection with her as causal rather than synergistic. Stein's recollection is one of mutual dialogue rather than consequence:

I began to play with words then. I was a little obsessed by words of equal value. Picasso was painting my portrait at that time, and he and I used to talk this thing over endlessly. At the time he had just begun on cubism (Murphy,2012: 140).

In fact, cubism is difficult to describe because to its anti-descriptive character, therefore contextualizing Stein's work within a wider discussion is more useful. Stein's relationship to the Cubist movement is similar to its expression in that it is made up of various views with no single or dominating voice. Stein is able to dismantle language in many of the same ways that visual artists demolish the image in this discussion, physically with Picasso and metaphorically with the movement. Her collection *Tender Buttons* series uses defamiliarization, form fragmentation, varying perspectives, and minimalism to clarify a new understanding of poetry.

Tender Buttons is easily recognisable for its use of the subject in unexpected contexts. Stein skillfully compels a re-evaluation of reality by removing ordinary items from familiar descriptive language. Gertrude Stein jarringly infiltrates notions of home signifiers in the same manner that visual cubists defamiliarized the most approachable art, portraiture, with new reflections of the body in sharp lines and angles. In "A Substance in a Cushion," for example, Stein says in the Objects portion of her series, "sugar is not a vegetable." By attacking what we take for granted: human form and domestic life, both methods threaten a supposedly fundamental understanding of private life. If an object that is universally identifiable in a given context is taken from that paradigm, the item will always be 'tainted' by persistent displacement, such that it seems monstrous, or at least out of place, in its original setting' (Maubrey,1985: 149).

Cubism goes beyond merely threatening those concepts to actively shatter conventional descriptors. The artist is able to disrupt what is meant between a hypothetical form of 'hand' and the relation to the self's hand in the more immediately discernible visual cubism by the fragmented distortion of a cubist reproduced hand. Fragmentation happens on Stein's literary canvass when seemingly incomprehensible, abrupt words destroy an established signifier/signified link between nouns and descriptions. Her written portraits aren't coherent or conclusive—they defy logic:

More of a double.

A place in no new table.

A single image is not splendor. Dirty is yellow. A sign of more in
not mentioned. A Piece of Coffee is not a detainer (ll.1-4)

Not only are these words incomprehensible as 'a cup of coffee,' but they also lack standard grammar. Stein is able to overcome language's customary boundaries by simultaneously defamiliarizing the signifier and fragmenting form. Another feature of Stein's innovative approach is how she avoids the issue of a biased speaker.

Because each word is given a voice, there is no single narrator, but rather an unlimited number of narrators. Words have lost their previous meanings due to their odd situation. A variety of perspectives are combined, akin to cubism in visual art, but the jumbled total indicates that no single perspective is 'correct.' The transformation of what was formerly background into the forefront is an exciting auxiliary to varied, value-free points of view. This might be caused by the use of scale distortion in cubist paintings to bring attention to, instance, an elbow. Stein has already used her larger series to similar effect by writing about mundane stuff, but she also shows how old language may develop fresh meaning inside each poem.

Her subdued language is another cubist homage in Stein's *Tender Buttons*. She uses simple, everyday language to convey highly sophisticated compositional concerns. Stein mentions her renowned "Rose" picture in a poem suitably titled "Nothing Elegant."

A charm a single charm is doubtful. If the red is rose and there is

A gate surrounding it, if inside is let in and their places change then

Certainly, something is upright. It is earnest (ll.1-3).

These phrases just smother romanticism and then lampoon the rose's overdone vulgarity as a symbol of love. This satire deviates from the usual significance of

things and arbitrary signifiers once again. Now that Stein's relationship with cubism has been clarified, it is critical to comprehend why *Tender Buttons* opposes traditional means of expression. Gertrude Stein created her series as a means of experimenting with removing nouns from her poems.

Nouns, according to Stein, have lost their ability to properly reflect meaning while also limiting their worth by rejecting competing interpretations. Stein's examination of literary cubism was motivated by her exclusionary view of language. Like the visual artists who rejected the concept of a single objective portrayal, Stein's poetry is a response to power dynamics disguised under systematic classifications. *Tender Buttons* is a poem that uses cubist ideas to retrieve meaning from a patriarchal, discriminatory background. To grasp the magnitude of Stein's reclamation, one must first grasp the scale of tyranny. These patriarchal practices may be traced back to the ancient Greeks, namely Aristotle's notion of 'truth.'

Consider Aristotle's idea of binary syllogisms, particularly how he defines "Greek" and "non-Greek." In this scenario, women have two challenges: 1) a universalizing restricted interpretation attitude; and 2) an 'Othering' effect in which one dominating end of a binary, in this example, Greek, is elevated above the alternative. If 'rationality' in framing arguments in a universal, dominant/submissive paradigm is justified, then women in gender binaries are constantly driven into the submissive zone. As a result, Stein's contention that she must avoid nouns for her writing to survive is correct: the death of this reductive, linear relationship will provide a new space for other meanings of language and a new way of feminine reasoning. If this looks to be an exaggeration, remember that other evaluators arrived at the same result using various methods.

"Stein intended to renew verbal representation, to move beyond descriptive mimesis to reproduction of the medium, language," Margueritte Murphy remarked, "much as Picasso aimed to reinvent visual representation" (Murphy,2012:141). "SUPPOSE AN EYE" is a nice example of this description;

Go red go red, laugh white.

Suppose a collapse in rubbed purr, in rubbed purr get.

Little sales ladies little sales ladies little saddles of mutton.

Little sales of leather and such beautiful beautiful,

Beautiful (ll.7-11).

Murphy's idea is based on the concept of home subversion, or the weakening of conventional gender norms. Jennifer Ashton concurs that Stein was "striving instead for a mathematical independence from experience as such; indeed, it is this independence that constitutes the breakthrough," but she disagrees that it occurs in "what she describes as her breakthrough texts - *Tender Buttons*, for example...will neither register the author's experience nor produce new experiences for the reader" (Jennifer,2005: 28).

At this point, it appears that Stein has effectively used cubist representation in her challenge to patriarchal linguistic norms, allowing for some dispute. Her creative defamiliarization innovations liberate her poetry from binaries and offer a broader perspective on the familiar. *Tender Buttons* does more than merely challenge an existing linguistic paradigm; it questions the assumptions that limiting paradigms are based on. It is a collection of poems, not a series. If the poems were arranged in a chronological order, it would undercut the entire cubist premise by placing them inside the limitations of a deeply rooted tradition of male poets who did not question the basic structures within which they operated. Instead, implying that *Tender Buttons* is a collection of poetry places Stein's work in a 'tradition' of rejecting convention, sometimes known as postmodernism.

According to this definition, the sequence retains the patriarchal aspect of exclusion; it is obvious, then, that Stein's poems are neither narrative, continuous, nor insistent, which places them in the area of the series. Serial poetry, in contrast to exclusive lyric forms, which Stein is not because of her many conceits, is ambiguous and flexible enough to enable form innovations. "Serial thought recognizes that each conjunction of objects has a meaning; that the objects are

capable of rearrangement; and that that subsequent arrangement also has a meaning which is in no way 'secondary' to its articulation" (Conte,2003: 25).

Additionally, he constrains the genius of the current sequence by necessitating balance against disorder: specifically, balance against its internal disorder, which satisfies linear thought traditions. To avoid falling into the trap Stein has skillfully escaped, namely the male projection of objective order, it is more appropriate to carve out a place in postmodernism. Postmodern artists perceive human orders as arbitrary and sporadic, and they are dubious of assertions that such systems are supported by anything other than our own immediate political, ethical, or utilitarian convenience (ibid. 5).

So, according to Conte's description of the postmodern movement, Gertrude Stein not only 'fits in,' but she also started the literary expression herself! Still, the fact that Conte is a male authoritatively defining the link between the signifier (postmodernism) and the signified complicates the argument (a supposedly un-specifiable way of thinking). Despite the possibility of comprehending Stein's *Tender Buttons* in a postmodern framework, what is crucial to understanding the series is how it resists classification rather than adheres to one. Stein's production of a series of poems answers to the constraints of lyric sequences rather than simply opposing them. Stein's use of serial poetry places the poems into dialogue with prior traditions in a way that is both imitative and innovative, changing the patriarchal pattern of the descriptive monologue by composing cubist poetry (Conte,2003:17).

The different discourses that occur throughout Stein's *Tender Buttons* are essential to understanding how her writing has grown from and beyond patriarchal norms, but we must also investigate what Stein wanted to express in that debate. The division of the poems and the greater dynamic between the three major chapters of the poems are where the concepts of cubism and serial characteristics converge. Those interactions appear to illustrate a journey (not linear, but radial) toward recognizing a woman's many identities in Stein's own

woman-identified-woman position. Beginning with "Objects," "Food," and ultimately "Rooms," as Stein does, the first two chapters reflect men's outward identification of women, while the last provides a space for self-empowerment and identity.

Gertrude Stein's "Objects" is a Cubist-inspired explanation of women's exploitation, outlining the issue at the heart of her series. When contrasted to the section title, she obviously concentrates her poetry on feminine, domestic items, demonstrating the link between the two. Because the items are inert, only the observer may actively evaluate them in this interaction. By forbidding connection, Stein defines her poems' subjects, feminine objects, as "Others," helpless to act as agents and foreign to mankind. The discriminatory cliché "a woman's place is in the house" reveals how women are inextricably linked to the private, domestic domain. The names of her poems in the "Objects" section allude to this—Stein opens with "A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass," which is not only a household object, but also the pinnacle of feminine objects because it is used for serving, receiving, and is fashioned curvaceously. In her titles, she also mentions petticoats, dresses, and purses, all of which are extremely feminine accessories, such as "THIS IS THE DRESS, AIDER";

“Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider
stop the muncher, muncher munchers.

A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a
to let” (ll.1-4).

Objectification is upsetting to women not just because it assumes passivity, but also because it suggests 'othering.' Women, like the umbrella, cannot be characterized as anything other than what men are not: agents capable of comprehending. This classifies women as lower creatures and separates them from males as people. Women, like nouns, are bound by their categorization as something other from men. In numerous of her poems, such as "Colored Hats," Stein highlights the limitations of visual representation. Colored hats are required

to demonstrate that curls are worn by adding blank spaces; this distinguishes between single lines and broad stomachs.

Tender Buttons captures this in an intermediate manner by leaning on cubist aesthetics. The narrative progresses the reader through abstract language arrangements that fracture standard conceptualizations of things and practices, from glimpses of everyday home goods through domestic behaviors, and eventually a mixture of those objects and practices. *Tender Buttons'* opening part, "Objects," gives the reader abstract descriptions that produce complicated sensory sensations. By using a variety of phrases, Stein inspires different pictures in each poem throughout *Objects*, *Food*, and *Rooms*. For example, in the collection's second poetry, "Glazed Glitter," Stein writes:

Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of cover
The change is that in that red weakens an hour. The change has
come. There is no search (ll.1-3).

Stein begins with a hypothetical query, asking her reader to contemplate the look and meaning of a nickel with her. Stein encourages the reader to break apart the definitions of nickel as a material and as a sign of economic worth by drawing on its diversity as a piece of cash and common metal. Furthermore, the word "GLAZED GLITTER" tells the reader that nickel appears bright and silvery, but it is not genuine silver. *FOOD* acts as a transitional part in *Tender Buttons*, moving the reader from the perplexing *OBJECTS* to the more concentrated *ROOMS*. The reader quickly notices the change in format from *OBJECTS* to *FOOD*. While the poems are organized similarly (a lyrical description of the titular object: "EGGS.," "CHICKEN.," "CAKE.," etc.), Stein offers a list of contents before the first poem. This list contributes to the poem's gradual development of limits. *OBJECTS* is totally open, shifting from item to item with only a few hints pointing to Stein's decision to hop from issue to issue.

In FOOD, however, the reader is given a list of ingredients. Stein is constrained by the subject matter in the section, just like a cook would be constrained by the ingredients in a pantry or ice box. *Tender Buttons'* last portion, ROOMS, is a dramatic contrast to the prior two sections. ROOMS is distinct from OBJECTS and FOOD in that it comprises only one poem. ROOMS is fourteen pages of prose poetry that reads like a manifesto, building on the momentum established in the preceding two sections. Stein provides new observations regarding her living area, in addition to references to previously documented in OBJECTS and FOOD iv (Pitchford,1999:674). These new findings are mostly about limits, recognizing the physical restrictions of rooms as well as the implied limitations of household spaces.

"Act so that there is no utility in a center," the opening statement, draws the reader into Stein's approach to material space. She implies that there is no center, no clear focal point of space or objects. Furthermore, she claims that "broad acts," or lyrical descriptions, do not give measuring scales. Rather, poetic descriptions help the poet develop their subject—preparation is for the one doing the preparations. ROOMS is a self-referential section that observes the framing of space through architecture while also arguing against the framing of perception. Because there is no ultimate, unique point of view, there is no center. Language, or "voice," gives "a gift" of viewpoint (Bennett,2017: 24).

Kley investigates the connection between cubist aesthetics and Stein's poetry in her paper "'keeping pace with the visual revolution': Exchange service Reference in Gertrude Stein's Prose Poems *Tender Buttons*." "Speaking of Stein's "analytical and inventive" mode of cubism rather than the "representational mode of realism," Kley observes that "Stein's verbal still lives are playful pieces which project onto the page different non-referential or associative perspectives seemingly dislodged from the control of the conscious, purposive mind" (Kley,2004:519). Kley continues with this antimimetic thread and argues that "Stein's work defamiliarizes the familiar and thus temporarily effects and

eventually denies the critical distance that seems so central to dominant accounts of modernism—which assume that the modernist text provides an autonomous alternative to mass culture . . .” (Ibid.520).

In this critical framework, Stein's seemingly haphazard grouping of signs in her poetry "defamiliarizes the familiar." Kley contends that these groupings are less random than they appear at first glance in *Tender Buttons*. The OBJECTS section of the prose poem is a concentrated exploration of household space, consisting of apparently random elements ("A BOX.," "A RED STAMP.," "A PLATE.," etc.). For example, in the opening poem in the book, "A CARAFE To IS A BLIND GLASS," Stein begins with an abstract representation of the eponymous object, establishing the tone for the poems.

Kley's adherence to Stein's abstract language arrangements lends to a semiotically concerned reading of *Tender Buttons*. If Stein's intention is for her readers to "adjust their perceptual apparatus to see or hear what they usually take to be transparent signifiers," then the intentional use of linguistic multiplicity becomes a cubist aesthetics experiment that is concerned with cognition as well as verbal/visual relationships. Kley finds that cubist literature and art have an inherent semiotic link. *Tender Buttons* by Stein and Cubist painting bring the two media closer together (Kley,2004: 523).

Learning how Stein tries to manipulate words to generate multisensory experiences helps to understand *Tender Buttons'* ekphrastic character. The pictures and sensory impressions Stein evokes linguistically are generated by her innovative word arrangement in her prose poetry. If the reader is aware of Stein's approach to language as a system of representation that may be altered, he or she can approach *Tender Buttons* ekphrastically. A semiotic analysis reveals that *Tender Buttons* is anti-mimetic by demonstrating the mismatch between the poems' titles and the descriptive stanza that follows (Glavey 2016). Stein's work is descriptive rather than mimetic. Contemporary ekphrasis allows the viewer to

witness how Stein transforms common items into art by recognizing their aesthetic significance.

Studying *Tender Buttons* alongside semiotics and cubism to have a better understanding of how Stein is devoted to vocally portraying the sensory experience of the home through experiments in perspective. Stein's ekphrasis at work is the suspension of an elicited picture or sensory experience, displaying the subject and its following sensory experiences. The reader is fully interested with the depiction of the subject. Analyzing *Tender Buttons'* ekphrasis does not invalidate the text's cubist interpretation. Stein's ekphrasis allows the reader to interpret Stein's hyper-spatial language within the context of a literary rather than a visual comprehension. Cubism and ekphrasis are not mutually incompatible; rather, the cubist idea of perspective feeds into Stein's continuous present's semiotic play. The unorthodox portrayal of things in *Tender Buttons* introduces the reader to sensory sensations associated with household surroundings (Bassoff,1978:79).

Tender Buttons is a semiotics inquiry that aims to let the reader see, feel, touch, smell, and hear the home environment through language, eliciting "the word link between the word and the things observed." Why not use the collection as an experiment in immersive sensory experiences if the poems' goods, food, and rooms form the home setting and all of its nuances? *Tender Buttons* was designed to be more experiential than representational. Stein is expressing her understanding of language via the medium of the household space.

Her evocation of items, food, and spaces brings the reader into many visions and sensory experiences, implying that word values are intrinsically plural. Stein suggests that pictures in the modern world are escaping their frames, drawing on her grasp of cubist aesthetics. The topics of her still life paintings are everyday objects, and her still life poetry seek to elevate the mundane to a level of aesthetic worth. She creates experiences using profoundly ekphrastic poetics, manipulating

perception through a semiotic plurality of selected signifiers, and producing a cubist home setting with shattered viewpoints of the subject.

Conclusion

When regarded via a very cubist perspective, *Tender Buttons* become more easily identifiable as a textual confluence of language and geography. By scrutinizing the words in the several prose poems for their varied meanings, the reader may be able to build one or more images inspired by domestic space. The radical ekphrasis of *Tender Buttons* is not based on Stein's exactly mimetic portrayal of materiality; rather, Stein's use of radical ekphrasis is based on the subjectivity of home space. By meticulously arranging words such that they reflect one another, Stein creates a multidimensional and colorful environment. It is a universe that the reader may co-create with her as they find the joy of the ordinary.

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