

Representation, Re-presentation, and Repetition of the Past

in Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*

by

Alexandria Sanborn

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This thesis is dedicated my father. Even as he remains my most exasperating critic, his opinion has always mattered most to me.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines how the past remains relevant in Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, even as the novel focuses on narrating the immediate present. The initial passage narrates a tale of a son who drags his father on the ground of his orchard, seeming to rebel against his father, but actually pursues knowledge. Furthermore, the father reveals at the end of the passage that he once dragged his father as well, but not as far as his son now drags him. This structure of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition provides a framework to understand the novel's relationship to its past. Chapter One argues how the form of *The Making of Americans* reveals the novel's relationship to its beginnings. The initial passage is a "hypothetical epigraph" that pursues both scientific and literary methods to apply the initial passage's themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition within the social setting of the novel. Chapter Two continues the work of the previous chapter and examines the father daughter relationship between Julia Dehning and her father, Henry Dehning to identify how it simultaneously replicates as well as transforms the initial passage's themes within its contemporary culture. Moreover, the plot reveals how Julia depends on her father's advice, emphasizing how the novel portrays that each generation repeats the actions of its predecessors. Chapter Three explores how Stein responds to hostile critical reception towards her experimental composition and in turn, asserts its changes the conventional composition to account for the novel's attempt to capture changes within the real world. Experimental composition is not a rejection of tradition, but rather reflects the writer's attempt to understand the present. In terms of the novel's subject, Americans, repetition of the urge to rebel can contribute to understanding how Stein constructs American identity.

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## Introduction

His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours – because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so.

“When I was younger and determined to write I knew nothing of the ancient Greek curse on us all, heredity; now I have seen, I have weighed, I have reflected, I know, and my ‘Americans’ is the outcome.”

Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Gertrude Stein’s interview with Willis Steell, respectively, convey contrasting ideas about what “we” have inherited from the Greeks.<sup>1</sup> Oedipus’s “destiny” in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* is to become the tragic hero who unknowingly kills his father. Freud maintains that this urge continues to plague father-son relationships to modern days, an urge he termed the “Oedipus complex.” In *Modernism: A Cultural History*, Tim Armstrong describes how this theme influenced modernist literature: “Early twentieth-century literature often takes the form of a *Götterdämmerung*, rage directed at those towering Victorian figures, the parents, a torrent of Oedipal anger.”<sup>2</sup> *The Making of Americans* thus seems typical: it opens with an archetypal, unnamed son who rebelliously and violently drags his father along an orchard. “Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. ‘Stop!’ cried the groaning old man at last, ‘Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree!’”<sup>3</sup> The passage seems to present an Oedipal scenario through a son’s anger against his father that externally manifests in dragging. It ends in ambiguity, which could suggest the son will murder the father. However typically Oedipal it may seem, the novel

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2010), 280. Gertrude Stein quoted in Willis Steell, “An American Novel that Paris is Talking About,” *The Literary Digest International Book Review* 4 (February 1926): 173.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2005), 10. Gotterdammerung: “Used *figuratively* to denote the complete downfall of a regime, institution, etc.”: “Gotterdammerung, n,” *OED Online* (March 2011. Oxford University Press. 20 April 2011), <<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/80243?redirectedFrom=gotterdammerung#eid>>.

<sup>3</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (New York: Dalkey, 1990), 3.



actually uses the repetition of rebellion among generations to demonstrate how each generation is like its predecessors. As the passage unfolds, the father negates the initial presumption that the dragging only happened “Once” through revealing he dragged his father as well. In this sense, the passage ends focusing on the repetition rather than violence. Likewise, Stein’s interview with Steell suggests this focus on “heredity,” rather than the urge to kill one’s father, is the curse that connects generations of people. Thus the novel resists the Oedipal genre because of the way repetition of the past fosters the connection between father and son.

I have been pondering the premise of this thesis since the Fall 2009 semester, though I didn’t realize it was to become my thesis until a year later. After producing a lengthy, multi-faceted close reading of the initial passage of *The Making of Americans* for Josh Miller’s class on the Modern American Novel, I became fascinated by the psychological depth and linguistic peculiarity of Stein’s writings. I was also taking Literary Theory that semester and began ruminating over a topic to pursue for my final paper. Of all the theorists we read in that class, I decided to compare Stein’s writings to David Hume’s essay “Of the Standard of Taste,” believing I could draw out how each writer examines the way an individual’s perspective influences their behavior. Though Tina Lupton and Josh Miller encouraged me throughout that ambitious project, my paper did not answer my initial question. For one, the scope of the assignment did not allot the time or resources I actually required to carry out my inquiry. What I did begin to see was a comparison not of how, but a comparison of when: Stein and Hume draw from different historical discourses to communicate their ideas about an individual’s perspective. Though I also began to feel their motivations to explore human nature spoke to one another in an almost universal way in spite of temporal borders, I admit for the sake of my deadline, my paper argued how their respective eras influenced the contrasting ways they inquired and wrote about

human nature. I have not explicitly included any of this material, but my findings from this paper inform my initial instincts about the argument this thesis makes, specifically, that the novel maintains a dialogue with the past even as it focuses on describing the present.

Earlier this year, I returned to that close reading of the initial passage in *The Making of Americans* to see if I could transfer some ideas I already expressed. Though none of the passages managed to directly survive my revisions, I had toyed with the concept of whether the son actually rebels against his father through dragging his father “beyond the tree” and thus progressing farther than any other father had been dragged. I interpret dragging as the son’s unsuccessful attempt to rid himself as well as his father of their “tempers” and “sins” (3). Unfamiliar territory promises both of them an escape, as a space neither has ventured. Though the dragging can lend to an interpretation of Oedipal violence, it can also suggest the son’s desire to include his father in his pursuit of redemption. The way the initial passage *seems* to depict violence conveys how pursuit of knowledge can imply, but not necessarily be one’s rejection of the past.

Dragging can also be interpreted as a way the son asserts his authority over his father: the son continues to drag his father, in spite of his father’s protests. Lisa Ruddick maintains the novel “adopts the...persona of an oedipal son, for the son stands simultaneously outside and within the father’s domain. He overthrows the father to become the father; the father that he challenges he inherits.”<sup>4</sup> Ruddick interprets the dragging as a power struggle: the son’s anger inspires the attack, and the father’s groan reflects the pain he is willing to endure to openly disagree with his son. Barrett Watten claims that “son succeeds father by controlling his desire to kill him just as the father controlled his desire to kill his father before him...the continuity of

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, and Gnosis* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990), 60.

these murderous impulses from father to son is the basis for the transmission of authority.”<sup>5</sup>

Patriarchal authority stems from each son’s ability to control his urge to kill his father.

Childhood and rebellious urges are inextricably linked, and one’s control of these urges enables adult identity. In this interpretation, dragging replaces the son’s true urges to kill his father, and thus the son comes of age. Ruddick and Watten suggest the son drags to express anger to the father, whereas I regard it as an attempt to bring his father with him on his journey to find redemption from his father’s “tempers” and “sins.” My interpretation reveals a way to view the dragging as the son’s commitment to finding this redemption no matter the cost.

Even as the son seems to act against the past through venturing in unexplored territory, bringing his father with him maintains his connection to the past. G.F. Mitrano argues a connection between father and son actually occurs later in the novel: “the oedipal narrative is interrupted or suspended by the grace of the son....The sin of the self... must metabolize until [Stein’s] anger against the fathers somehow breaks into a new kind of love, into a form of intellectual mimesis for the sake of the new modernist prose.”<sup>6</sup> The novel begins with more conventional prose as the initial passage exemplifies and comes to use experimental prose like repetition later in the novel. Repetition requires the past to reappear in the present, and thus the younger generation begins to imitate, rather than reject their elders. According to Mitrano, when the novel launches into this repetition, the violence presented in the initial passage ends. But the dragging suggests the son already envisions the shared nature between himself and his father from the start of the novel: he requires his father to embark on this journey of change with him. In this sense, heredity can be considered a “curse,” as Stein notes in the epigraph of this chapter,

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<sup>5</sup> Barrett Watten, “An Epic of Subjectivation: The Making of Americans,” *Modernism/modernity* 5 (1998): 96.

<sup>6</sup> G.F. Mitrano, *Gertrude Stein: Woman without Qualities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 33-4.

because the son *requires* his father. My reading emphasizes how even as this son embarks on a journey distinct from his father's, he acknowledges his connection to his father.

The initial passage generates several questions about how we can read the novel's portrayal of the relationship between past and present. For one, is rebellion against the older generation in the novel simply that, or can we alternatively consider it a pursuit of knowledge? Does pursuit of knowledge in the present necessarily reject previous forms of knowledge? Furthermore, does embarking on a different path from the previous generation to gain knowledge prevent repetition of the past from occurring, since it is not true repetition? These lines of inquiry convey the undertaking of this thesis, which I attempt to answer through examining the novel's form, relationships between characters, and initial reception of the novel.

The novel powerfully initiates its reader through this passage, but the narrator retreats from further indulging in this story line, never to return explicitly to these figures for the rest of the novel. Instead, she begins to introduce the reader to the main characters within the novel: the Herslands of Gossols, California and the Dehnings of Bridgepoint, Connecticut.<sup>7</sup> Though the two families are geographically separated, they eventually come together through the marriage of Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland. The novel identifies its project is to "fill up this history for us of a family and its progress," which the narrator attempts to accomplish through describing the characters of each family as well as their friends and neighbors (Stein 4).

My first chapter explains through combining scientific and literary approaches how the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition between the older and younger generations expressed at the beginning of the novel offers the novel common ground among the

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<sup>7</sup> Critics most commonly use the pronoun "she" to denote the narrator, which I adopt as well throughout this thesis to maintain coherency with the body of Stein criticism. However, I have reservations about appropriating this pronoun, as it suggests critical design to merge the narrator with the author.

characters. From the literary perspective of the novel, I consider how the initial passage is an epigraph that introduces themes that set the tone of the novel and juxtaposes a narrative of the past within a novel that focuses on the present. This passage did not even appear within the first draft of the novel, which supports my argument that it provides clarification, rather than serves a necessary purpose to the plot.<sup>8</sup> Stein also employs the scientific method: the initial passage is a hypothesis of the rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition that could occur in a father-son relationship. The narrator investigates this claim through the novel's literary experiment, similar to Emile Zola's concept of the experimental novel.<sup>9</sup> Science adds an element of realism to fiction through the way the novel mimics a process of pursuing knowledge, similar to the way a scientist would collect empirical evidence. Through fiction, Stein gains the power to create as many diverse social environments as she deems necessary for the narrator to conduct a scientific investigation on the variety of ways the relationship between rebellion and pursuit of knowledge can manifest. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia demonstrates how the literary setting of the novel allows for the scientific investigation through its emphasis on various social conditions.

Even though critics have questioned the practice of examining this novel's form to understand its content, I use the rationale behind Formalism to reveal this other way to frame the novel. Leon Katz interviewed Alice B. Toklas, Stein's lover of about 40 years and wrote his dissertation about the biographical influences behind the novel using his notes from this interview and Stein's notebooks and manuscripts. He maintains Stein only intended the novel to

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<sup>8</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*, Ms, 1903, (Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Emile Zola, "The Experimental Novel," in *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays* (New York: The Cassel Publishing Company, 1893).

engage with aesthetics of composition and implies we should only interpret the novel through this framework:

“The process of creating a work of art and the process of arriving at a whole and in central view of reality for [Stein] is one thing. The ‘form’ of all these works is therefore the accidental result of their being testimonials to the chronology of the struggle to realize their vision.”<sup>10</sup>

Also, any formal relationship was strictly a coincidental metaphor for Stein’s conception of psychology: “Stein was later to attempt to define to herself the relation of ‘beginning, middle and end’ specifically as it applied to the description of ‘being’” (Katz 13). In their own work, Richard Bridgman, Lisa Ruddick, and Barrett Watten briefly identify the initial passage as a prologue, epigraph, and paradigm, respectively.<sup>11</sup> However, as my thesis largely relies on form to stake its claim, it is necessary to address Katz’s criticism. Even if Stein never intended the initial passage as either a hypothesis or epigraph, the way I analyze the passage in relation to the novel produces a consistent interpretation that can inform how we can understand the novel conceives its relationship to the past and present.

Chapter two examines how the father-daughter relationship between Julia Dehning and her father Henry Dehning imitates the paradigm of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition in the initial passage and how the social setting fosters these themes. Even as feminism asserted a woman’s ability to act without male influence, the novel suggests she requires her father’s influence, which responds to the initial passage’s repetition of the past. When Julia desires to marry Alfred Hersland, her father initially disagrees because he is suspicious of Alfred.

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<sup>10</sup> Leon Katz, *The First Making of The Making of Americans: A Study Based on Gertrude Stein's Notebooks and Early Versions of Her Novel (1902-1908)* (Diss. Columbia University 1963), 150.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 66-67.

However, Julia challenges his decision, and eventually, he concedes to the marriage especially because he has no solid evidence against Alfred. Ultimately though, the father's suspicions about Alfred are correct: Julia discovers Alfred intends to use the marriage to access her father's money so that he can invest in business ventures. The novel's plot parodies a popular contemporary genre of literature that featured a naive American woman who travelled to Europe and was seduced by a European man who desired her money. Furthermore, because she has legal authority, no one could prevent her from making this mistake. However, in the novel, the father's presence can allow the daughter to recognize the deception, suggesting Julia is to repeat the past through using her father's advice. Thus similar to the initial passage, this scenario reflects how the younger generation relies on the older generation's influence while knowledge of the social setting allows us to arrive at this understanding.

My interpretation of how feminism functions in the novel departs from ways critics have conventionally interpreted Stein's identity as a radical feminist who usurped patriarchal values. Even as I remove the novel from this context, I maintain it allows female empowerment through envisioning this scenario in which a daughter can replicate patriarchal authority. This section does not address what critics have specifically argued about the Julia plot line: I will address those arguments in the chapter itself. Instead here I acknowledge how my interpretation responds to what seems to be the general critical understanding of Stein. Though feminist criticism on Stein is not limited to the following, I offer them as examples of the dialogue I enter. Catharine Stimpson captures contemporary social anxiety that educated women would lack the desire to reproduce, and instead focus on pursuing education: "a problematic gap existed, particularly for elite women, between what they might do with their minds and what they might do with their bodies [maternity]," and Stein reconciles the tension through "endors[ing] the concept of the

superwoman who would unite the new mind and old body...the intellectually competent housewife.”<sup>12</sup> My focus cannot speak to this point because I argue the tension does not exist in Julia becoming a housewife, and instead, how she decides whose housewife she becomes. On a different note, Marianne DeKoven describes the relationship in Stein’s writings between women and the patriarchy: “Although Stein never intended to be anti-patriarchal...opposition to patriarchal modes seems to me the ultimate *raison d’être* for all experimental writing.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Lisa Ruddick maintains how overall the novel intends repetition to “explode nineteenth-century beliefs and values,” particularly her former admiration of William James and “the nineteenth-century faith in progress, in science and in ‘character’” (1-2).<sup>14</sup> My analysis of the relationship between Julia and her father can suggest how the novel relieves such tension because the patriarchy enables feminine authority. Barbara Will’s argument differs from mine most. Similar to my approach, she analyzes the initial passage but chooses different case study in the plot to explore the relationship the novel has to its beginnings. A father writes letters to his daughter to scold her, but eventually, she comes to write him back: “he had not any right to write moral things in letters to her...he had commenced in her doing the things that would disgrace her...it was a shock to him getting such a letter...he kept saying...his daughter was trying to kill him and now she had done it” (Stein 489). Will maintains “Once again, a child is repeating an action performed by the father but in ways that contradict and threaten to ‘disgrace’ his authority—in this instance by writing back to him, by using the agency of the letter to resist

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<sup>12</sup> Catharine Stimpson, “Mind, Body and Gertrude Stein,” *Critical Inquiry*. 3 (1977): 490-1.

<sup>13</sup> Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), xvi.

<sup>14</sup> William James was a prominent American psychologist and philosopher during the last 19<sup>th</sup> century, who developed the idea of pragmatism, or use of knowledge for practical purposes. He was Stein’s former college professor.



him....the Other appropriates his language and repeats it in contradictory ways.”<sup>15</sup> Since I delve into the relationship between Julia and her father and not to this father and daughter, I cannot speak to Will’s argument, but my analysis can present another perspective of the relationship a father and daughter can have. My analysis of the Julia Dehning plot provides another context of feminism in Stein’s texts that actually relies on repeating the patriarchy because of its overall commitment to exploring repetition between generations.

My analysis of the relationship between Julia and her father resists the label of anti-feminist literature as well. Before Stein wrote the novel, she read Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* (Katz 13). Moreover, Weininger was widely known for his misogynist views, which manifested in his work:

whenever a new judgment is to be made, (not merely something already settled to be put into proverbial form) it is always the case that the female expects from man the clarification of her data...she expects from him the interpretation and illumination of her thoughts. In short, the woman makes it a criterion of manliness that the man should be superior to herself mentally, that she should be influenced and dominated by the man; and this in itself is enough to ridicule all ideas of sexual equality.<sup>16</sup>

This passage could capture how Julia asks her father for his permission to marry Alfred and later, how Julia *should* have listened to his advice. However, the novel does not debate masculine superiority because it focuses on how a female learns to practice agency through repetition. Will proposes Weininger’s influence “lies arguably in his providing her the terms with which to

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius”* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 49-50.

<sup>16</sup> Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 101.

understand her own ‘type,’ and thus, paradoxically, to move beyond her own typological project” (65). In other words, he informs Stein’s psychological knowledge, but his work has no direct bearing on the novel’s presentations of gender. I argue the novel adopts a ‘middle ground’ on this spectrum of feminist influence: though it does not repudiate patriarchal influence on a female, it does not seem to prescribe direct perpetual patriarchal influence either.

I shift in my third chapter to examine how the novel’s response to its reception and Stein’s writings about composition emphasize how the novel’s narration differs from convention but does not rebel against past forms of narration. Instead, composition changes to communicate changes in a writer’s present environment. This chapter does not delve into what these changes are, but rather, focuses on how Stein’s attitude about aesthetic movements contributes to the novel’s inclusion of the past, even as it pursues a different path of knowledge. I juxtapose Stein’s attitude against “Gertrude Stein in Critical French Eyes” in which an anonymous critic exemplifies a negative attitude towards the novel’s prose. He characterizes the novel’s language as a regression of literary progress, whereas Stein maintains the novel’s language transitions from past literature to future types of writing. This further reveals how the novel does not privilege a particular time while delivering literature for Stein’s present audience. Also, I argue the change from the conventional prose in the initial passage to the experimental prose does not negate past forms of narration because the content in the later parts of the novel responds to the themes the initial passage puts forth.

This interpretation of the composition as depicting, rather than negotiating culture, can supplement contemporary criticism that argues Stein’s composition represents specific aspects of early twentieth century America. Barrett Watten likens the process of composition to the Ford automobile assembly line: “Organization, in Ford’s development of the assembly line, is not a

matter of top-down hierarchy but an example of American ‘open’ form...American identity for Stein is inductive, paratactic, and truly modern.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Jennifer Ashton attributes Stein’s radical prose in this novel as marking the downfall of the British Empire to the rise of America in the twentieth century. To paraphrase Ashton, the “nineteenth century phrase,” though of few words, was able to stake its claim on many meaning and implications in the same way the British Empire was able to stake its claim on many territories. However, to Stein, like the “twentieth century paragraph,” America was large and expanding, and isolated and contained: not allowing itself to become involved in other countries’ affairs.<sup>18</sup> I further these critics’ arguments through the way I explicitly identify Stein’s composition as representing not only the cultural artifacts of her present but also the present itself.

Stein’s writing enters the Modernist era that attempts to “Make it new!”<sup>19</sup> “It” referred to the old, specifically, Chinese poetry that Pound translated into English to make new. Like Pound’s work, *The Making of Americans* presents the past in the context of the present. However, the novel offers a “making,” a work which conveys that becoming new is a process rather than a single act. The title of the novel projects “new” is a relative term because the “new” continuously becomes old. Thus, the novel also contemplates the continuous nature of present becoming past, another way repetition manifests in the novel. Moreover, each generation’s

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<sup>17</sup> Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 125. This is the only instance I cite *The Constructivist Moment*. All other instances of Watten refer to the article “An Epic of Subjectivation.”

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Ashton, “Gertrude Stein for Anyone,” *ELH* 64 (1997): 290. The terms “19<sup>th</sup> century phrase” and “20<sup>th</sup> century paragraph” are Stein’s from “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans”; “But if she appears to identify the decline of British writing with the decline of the British Empire, she does not identify the rise of American literature with the beginnings (in, say, the Philippines or Hawaii) of a new American empire” (Ashton 290).

<sup>19</sup> Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1934).

tendency towards rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition remain, emphasizing how inheritance continuously occurs even when the novel is “making” “it new.”

## Chapter 1 - The “Hypothetical Epigraph”:

“Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground through his own orchard. ‘Stop!’ cried the groaning old man at last, ‘Stop! I did not drag my father beyond this tree!’” (3)

In “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans,” Stein describes how the experimental prose in *The Making of Americans* is of the “twentieth century,” emphasizing how she intended that the novel represent its present time.<sup>1</sup> Yet in its initial passage (quoted above), she seems to include vestiges of the past through conventional composition as well as the way she indicates it “Once” happened. This chapter argues the novel uses its initial passage simultaneously as an epigraph and a hypothesis to transform themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition from the way they appear in the initial passage while they remain relevant to the novel, revealing how the form facilitates a way the present maintains a relationship with the past. Moreover, Stein innovates conventional ways to engage in science and literature, also a way the novel’s form includes the past in its present pursuit of knowledge.

Prior to writing literature, Stein studied to be a psychologist. When she attended Radcliffe College as an undergraduate, William James was one of her professors and the leading figure who transformed the field of Epistemology to what we know today as Psychology through emphasizing the scientific method and use of empirical evidence to assert claims about human behavior. She went on to attend the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine where she further pursued her interest in Psychology, but dropped out in her final semester. During this period of her life, Stein collaborated with other psychologists like Leon Solomons to conduct experiments that examined human behavior in the laboratory. Though Stein abandoned a career as a psychologist, her interest in studying human behavior remained. For instance, the personal notebooks she kept while drafting this novel contain numerous observations of people she

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Stein, “The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans” in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 158.

encountered. This time in Stein's life can contribute to understanding how she came to include the scientific method and experiment in the novel.

I begin with offering ways the experimental part of the novel demonstrates its experiment involves both science and literature. This interdisciplinary method innovates conventional methods of inquiry, which exhibits how the novel pursues a new way of thinking while preserving evidence of the old. Examining Stein's descriptions of character types in her studies illuminates the novel's scientific aim as well as how the novel, as fiction, departs from pure science. Her article "Cultivated Motor Automatism" exemplifies scientific description that the novel seems to pursue: "Type I...mostly of girls who are found naturally in literature courses and men who are going in for law...is nervous, high-strung very imaginative, has the capacity to be easily roused and intensely interested" and continues in this fashion of enumerating and narrowing traits that define this category of what "Type I" people "are" (297).<sup>2</sup> The novel identifies characters with traits in a similar fashion but digresses and reconsiders more frequently. For instance, it begins describing David Hersland as "being one beginning being living," the narrator's trail of thoughts leads to "old ones" with "angry feeling in them" (755). The narrator proceeds to spend the next 11 or so pages describing the varying conditions of this angry feeling: "certainly," "sometimes," "liking," "changing," in "some," "mostly," "David," (755).<sup>3</sup> Stein as a scientist presents the Type I category with more definite sense, whereas Stein the writer clearly ruminates and renegotiates who fits and how in this category of individuals with "angry feeling." This demonstrates how fiction provides Stein freedom to express speculative tangents while conducting a scientific investigation.

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<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism; A Study of Character in its relation to Attention," *Psychological Review*, 5 (1898): 297.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for longer quote.

The novel also departs from pure science through the way the narrator identifies with her subjects. For instance, before the narrator begins describing David and Alfred Hersland through the experimental prose, she indicates how “the youngest David who was always searching to decide in him and no one could ever understand him...[Alfred] had some of it inside him...We all are the same all through us, we never have it to be free inside us” (Stein 47). She demonstrates her role as an observer through the way she steps back to describe Alfred and David. However, she equates herself to them, transgressing the observer role. Ruddick maintains “Stein knowingly undermines her position as a detached theorist of character...Increasingly she allows herself to over-identify with her characters...her descriptions are coming from her immediate fantasies rather than from hard findings” (130). This frames the narrator’s identification with the characters as her intentional breach of scientific protocol.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the narrator challenges the aim of science to remain objective. Chodat provides another perspective on this subjectivity: “Her project, we might say, is less about an intentional object in the world, less about some entity or the state of affairs...than about an intentional object in Stein’s mind” (584).<sup>5</sup> The narrator identifies with the subjects precisely because she can. Because it originates from her mind, she can describe her characters any way she wants to without compromising the reality of the object, as she might in a scientific study with real participants.

At the same time, the text does maintain its scientific aims in literature through consistently attempting to understand human behavior, which emphasizes how this instance of fiction maintains rooted in a real question. A novel such as Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*

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<sup>4</sup> Ruddick does not distinguish between the narrator and Stein the author and uses “Stein” to designate the narrator. “Narrator” in place of “Stein” reflects my interpretation of this difference.

<sup>5</sup> In the next sentence I distinguish Stein’s ‘intent’ for her fiction from what the narrator demonstrates in the text, though the former influences to the latter.

communicates traits through the way a character's behavior implies them. Miss Havisham desires revenge on all men because she was jilted on her wedding day. She instills hatred for men in her ward Estella and encourages Estella to break Pip's heart.<sup>6</sup> But Stein's novel would explicitly communicate that Miss Havisham is angry and emotionally damaged. In his writings about the experimental novel, Emile Zola describes how: "It is scientific investigation, it is experimental reasoning, which combats one by one the hypothesis of the idealists, and which replaces the purely imaginary novels by novels of observation and experiment." Zola reveals how the narrator's straightforward, methodical rumination serves a higher purpose of engaging in this real pursuit of knowledge, even if the plot is fiction. This combination of scientific and literary techniques demonstrates how the novel's interdisciplinary method transforms and remains engaged with past scientific and literary forms of thinking; making it new does not necessarily destroy the old.

I have described the novel's engagement with scientific and literary elements to establish the interdisciplinary nature of the novel's experiment. On this note, I identify the initial passage as a "hypothetical epigraph" to emphasize the roles the scientific method and literary form play in introducing this experiment. In this sense, the initial passage acts as a point of reference that influences and is transformed by the novel, even as each part seems separate. Most of the novel's characters connect to either the Herslands or Dehnings. The only exception is the initial passage's unnamed son and father that never reappear throughout the rest of the novel, seeming to bear no relation to either family. In the same way the son's dragging suggests his desire to separate from his father's "sins," the novel's distance from these initial characters can suggest it departs from its beginning (Stein 3). In the same way, Barrett Watten argues this difference

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997).



implies the novel rebels against its beginning: “Stein’s opening gambit in *The Making of Americans* is to offer a paradigm for the narration of the making of Americans that ironically suggests its own negation, an overturning that will be necessary so that its initial assumptions may be overcome” (96). In this sense, the initial passage actually negates the son’s repetition of his father through the way he drags his father farther. This frees the novel from the chain of repetition the initial passage presents, allowing the novel to rebel against its beginning. I define the initial passage as a hypothetical epigraph to emphasize that even as the novel imperfectly represents the initial passage’s themes, it repeats the initial passage’s law that each generation *will* repeat the actions of its predecessors even when its social settings change. *The Making of Americans*’s development as literature and a scientific experiment requires it to continuously refer back to and thus repeat its beginning. Zola describes the aim of the experimental novel is: “to possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the machinery of his intellectual and sensory manifestations under the influences of heredity and environment...then finally to exhibit man in living in social conditions produced by himself” (20-1). This speaks to the epigraph of this thesis in which Stein asserts “heredity” is the curse that links generations. The initial passage presents the rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition that could be “inherent” to man through paradigm characters; the experimental portion of *The Making of Americans* attempts to demonstrate how the characters inherit these tendencies and how the social setting presents them through different contexts. To name a few examples of the way the initial passage’s themes manifest in the later novel, Julia Dehning enjoys debating with her father, the Hersland children are embarrassed by their father, and the narrator expresses awareness that the novel’s narration differs from convention. Each of these scenarios demonstrates ways in which members of the younger generation appear to rebel against their

parents, and actually the younger individuals merely express a different opinion from their elders: Julia attempts to follow the contemporary trend of feminism, the Hersland children seek a different way to behave, and the narrator attempts to discover a new way to describe her surroundings. Furthermore, all of these scenarios hint at the way the elder generation believed they rebelled against their parents, emphasizing how the novel continues the notion that rebellion repeats among generations.

I will now focus on defining the literary side of the ‘hypothetical epigraph.’ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the epigraph as: 3. A short quotation or pithy sentence placed at the commencement of a work, a chapter, etc. to indicate the leading idea or sentiment; a motto.<sup>7</sup> Textually, the first passage of this novel is not set apart in the typical fashion of presenting an epigraph: it is not isolated on a separate page, an especially large space, or a different font setting. I argue the content of the initial passage demonstrates its qualities as an epigraph through the way its disparate characters and conventional composition style sets it apart from the experimental text. Also, it demonstrates a short sentiment or motto in the two sentences that present a relationship between rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition between a father and son.

A dictionary definition of an epigraph only allows us to recognize one as it appears. To fully explore how an epigraph informs its text and to provide further framework for my reading, I now briefly present critical interpretations of epigraphs to understand a few examples of how

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<sup>7</sup> “Epigraph, n,” Def. 3, *OED Online* (November 2010. Oxford University Press. 19 Jan. 2011), <<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/63381?rskey=Gy2RFI&result=1&isAdvanced=false#>>.

they can inform the reader about the main text.<sup>8</sup> Though George Eliot wrote during Victorian England, the era before this novel's time, the way she uses epigraphs in her novels can illuminate Stein's use. Higdon claims: "The numerous quotations, particularly the epigraphs, in [George Eliot's] novels suggest that her reading played a major role in her creative process and their presence provokes inquiry into matters of form, effect, and intention."<sup>9</sup> A passage from a different context allows the text to reflect on the way it accompanies a specific historical and theoretical position. It would be impossible to recreate the historical conditions in this precise way Higdon proposes in his analysis of Eliot's epigraphs because the initial passage originated as an anecdote written by Stein during her undergraduate years at Radcliffe as part of her daily writing exercises. Moreover, the passage resists historical interpretation through the way it identifies its past in a vague way: we cannot identify when "Once" precisely occurred. Instead, epigraph in *The Making of Americans* can signal that the novel includes a narrative from another historical context. The novel's attempt to include the past, even as it cannot precisely relate to its past reveals a way the present pursues new knowledge without overturning the past.

Earlier drafts of the novel also suggest the initial passage can be interpreted as this type of epigraph: a narrative of the past within this novel about the present. Stein initially used the phrase "There was a story," but she crossed this out and replaced it with "Once," the phrasing that appeared in the final published draft (3).<sup>10</sup> "There was a story" uses a past verb tense to

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<sup>8</sup> I do not limit the interpretation of the epigraph to these two examples, nor do I claim that the possible interpretations of the epigraph in the novel are directly caused by or intended to maintain a dialogue with Eliot or Hemingway's uses. I use these examples to illuminate my own interpretation of the epigraph in lieu of a specific text that deals with epigraphs.

<sup>9</sup> David Leon Higdon, "George Eliot and the Art of the Epigraph," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 25 (1970): 127.

<sup>10</sup> Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans*, Ms, 1906, (Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), 1.

convey how the initial passage has already happened. But “Once” quantitatively orients the event in the past. The former grammatically contrasts with the main narrative of ‘making’ in the present that the title of the novel promises. Also the fact that it is a “story” explicitly draws out the initial passage’s potential as a narrative of the past juxtaposed against the novel. Though Stein’s move from the explicit mention of “story” suggests Stein discards this idea, Stein’s transition to brevity actually emphasizes the novel’s engagement with past styles of composition. According to Jennifer Ashton, the nineteenth century phrase is Stein’s metaphor for how she views the British Empire. Though the British inhabited a small landmass, they managed to stake claim on large amounts of land in the same way a nineteenth century phrase, though compact, stakes claim on many meanings and implications (290). “Once” implies the “story”; conversely, the earlier draft explicitly states an implication of “Once.” Stein’s move to employ implicit diction suggests how the composition of this passage engages with the past in this novel.

My argument that the initial passage juxtaposes a narrative of the past in the novel connects the characters of those narratives as well. For one, this reconciles the seeming disconnect between the Herslands and Dehnings and the initial passage’s unnamed father and son. Also, it connects the novel’s characters to the characters of the original Oedipal narrative, *Oedipus Rex*. Stein’s assertion that the novel is “the outcome...of the ancient Greek curse” suggests the initial passage’s connection to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*.<sup>11</sup> Through reconstructing the patricide as a paradigm, Stein removes it from its original cultural context in the ancient Greek world and reconstructs a template with themes that remain relevant within the novel as well as to the Oedipal narrative. I make reference to Zola’s argument that the novel experiments

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<sup>11</sup> Critics have also asserted the novel’s connection to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the connection to *Oedipus Rex* because my thesis frames the novel as Stein’s reinterpretation of a father-son power struggle.

with whether characters inherit these tendencies to enact rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition and because the results provide such evidence, the present characters are connected to the past one in this novel.

Stein's use of nineteenth century composition separates the initial passage from the experimental prose of the novel, nonetheless. This demonstrates how the novel depicts the way one might perceive the abruptness of temporal change. Furthermore, this emphasizes how the novel relies on the initial passage's themes to maintain its connection to the past. Lisa Ruddick identifies this passage as an epigraph as well through distinguishing the inconsistent composition styles between the beginning and the later experimental text, "like remnants of an early draft, neither well integrated into the text nor particularly coherent in themselves." She suggests the purpose of negating the rebellion is to put forth "a form of free association that exposes the conflicting pressures Stein felt as she began to put her novel together" (58). These conflicting pressures are the author's intent to "announce her own independence of paternal figures, notably her father, her brother Leo, and her mentor William James" and "her desire to stay in the fold" (58-9). Through the way I interpret the initial passage as asserting the presence of the past in the novel, the inconsistency can be seen as a metaphor for the development and relationship between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the novel. Ruddick's reading can demonstrate how the text's juxtaposition of the past and present represents how one might perceive dissonance between these different temporalities. As Stein puts forth in "Composition as Explanation": "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything."<sup>12</sup> Even as people's actions seem to change among different times, the actions actually remain the same: the repetition of rebellion, pursuit of

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<sup>12</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation," in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 513.

knowledge, and repetition maintains the connection between temporalities, despite “how” the different characters or type of composition in the novel express it. Likewise, according to Robert Chodat, “Clear teleologies, the kinds that link past to present or present to future, betray a naïve (and for Stein, patriarchal) conception of experience.”<sup>13</sup> Even as the novel maintains its connection to the past, it portrays the present from the perspective of an individual currently experiencing the present and thus the novel can *seem* to detach from its past. This corresponds with the way the initial passage opens with “Once,” suggesting a son’s act of rebellion has only happened in this one instance but later reveals how the father dragged his father as a youth as well. Also, the novel describes how David Hersland as a youth (the father, not the son) leaves his parents and siblings to settle in Gossols, California. As he ages and his children mature, his children parallel his desire to escape from his elders through their embarrassment of his “irritating” behavior (124). Even as the younger generation believes they are different from the older generation, the novel questions whether the younger generation is truly different from the past because they repeat the rebellion their elders once performed.

An epigraph can also be understood through the way the novel’s text repeats an introductory sentiment, as demonstrated in Ernest Hemingway’s novel *The Sun also Rises*.<sup>14</sup> One half of the epigraph originated as a casual anecdote from Gertrude Stein in which she overheard an older mechanic berate his apprentice’s poor work: “You are all a lost generation.”<sup>15</sup> The other half is the optimistic passage from Ecclesiastes that inspired the novel’s title *The Sun also*

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Chodat, “Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein,” *Modernism/modernity* 12 (2005): 586.

<sup>14</sup> Hemingway and Stein are both considered members of the “Lost Generation” group of American expatriate writers who lived in Europe post-WWI. Hemingway considered Stein his mentor and he typed *The Making of Americans*.

<sup>15</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, (New York: Scribner, 2006), 7.

*Rises*.<sup>16</sup> Fulton points out how this epigraph can demonstrate a formal relationship that the novel's structure mimics: "The novel begins with a two-part epigraph at odds with itself. Hemingway's plot also turns on contradictory notions. In this story that he considered a tragedy, everyone celebrates, but no one finds true happiness."<sup>17</sup> In the same way Hemingway's novel repeats the epigraph's relationship of contradiction, the characters of *The Making of Americans* repeat the way the son in the initial passage seems to rebel against his father to pursue another path of knowledge.

The initial passage condenses this within a few sentences, presenting the relationship between rebellion, repetition, and pursuit of knowledge, which I summarized in the Introduction. The narrator proceeds to claim "we all" demonstrate it (3). This, along with the way the unnamed son and father seem to be paradigms can prompt us to consider that the novel imitates its epigraph in the same way an experiment carries out a hypothesis. The initial passage presents a theory about how the individual themes can relate to one another, which the novel tests in a scientific experiment that explores how the themes appear in the multiple social settings and relationships. For instance, we can analyze Julia Dehning's struggle against her father to marry the cultured Alfred Hersland as a way the themes from the initial passage repeats. The novel even considers what happens when a father is absent from the setting, like in the Shilling family. The Oedipal drama occurs between siblings: the thin sister secretly desires to kill her fat sister.

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<sup>16</sup> Full quotation as it appears in the epigraph: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever... The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose... The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to its circuits... All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come thither they return again" (Hemingway 7).

<sup>17</sup> Lorie Watkins Fulton, "Reading around Jake's Narration: Brett Ashley and *The Sun Also Rises*," *The Hemingway Review* 24 (2004): 61.

But the violence *is* between siblings and never manifests. These variations of the initial passage reflect a way sentiment of the father-son relationship in the initial passage manifests in the novel.

This idea that the novel is an experiment is not restricted to my interpretation of the experiment setup by the scientific method. I would like to also acknowledge how critics have also considered it an experiment in composition and how my thesis builds off their interpretations. Chodat offers that “Given the prestige of empirical science in our culture, it is not surprising that ontological justifications for experimental art are sometimes associated with the sorts of investigations performed in the laboratory” (582). In the same way empirical work involves observing and recording sensory experiences, Chodat suggests Stein’s composition engages in a similar process with writing, only Stein records her thoughts like sensory observations. Stein’s awareness of her thoughts as she attempts to describe the characters causes her to explicitly monitor her thoughts throughout the novel. For instance, she is “beginning again and again,” returning to her original observations and reevaluating a better way to understand them (304). Ulla Dydo asserts this rhetoric “becomes Stein’s principal mode of structuring discourse...fresh aim to find the language that is exactly consonant with her thought...finally reaches finished formulations in the struggle of winning sentences.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the novel loses its focus on the characters and becomes a way to experiment with new forms of composition. Steven Meyer points out how Stein’s writings, as literature transform science: “Stein exchanged James’s more obviously scientific brand of ecstatic science for its poetic counterpart, and in the process transformed the object as well as the method of her inquiry.”<sup>19</sup> The “ecstatic” empiricism manifests through the narrator’s eagerness as she continuously offers a

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<sup>18</sup> Gertrude Stein, *A Stein Reader*, Ed Ulla E. Dydo (Northwestern U P: Evanston, 1993), 21.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 2001), 48-9.



variety of descriptions about who possesses “angry feeling” (Stein 755). Again, this suggests Stein’s shifts from science to experiment with the poetic aspects of description. I argue “beginning again and again” can also designate points during the experiment where the narrator remembers the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition from the initial passage, returning to the hypothesis as she observes the Herslands and Dehnings. Chodat points out: “The act of remembering and perception of resemblances are intertwined...to place any single given object within a wider class of objects requires that the observer ‘remember’ a range of other objects not necessarily before him or her” (585). Repetition in the diction of “beginning again and again” mimics the repetition of the initial passage in the narrator’s mind while she attempts to describe the Herslands and Dehnings: this passage is not just about composition. This demonstrates how the experiment in composition can be a way the novel emphasizes its formal engagement with the past. Again, the narrator identifies the initial passage as the point it continuously returns. Even as the novel attempts to remake composition, it remains connected to the older style in the initial passage. I describe the novel’s relationship to composition further in Chapter 3.

The novel as a social experiment transforms the initial passage’s themes within a social setting in a way that can still be interpreted as repetition. Bakhtin conveys how the novel re-presents the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition through the social contexts and sources of culture. “The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions.”<sup>20</sup> My

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<sup>20</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Ed. Michael Holquist (U of Texas P: Austin, 1981), 263. The English translation of *raznorecie* is heteroglossia.

analysis of a rebellious relationship (Julia's desire to marry Alfred Hersland and her struggle with her father to achieve this) will be carried out in Chapter 2 with much greater detail.

However, I want to briefly point out that the dialogues of feminism and the American woman European man genre that influence Julia's rebellion act as the 'language' through which the narrator expresses the theme of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition. No evidence indicates these cultural influences incite the son's rebellion against his father, which emphasizes how the novel projects the themes through the language of each character's culture. The social setting lessens level of external hostility between the younger and older generations; as I point out later, Julia and her father engage in benign squabbles. Even as the themes mutate under the social conditions of the novel, just the fact they continuously reappear seems to confirm some truth about the initial passage that rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition appear in relationships among all generations. Zola expresses how "Man is not alone; he lives in society, in a social condition; and consequently, for us novelists, this social condition unceasingly modifies the phenomena," and it seems Stein takes this notion into account as she demonstrates specific ways the initial passage repeats in the novel (20). The initial passage features just the paradigm father, son, and orchard. The novel's plot brings in contemporary influences such as feminism, which reveals a real influence on human behavior like how Julia's reasons for rebelling are actually tied to history.

Even as the novel explores the initial passage's rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition in a contemporary setting, seeming to make these themes new, the novel and themes become old when we also take into account *The Making of Americans's* association of experience with older people. Bakhtin describes how the novel projects a tone of the present

because it is “determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future).”<sup>21</sup> The plot of a novel provides a setting in which the characters and reader can directly gather information about and understand the novel. Likewise, Stein’s narrator identifies how the novel portion of *The Making of Americans* provides her direct contact with the actions, unlike the “beginning” of the book:

Mostly in the beginning as I was saying I heard repeating, I was learning, thinking, talking, living not really anything I was really knowing. Slowly I came to be living, loving thinking, feeling, hearing everyone repeating, beginning again and again so as to feel all changing, remembering all the ways one can come to be mistaken. (304)

In the “beginning” of the novel, the narrator’s awareness of the actions people “repeat” extends to only to “knowing.” The passage describes how the narrator “heard” the actions, suggesting someone taught or told her. Similarly, the initial passage informs the reader of the way rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition play into a father-son relationship. As the novel progresses, we come to experience firsthand how these themes can emerge in parent-child relationships in a variety of ways. Likewise, the narrator describes how she “came to be” the actions, which emphasizes how her direct experiences within the novel’s social context transforms her previous understanding. This passage can also remind us this transformation actually situates her experience as of the past: “These men [her kindred] did not supply for her the training and experience that helps to clear the way for an impetuous woman through a world of passions” (Stein 19). Though experience can connote the present “living, loving thinking, feeling, hearing everyone repeating,” the older men’s “experience” reminds us that once we have experience, it

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<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination*, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Ed. Michael Holquist, (U of Texas P: Austin, 1981), 15.

inhabits the past. This dual interpretation of experience in the novel emphasizes the way the novel's experiment actually calls attention to how the present will eventually come to be the past. In the same way, the novel describes Julia's intellectual debates with her father and the way ideas that were new during his youth are now old. Thus the effort to create something new actually reproduces more old ideas.

Through this reading of the initial passage as a "hypothetical epigraph," I argue the initial passage remains relevant to the novel. In this sense, the novel's form reflects how even as *The Making of Americans* attempts to understand the present, it inherently includes its past in its pursuit. The initial passage offers a theory about the father-son relationship that the novel undertakes to explore within multiple frameworks and thus the novel builds off its beginning. For one, the narrator observes other father-son relationships, father-daughter relationships, and families that lack a father to understand how the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge and repetition play out in other social settings. Also, the repetition of the composition augments the arguments from the initial passage. Still, even as the narrator expresses the themes differently from the initial passage, they do repeat in the novel. The novel provides evidence to support the initial passage's claim that the novel is about repetition through the variety of ways the initial passage repeats in the novel. Moreover, this interdisciplinary approach I undertake can suggest the novel transforms conventional scientific and literary methods of thinking while preserving the basic structure. Science adds an element of reality to fiction, while fiction allows the novel to capture *how* it comes to its conclusions.

## Chapter 2: Rebellion and the American Woman

This chapter explores how the experimental nature of the novel both repeats and transforms the themes of the “hypothetical epigraph” I discussed in the previous chapter. Julia Dehning desires to marry Alfred Hersland. Her father, Henry Dehning is suspicious of Alfred’s intentions, and rightly so: Alfred marries her to gain access to her father’s money. However, Julia refuses to accept her father’s advice and argues with him until he agrees to allow the marriage. The novel’s allusions to the feminist movement situate the conflict in a specific time in history, yet I maintain situating rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition within this social setting do not erase the connection the plot has to the initial passage. In particular, the narrator describes Julia’s rebellion as progress in space in the same way dragging involves movement through space: Julia “was always winning but it was slow progress like that in very steep and slippery climbing. For every forward movement of three feet she always slipped back two, sometimes three and often four and five and six and seven” (27). This passage links the scenario back to the initial passage. Though I describe later how the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition undergo cultural transformation through Julia’s issues, I foreground here that the novel reflects back to its beginnings to emphasize how the past remains relevant to the novel’s present.

I now turn to examine how the novel digresses from the initial passage through presenting Julia’s rebellion within contemporary culture. Though Stein’s spatial vocabulary links the son and Julia, the son continuously pulls his father forward, whereas Julia allows herself to slip backwards, which connects to the way Julia waits for her father’s permission before marrying Alfred. This element of the plot seems strange because Stein writes the novel around a

moment of prominent public concern with women's suffrage movements.<sup>1</sup> The novel does seem to include the feminist movement in its social world through "the way [Julia] had of believing that she knew more than her mother" (18). Julia surpasses her mother's intellectual knowledge, which demonstrates the way the feminist movement enabled contemporary women to excel in areas other than household work, unlike the women of their past. But even as Julia exhibits feminist tendencies, she remains obligated to honor her father's authority even though the feminist movement asserted a woman's independence from patriarchal influence. Jessica Benjamin offers an interpretation of why a woman would do this in spite of the authority society now allows her: "No matter what theory you read, the father is always the way into the world. In some contemporary delivery rooms, the father is literally encouraged to cut the umbilical cord."

<sup>2</sup> The father's approval still signifies social and legal acceptance because of the way Julia's father was the dominant parent, emphasizing how the history of gender inequality influences how Julia gains authority. The father-son relationship from the initial passage cannot capture this twist because it lacks this issue of gender. Julia hesitates because she remains bound to the laws of repetition in the novel, and thus looks to her father to legitimize her social decision. Ruddick recognizes, too, how Julia's relationship with her father differs from the father-son relationship in the initial passage: "a route past the conflicts of the other introductory sections, in which filial rage mixed unstably with feelings of devotion.... Now seemingly opposite feelings can merge in a way that seems psychologically coherent" (62). Again this other possibility can be seen as a variation of the initial passage through the way Julia needs to repeat her father's advice. I

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<sup>1</sup> Women gained suffrage in 1918 in Great Britain and 1920 in America.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, And the Problem of Domination*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 103.

interpret this as how the themes of rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition appear in relationships between members of different generations, even when the social setting changes.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many instances of fiction were published about a tale of an innocent American woman who, alone and confused in a foreign country, allows herself to be seduced by a European man.<sup>3</sup> Julia Dehning, “just now eighteen...showed in all its vigor, the self-satisfied crude domineering American girlhood that was strong inside her” and “a crude domineering virgin” is the innocent American woman (Stein 14-5, 18). Though Alfred Hersland is also an American, to Julia, he represents a European presence through the way his European knowledge and experience of “hill towns in Italy...Giorgione and Botticelli” appeals to her “very real desire, this longing for the wisdom of all culture, this that had been always strong in Julia” (Stein 22). These character descriptions suggest the novel presents a hybrid version of the genre through its setting in America, rather than Europe. Bakhtin describes in his essay “Epic and Novel” how “The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating them and re-accentuating them” (5), and likewise, Steven Meyer notes how Stein “queries various sources that remain implicit in her texts, making them over in her image” (xvi). In this novel, the American woman is no longer the lone, inept tourist and instead, exudes power, emphasizing how the hybrid genre brings feminine power into focus, especially through the way

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<sup>3</sup> My understanding about this genre draws from Sarah Wadsworth’s article “Innocence Abroad: Henry James and the Re-Invention of the American Woman,” *The Henry James Review* 22 (2001): 107-127. Also, Erich von Stroheim. *Foolish Wives*, Perf. Erich von Stroheim, Miss DuPont, Maude George. (Universal, 1922). Henry James, *Daisy Miller*, (London: M. Secker, 1915). Mary Murdoch Mason, *Mae Madden*, (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1876).

Julia becomes a participant in the exchange of commodities.<sup>4</sup> Mitrano omits mentioning this plot line has nothing to do with debating female authority and rather, focuses on how it promotes middle-class values over culture: “In her inability to tell the effect of freedom from poverty and degradation, the narrator proves a good student of Julia’s father, a man who likes to complain about the corruption of culture and modernity... dangers to the advancement of his daughter in the walks of life” (35). Mitrano’s interpretation of the father’s anxiety to defend his economic lifestyle offers a way to read how his social role as a father produces his anxiety to protect his daughter. In particular, Stein also reminds us Julia is still a “virgin” to deception, in contrast with the father’s social experience. In this sense, the setting of the hybrid genre provides a way for the father to influence and protect his daughter through the way he is near enough to observe the situation and warn her against Alfred. The hybrid genre also provides another way to understand the rebellion, pursuit of knowledge, and repetition from the initial passage. Julia

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<sup>4</sup>Also, the hybrid genre allows Julia authority to associate with Alfred: unlike the convention of the genre, she is not alone in a foreign country, and thus does not depend on the European man as a companion. In some stories, the European man pursued the American woman for his amusement, but in others, he seduced her to steal her money. The latter case demonstrates how the American woman can be seen as a European commodity. However, the narrator points out Julia, too, has ulterior motives to marry Alfred, similar to the way she desires his European knowledge: “she grew more firm in her resolve for that free wide and cultured life to which for her young Hersland had the key” (Stein 28). Alfred as Julia’s “key” to her desires suggests Julia mutually envisions her marriage to Alfred as a commodity through which she gains a “cultured life.” Even as Julia discovers Alfred’s economic desires before the wedding, Julia remains determined to marry him because of “the new life she had before her” (Stein 33). In this sense, her role as a victim of Alfred’s deception is a minor consequence of this larger opportunity to wield economic authority. Erika Rappaport describes London court cases from the early twentieth century in which judges ruled the wife, not the husband was primarily responsible for her shopping debts: “In settling their debts they were debating the meaning of *family*, *property*, *consumption*, as well as the extent of wives’ legal ‘agency,’ at a moment when these concepts were being disputed and dramatically reshaped.” In the same way, Julia does not emerge from the deception without benefits, namely, her “cultured life” as well as her power to pursue or reject it. This demonstrates how the novel’s restructuring of the genre allows the female to have the opportunity to pursue her desires; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 49.



refuses to listen to her father, seeming to rebel against him. But actually, she is attracted to Alfred's knowledge of culture, and thus what seems to be rebellion is pursuit of knowledge. Repetition emerges when the novel reveals how Julia depends on using her father's advice. Thus she repeats patriarchal knowledge to avoid the deception. In this sense, the hybrid genre provides a way for the novel to repeat the initial passage while supplying a social setting that differs from the initial passage.

The hybrid genre also suggests ways in which Julia's marriage results in her downfall, again, emphasizing how she relies on her father. Contemporary criticism about the American woman-European man genre framed the American woman who associated with such a European man as a fool. Though the novel acknowledges a woman's desire to practice authority, the criticism about inexperience women suggests how she can practice it more wisely through learning how from her father. *Foolish Wives*, a film produced roughly around the time of the novel, features a tale about an American woman who travels to Europe and is seduced by a European man.<sup>5</sup> This review of the film conveys how the media actually shrouds the character of this deceptive European man, making it impossible for an American to identify him without previous firsthand experience:

“Why will they be such fools,” is the frequent query, when the marriage and subsequent divorce of some American woman to a titled roué is chronicled in the sensational society columns; but the stay-at home folk cannot realize the

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<sup>5</sup> *Foolish Wives* is a film about a married American woman who travels to France with her husband and falls in love with a Russian man who pretends to be a count to steal money from wealthy American women. However, as she is about to give him the money, they are caught in a fire. Ultimately the husband forces the false count to leave the country and forgives his wife.

cleverness and finesse with which these adventurers carry on their campaigns of conquest.<sup>6</sup>

The writer defends the fallen American woman against the criticism of the “stay-at-home folk.” It was easy for anyone to recognize the villain when the columns framed him at a distance. However, the American becomes a “fool” when encountering European “cleverness and finesse.” These “stay-at-home folk” engage in a false process of recognition, identifying the European seducer through these columns, rather than through their ability to parse through the European “cleverness and finesse.” In this sense, fiction and films portraying this scenario not only portray a fictional plot: the European male also becomes fiction, as he is unable to seduce the American consumer as he could in reality. This speaks to the novel’s portrayal of the way experience provides authority, which as I suggested in the previous chapter comes with the elder generation.

Similarly, Julia has a false sense of confidence in her ability to identify the European man because of the way she has grown accustomed to the way the media portrays him. However, the novel suggests her father’s social experience enables him to recognize and advise Julia against the deceptive European male:

She knew it, there were the men one could read of in the books and hear of in the scandal of the daily news. But never could such things be true of men of her own world....No, this was a thought that could not come to her to really think, and so for her the warnings of her father carried no real truth. (30)

“[Julia’s] own world” and this other world portrayed by the media are separate because this situation does not normally take place in a small town like Bridgeport, Connecticut. Though the

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<sup>6</sup> “Foolish Wives Points a Moral,” *Olympia Record*, published as *Olympia Daily Recorder* ([Olympia, WA] 11 May 1922), 5.

novel changes the setting to allow the father to protect his daughter, it distorts Julia's ability to distinguish a deceptive man. Julia, then, depends on her father, as he is the only individual who can parse through Alfred's deception.

The novel was published when the feminist movement, as I will demonstrate through Virginia Woolf's writings, considered masculine influence as the obstacle to a woman's ability to practice social authority. Thus it seems to work against feminism because it advocates the father's influence on Julia. I argue the novel resists the contemporary social definition of feminism because it remains committed to portraying repetition, which in this case, manifests as a repetition of the father's power. Virginia Woolf offers an example of anti-patriarchal sentiment: "The old system which condemned her to squint askance at things through the eyes or through the interests of husband or brother, has given place to the direct and practical interests of one who must act for herself, and not merely influence the acts of others."<sup>7</sup> A woman learns to act on her own behalf through refusing the "influence" of her male family members, whereas the novel offers an opposite remedy through the father's role as Julia's protector. Likewise, Janice Doane argues this plot actually is Stein's attempt to capture anti-feminist sentiment in society and that Stein herself does not advocate the father's influence: it "simply confirm[s] the woman's oppressed place in the patriarchal order...where the woman's truth is to be repressed or acknowledged as an 'illusion' or mistake."<sup>8</sup> My interpretation offers Julia's "mistake" lies in disrupting the novel's pattern of repetition, which happens in spite of contemporary social norms. This can suggest it is arbitrary that patriarchal order must be repeated, since the novel is so tied to the idea of repetition. The novel does not deny that a woman could act on her own

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Women and Writing*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Janice L. Doane, *Silence and Narrative: The Early Novels of Gertrude Stein*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 87.

behalf but that she does so through continuing the past, in this case, her father's authority. Its practical solution is for Julia to listen to her father's advice.

Furthermore, the novel distinguishes between intellectual education and social education, which acknowledges Julia's capabilities and maintains that her father can assist her in practicing her authority. For instance, the relationship between Julia and her father exhibits the way they respect one another as equals, rather than competitors:

He liked to hear her... the new illusions and the theories and new movements that the spirit of her generation had taught to her... And he laughed at her... and he abused them... but always it amused the father to have his bright quick daughter explain all these new ways to him. (18)

Though Henry Dehning maintains the beliefs developed by and during the height of his generation, he remains open to his daughter's ideas. The "hear[ing]" and "laugh[ter]" demonstrate how father and daughter mutually participate as equals in the exchange. In this sense, the novel veers from conveying that masculine power in itself is more powerful. The father's social power derives from his experience, because history has allowed him such experience. For instance, George Tucker, a lawyer during this time, conveys men took advantage of a woman's attempt to exercise her new social authority and suggests how an individual with more experience in the social world can collaborate with her:

The common complaint of women, both single and married, that they are taken advantage of in business transactions, is often well grounded; and as a practical consideration, it may be said that this is a good reason why a woman should not

enter into commercial or business engagements without first consulting a competent lawyer.<sup>9</sup>

Though the passage from Tucker's lecture touches on women and business, his advice captures a historical truth that inexperienced women often fell to deception. The novel presents the father as having a similar role to Tucker's idea of a lawyer; an experienced male can provide unbiased advice to assist a woman just beginning to act on her behalf. Though the novel acknowledges a place for female agency in its social world, it maintains a female cannot simply learn to act on her own behalf, and rather, requires her father's social experience to teach her how to avoid deception. Likewise, in this passage, Stein suggests Julia's ability to recognize Alfred's deception depends on whether the elder males in her family teach her: "These men [her kindred] did not supply for her the training and experience that helps to clear the way for an impetuous woman through a world of passions, they only made a sane and moral back-ground on which she in her later life could learn to lean" (19). In this sense, males can seem to be superior to females because they provide the only "way" to navigate the "world of passions." Julia's ability to think independently cannot replace the male "training and experience" necessary for her to recognize Alfred's deception. The narrator characterizes the outside world in which this type of deception occurs as a "world of passions," conveying how it compels her to act on emotion, rather than solid experience that the men, like her father can provide. Again, this speaks to the novel's portrayal that the father's advice is to be repeated in Julia's life.

This father-daughter relationship between Julia Dehning and her father Henry Dehning allows us to understand a way the novel directly draws from the rebellion and repetition in the initial passage, and how the social setting transforms these themes. Julia seems to rebel against

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<sup>9</sup> George Tucker Fox, "Advising a Woman as to Her Legal Rights," *Modern American Law Lecture*, (Blackstone: Chicago, 1920), 6.

her father but consistently waits for his permission before she marries Alfred. Julia finds out her father is right about Alfred, reflecting how the younger generation depends on learning from the older generation. In light of Stein's contemporary feminism, these are conventional ways the novel portrays woman's rebellion against the patriarchy to gain social authority. The way Julia can gain social authority through her father modifies the convention. In this sense, not only do the initial passage's themes adapt to the novel's social setting but Stein creates a social setting to support the themes, emphasizing how the experiment takes place within fiction.

### Chapter 3: Composition and Critical Reception

“Sure, [Stein] said, as Pablo [Picasso] once remarked, when you make a thing, it is so complicated making it that it is bound to be ugly, but those that do it after you they don’t have to worry about making it and they can make it pretty, and so everybody can like it when the others make it.”<sup>1</sup>

In my analysis of the initial passage, I argued repetition of the rebellion across multiple generations of fathers and sons provides a model for how we might interpret the novel’s project: the past contributes to how we understand the present. For instance, though the narrator implies through “Once” that the dragging only occurred one time in the past, the passage negates it, revealing that it did not only occur “Once” because the father had dragged his own father as a youth. Rebellion actually confirms the relevance of the past within the present and fails to challenge the status quo. The first chapter examined the role of this initial passage as a ‘hypothetical epigraph.’ I argued the apparent disconnect between the characters and composition between the initial passage and experimental novel actually serves as a platform for the latter to scientifically apply to the former in a social, fictional setting: a true enactment of the label ‘experimental fiction.’ In the second chapter, I presented an example of a father-daughter relationship, Julia and Henry Dehning to demonstrate how the novel actually combines the cultural frameworks of feminism and European-American relations to frame Julia’s rebellion against her father as a product of feminist values and how the father, a symbol for past authority, emerges as the figure to teach his daughter about the deceitful society she enters. Even as the themes in the initial passage transform through the cultural setting of the novel, the fact is, they do repeat. This allows us to see how the novel’s beginnings remain relevant to its middle and end, in spite of the narrator’s focus on describing the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Stein, “The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,” in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 23.

Up to this point, I have argued the novel incorporates the past as a means to inform understanding of the present and relied on the novel as my primary source of inquiry. This chapter shifts to explore how Stein, through the novel and her writings about composition responds to negative initial reception. “Gertrude Stein in Critical French Eyes” was written in 1926, a year after the novel was published. Its author, an anonymous critic takes issue with what he considers Stein’s backward innovations to composition.<sup>2</sup> He frames the novel as a threat to generations of literary development and its seeming reconnection to the past challenges present forms of literature. The novel does not speak directly to this critic. As the epigraph of this chapter suggests, Stein was aware that experimental art entered this hostile environment, and the article is simply an example that provides a way for me to reenact this dialogue. I juxtapose the critic’s attitude about the past against Stein’s writings about experimental fiction and passages in the novel to emphasize how she envisions the present continuously reengages with the past as well as provides a transition to the future. Changes in visual surroundings dictate a writer’s need to change the composition style. Thus experimental composition does not aim to renegotiate a past literary form, but nevertheless, does. This chapter argues even as Stein mobilizes change to composition, the novel equally privileges the past, present, and future within its present context.

Like Picasso, Stein’s attempt to capture the present seemed “ugly” during the novel’s initial critical reception. “Gertrude Stein in Critical French Eyes” provides an example of a critic who marks the novel as ‘other’ to their conception of the literary world. Specifically, the article ends describing how: “Miss Stein remains to many literary persons what the hippopotamus was to the farmer, ‘no such animal’” (34). In the same way the farmer only recognizes animals profitable to his trade, “literary persons” (and implicitly this critic) only validate literature that

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<sup>2</sup> “Gertrude Stein in Critical French Eyes” in *Gertrude Stein Advanced: an Anthology of Criticism*, Ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1990).



further confirms their knowledge of good literature. Unlike a horse or cow, a hippopotamus would not be an animal that a typical twentieth century American farmer would use. This reveals how the critic elevates the reader's impression of his literary taste. The fallacy simultaneously reveals the critic's subjective judgment. Though a hippopotamus is unfamiliar, it is still *an animal*. Despite logic, the critic maintains the novel is not literature, which emphasizes how his anxiety draws from his resistance to reconsider his beliefs, rather than proof that *The Making of Americans* is not literature.

The narration of *The Making of Americans* enters meta-fictional moments that demonstrate its awareness that the novel enters this type of hostile reception. In this sense, the novel's status as other to the literary world stems from the audience, rather than its intent. Specifically, the character of the narrator identifies with the condition of "singularity," signaling her awareness that her "queer" narration isolates the novel from other forms of literature (Stein 47). Of course, "queer" acknowledges how experimental art seemed "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric."<sup>3</sup> Ruddick has argued "queer" simultaneously provides a platform for the author to assert her homosexuality (121). However, I emphasize another denotation of "queer": "of questionable character; suspicious dubious." In the same way Alfred and David Hersland cannot "be free inside themselves," the narrator cannot envision her words undergoing "machine making [ , it] does not turn out queer things like us" (Stein 47). Machine making resists the novel in the same way the social world resists Alfred and David Hersland. This inability for these larger social powers to accept these individuals results in singularity. In the same way, the novel threatens the critic's understanding of literature and the critic separates the novel from the literary world. The

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<sup>3</sup> "Queer, adj," Def. 1a, *OED Online* (November 2010. Oxford University Press. 6 Feb. 2011), <<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/156236?rskey=uUk8CU&result=2&isAdvanced=false#>>.

novel only *seems* strange because other writers have not yet produced similar texts. In this sense, the novel simply exists, and its identity depends on others, namely writers and critics.

I have argued what the composition is not, namely, rebellion against past forms of composition. Now, I turn to examine how Stein considers experimental composition. Stein's writings about experimental art can reveal how she envisions the project of her novel: composition can be an attempt to capture a perspective of the present, rather than renounce past forms of narration. These writings recognize critical reception largely influences the latter perspective. Though she wrote about several experimental artists, she distinguishes Picasso, the father of Cubism, among the others:<sup>4</sup>

Matisse and all the others saw the twentieth century with their eyes, but they saw the reality of the nineteenth century...Picasso was the only one in painting who saw the twentieth century with his eyes and saw its reality, and consequently his struggle was terrifying, terrifying for himself and others, because he had nothing to help him, the past did not help him, nor the present.<sup>5</sup>

Stein argues Picasso, unlike the other artists, portrays reality as he sees it, rather than attempts to structure his art as a response to “the reality of the nineteenth century.” In other words, Picasso does not create for the sake of furthering an aesthetic project that rejects the past; art becomes the medium through which he conveys his ideas. Without the past, he relies fully on his own “eyes” to interpret his surroundings to produce the art.<sup>6</sup> Thus, his work “terrifies” him because artists who attempt to reject the past still rely on something to structure their art. Though he desires to

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<sup>4</sup> She drafted the novel in Paris from 1906 to 1908 and maintained friendships with artists like Matisse, Picasso, and Cezanne whose works marked the beginnings of various Modern art movements like Post-impressionism, Cubism, and Fauvism.

<sup>5</sup> Gertrude Stein, *Gertrude Stein on Picasso*, Ed. Edward Burns (New York: Liveright, 1970), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Cubism was a 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde art movement that attempted to analyze a subject from multiple viewpoints within a two-dimensional surface.

include the past, Stein conveys how a pursuit of knowledge, by nature, does depart from previous forms knowledge in some way, and does not necessarily reject the past. In this chapter's epigraph, Stein envisions how once other artists begin to accept experimental art, pursuing it becomes collaborative, rather than a lone effort. In this sense, Picasso's "terr[or]" of being alone can also manifest during instances of hostile reception, in which a critic, such as Stein's critic relies on past forms of art to frame their assessments. Stein explains his art is merely a "[consequence]" of his commitment to depict what and how he perceives. Critical reception, rather than the artist's intent shapes the notion that the artist challenges past forms of art through their art. Regardless of how Picasso actually envisioned the role of his art, Stein frames experimental art in this passage as a vehicle for the artist's vision.

Stein points out how the environment itself actually dictates the production of experimental art. This minimizes artist's role; he or she is not a creator but "chronicler."<sup>7</sup> In "Composition as Explanation," Stein defines the role of literature in relation to the artist's environment:

Nothing changes in people from one generation to another except the way of seeing and being seen, the streets change, the way of being driven in the streets change, the buildings change, the comforts in the houses change, but the people from one generation to another do not change. (17-8)

"People" and thus writers are all the same. As I have argued, repetition of the same actions across generations prevents complete "change." Rather, literature differs among generations because the writer's perspective, or as Stein defines it, "the way of seeing and being seen"

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<sup>7</sup> Gertrude Stein, Notebook (67), Ms, (Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University).

differs. The writer plays a passive role in changing her “way of seeing and being seen”: the changed objects: “the streets...way of being driven...buildings...comforts” dictate how they are “being seen” by the writer. In turn, these “ways of seeing and being seen,” reflect through the writer’s composition or the way she portrays the subject. To Stein, changes in literature among different times are natural because the culture changes. The writers themselves are not the agents that structure literary representation.

A writer cannot simply transcribe these changes into written language: Picasso’s “struggle” expresses this difficult nature of ‘translating’ ideas. Stein’s writings actually convey comfort with the past, and thus her resolve to pursue experimental literature can suggest her need to comprehend and orient herself in these new present surroundings. Ellen Berry argues that Stein’s writing “depends on shifts in surface rather than development in time...reflecting changed perceptual skills required by the cinema and by the twentieth century composition that endeavors to reproduce these changes.”<sup>8</sup> Time itself, past, present, and future lack bearing in Stein’s writings. This interpretation can further illuminate the way Stein’s writings respond to change in a writer’s environment, such as new technology. In this sense, literature becomes a way for writer and readers to access the writer’s contemporary culture.

Stein’s writings largely engage with the present, yet she maintains perspective on the temporary importance of them. The narrator points out how she is part of an “adolescent world,” situating the novel as a transition (Stein 47). The novel does not envision itself as the height of literary development. In fact, the metaphor seems to acknowledge how the novel, especially its composition, is awkward. Yet the narrator maintains later literary generations will develop using

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<sup>8</sup> Ellen Berry, *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein’s Postmodernism* (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1992), 140.

the findings produced by this experimental novel. Thus, the project of this novel becomes also to recognize the temporal limits of a cultural production.

Though the narrator and the critic do not speak directly to one another, the critic also interestingly draws on metaphors of human development to explain the novel's contribution to literary 'progress.' Drawing out the contrast reveals how Stein actually does maintain the relevance of the past within the present temporality of her work, whereas the critic shuns the past and favors the present. The critic introduces his article with a dilemma of how he should consider Stein's works: "childish babble or works of genius" (32). Unlike Stein, the critic privileges the present and rejects the past, as if the presence of "childish babble" within the present undoes the literary progress that a "work of genius" has achieved. In *The Gradual Making of the Making of Americans*, Stein states how the novel, in part includes how "I began very early in life to talk all the time and to listen all the time" (136). This is not a biographical reading so I will not attempt to examine which details Stein uses from her childhood within the novel. Instead, I argue this passage conveys, at the very least, a rhetorical attempt to capture the holistic nature of the novel. The critic regards "childish babble" as negative, but Stein's context seems to frame the idea, at the very least, of "childish babble" as occurring naturally (and perhaps unconsciously) in anything an individual produces. Likewise, the novel as a transition from childhood to adulthood further supports how Stein envisions the past as relevant to the present because the past lays the groundwork for such development. In this sense, even as the novel situates its experimental narration in the present, Stein asserts the past implicitly materializes.

In a sense, the critic does not completely reject the past. He privileges a particular narrative of the past that remains relevant to confirm his ideals of the present. . A "work of

genius” identifies something as the height of literary production, which implies there are lesser works that have been published to support this claim. Thus the past exists to authorize a “work of genius,” which renders the past obsolete in the present. Though like the critic, Stein uses the past to inform the present, she also includes details in the initial passage that are not literally repeated in the novel’s plot, such as the son’s actual dragging of his father and the characters of the son and father themselves. The connection between the initial passage and plot conveys how the past does not simply confirm the present in the novel: Stein juxtaposes the ethos of the past in the present. This humanizes the past and steers the reader from regarding the past as simply a means to understand the present. Stein’s holistic treatment of the past emphasizes how she equally privileges different temporal periods in the novel.

The novel’s response to its negative initial reception and Stein’s writings about composition emphasize how the novel acknowledges its narration differs from convention but does not rebel against these past forms. Composition changes as a writer communicates changes in their environment. Moreover, criticism, more so than the text itself frames the novel as Stein’s rebellion against past literary forms.

## Conclusion

*The Making of Americans* attempts to include the past even as it innovates the conventions of literary form, family relationships, and composition. This perspective on the novel can illuminate how the novel regards what its title claims as its subjects: Americans. American history in particular contributes how we might think the novel rebels against convention to create a new form of literature in the same way Americans rebelled against England to form their own nation. However, Leon Katz describes Stein's defense of Americans against the English when she lived in England: "Gertrude had to hold up the American end of the perpetual 'Am. vs. Eng. Disputes'...she slammed back...that cultivated Americans were 'unsusceptible' to shifts of political winds as compared to cultivated Englishmen" (6).<sup>1</sup> To Stein, Americans resist change and thus remain tied to the past. In this sense, we can interpret the novel's connection to the past within a rapidly changing social environment as a way Stein portrays American identity through literature. In the opening of this thesis, I argued the novel resists the genre of Oedipal literature. The initial passage presents a scene of violence between father and son that could suggest murder, but a close reading of the passage reveals the repetition of dragging connects the father and son. This can capture the way Americans perhaps believe they possess a rebellious identity, and the transmission of such an identity across generations actually negates such identity.

Also, the attempt of *The Making of Americans* to maintain the relevance of the past can inform us about how the novel situates itself within the modernist movement. Reiterating Armstrong from the Introduction of this thesis: "Early twentieth-century literature often takes the forms of a *Götterdämmerung*, rage directed at those towering Victorian figures, the parents, a

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<sup>1</sup> According to Katz, Stein lived in England from 1902 -1903.

torrent of Oedipal anger.” This expresses how modernist writers believed that making a new form of art or literature required them to destroy their past. However, the repetition of the past in Stein’s novel suggests an artist or writer can create a new form while understanding present forms of knowledge are connected to the past.

Ezra Pound’s motto “Make it new!” seems to capture the novel’s portrayal of the past’s relevance in the present. Stein, in the epigraph of this thesis, suggests to Willis Steell that the “outcome” of *The Making of Americans* demonstrates the curse is heredity, the continuous cycle of son inheriting from his father. This continuous turnover can suggest the novel deviates from Pound’s modernist motto through the way the present, what is “new,” never remains constant. Perhaps in this sense, the novel even resists being new because everything in the present is ultimately linked to the past.



## Appendix

Excerpt from *The Making of Americans*:

Mostly every one at different parts in their living when they are very little ones when they are a little bigger ones when they are not any longer very young ones when they are quite not very young ones when they are ones beginning being in their middle living when they are ones being in their middle living when they are ones ending being in their middle living when they are ones coming to be growing old ones when they are ones come to be old ones have a feeling about some one having angry feeling then them have some feeling about any one that has for them angry feeling in them. Mostly everyone has some feeling about angry feeling being in some one, about angry feeling being inside them, about angry feeling in any one. Some have all their living about the same feeling about some one having angry feeling about having angry feeling themselves inside them about any one having angry feeling on them. Some have a very different feeling about angry feeling being inside in them in different parts of their being in living. Some are certainly changing in their feeling about angry feeling being in any one about angry feeling being in some one about angry feeling being inside them as they are going on being living. I am telling now about angry feeling being in some one about angry feeling being in any one about angry feeling in one inside that one to that one and I am saying that some are changing while they are being living about their feeling about each one of these ways of being and some are not changing in their way of feeling about angry feeling being in any one in some one in some in themselves inside them, and some are changing very much in their living about angry feeling and some are not changing very much in their feeling about angry feeling and some are changing one way and some are changing another way. Each one of the Hersland family could have angry feeling in them. (755)

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