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Four Studies**

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Two Types of Obscurity in the Writings of Gertrude Stein

by

Randa K. Dubnick *

Mary critics have tried to deal with the difficulties of Gertrude Stein's writing by labeling it "meaningless," "abstract," or "obscure." But such judgments often are inadequate and misleading in their failure to make some important distinctions. In the first place, not all of Stein's writing is obscure. And within that part of her work which is obscure, there are two distinct styles which might be characterized as "abstract," each of which represents a linguistically different kind of obscurity. The first of these two styles developed during the writing of *The Making of Americans* and reached maturity toward the end of that book (as well as in some of the literary "portraits" produced during that same time.) The second style is best represented by Stein's *Tender Buttons*.

Stein called the first style *prose* and the second style *poetry*. As will be seen, her definition of each category, and her description of these two obscure styles seem to suggest some of the dualistic distinctions that structuralist thought (from Ferdinand de Saussure to Roman Jakobson and Roland Barthes) has made about language. What might be fruitful, then, and what the structuralist vocabulary seems to make possible, is an examination of the nature and stylistics of each of the two distinct ways in which Stein's writing moves towards the abstract and becomes obscure. All of Stein's writing can be viewed as made up of variations and combinations of the two stylistic preoccupations represented by the participial style of *The Making of Americans* and the associational style of *Tender Buttons*. To understand the stylistics of Gertrude Stein's two basic types of obscurity, one must begin with an examination of these two works. Structuralist theories can aid in this examination by supplying a vocabulary as well as a framework that may identify the basis of her obscurity as her concern with the nature of language itself. This inquiry may lead to an understanding of the theoretical basis behind Stein's movement toward two kinds of abstraction. In this regard, a look at what was happening in painting, as Cubism also developed two obscure styles, may be helpful. The relationship between Stein's writing and Cubist painting, when seen from a structuralist perspective, seems to be based on common emphases on certain linguistic operations

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over others. What one discovers is that Stein's comparisons of her writing to the work of the Cubists do not belie a misguided attempt to apply to language artistic theories which are irrelevant and inappropriate to it, as some critics believe: rather, those comparisons represent concerns about the nature of language itself, concerns which are, therefore, appropriately explored within the realm of literature.

Gertrude Stein, in one of her famous lectures, explains the radical stylistic difference between *The Making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* in terms of the distinction between prose (the main concern of which is the sentence) and poetry (the main concern of which is the noun):

In *The Making of Americans* . . . a very long prose book made up of sentences and paragraphs . . . I had gotten rid of nouns and adjectives as much as possible by the method of living in adverbs, in pronouns, in adverbial clauses written or implied and in conjunctions . . . really great written prose is bound to be made up more of verbs adverbs prepositional clauses and conjunctions than nouns. The vocabulary in prose of course is important if you like vocabulary is always important . . .¹

However:

. . . the vocabulary in respect to prose is less important than the parts of speech, and the internal balance and the movement within a given space.

On the other hand,

. . . Poetry has to do with vocabulary just as prose has not . . . Poetry is I say essentially a vocabulary just as prose is essentially not . . .

And what is the vocabulary of which poetry absolutely is. It is a vocabulary entirely based on the noun as prose is essentially and determinately and vigorously not based on the noun.²

In asserting this different emphasis on, first, syntax and, then, diction, Stein seems to be touching upon what structural linguists differentiate as the horizontal and vertical axes of language (as formulated by Saussure, Jakobson, and Barthes, with somewhat varying terminology). The horizontal axis links words contiguously. It is

. . . a combination of signs which has space as a support. In the articulated language, this space is linear and irreversible (it is the

¹ Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935), pp. 228-230.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.

“spoken chain”): two elements cannot be pronounced at the same time (*enter, against all, human life*): each term here derives its value from its opposition to what precedes and what follows; in the chain of speech, the terms are really united *in praesentia*.³

When Stein says that the key element in prose is the sentence, and that verbs, prepositions and conjunctions (which function to hold the syntax of the sentence together) are important in prose, she is implying an emphasis on the horizontal axis of language.

On the other hand, the vertical axis of language links words by associations based on similarity and/or opposition, and has to do with the selection of words.

“Beside the discourse (syntagmatic plane), the units which have something in common are associated in memory and thus form groups within which various relationships can be found”: *education* can be associated, through its meaning, to *up-bringing* or *training*, and through its sound to *educate, education* or to *application, vindication* in each series unlike what happens at the syntagmatic level, the terms are united *in absentia*.⁴

Stein characterizes poetry as concerned with vocabulary (and with the noun in particular). Hers is an oblique statement of the obvious observation that in poetry, word choice is of more concern than syntax, which is often suppressed, especially in modern poetry. The choice of a word from among a group of synonyms on the basis of qualities like rhythm and rhyme, or the choice of a poetic vocabulary from within an entire language, is an operation of selection. According to structural linguistic theories, the operation of selection functions along the vertical axis of language.

As to Stein's remarks regarding the various parts of speech, Ronald Levinson points out in his article, “Gertrude Stein, William James, and Grammar,”⁵ that Stein's theoretical formulation of the functions of the parts of speech was apparently greatly influenced by the theories of William James, who, in *Psychology*, compared the “stream of consciousness” to a series of “flights and perchings,” — the “perchings” being substantives (“occupied by sensorial imaginings”), and the “flights” being transitives, (“thoughts of relating, static and dynamic”), which depend on verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions.⁶ As Levinson points out, Stein in her philosophy of grammar set forth in “Poetry and Gram-

³ Roland Barthes, “Elements of Semiology” in *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁵ Ronald Levinson, “Gertrude Stein, William James and Grammar,” *American Journal of Psychology*, 54 (January, 1941), 124-128.

⁶ William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1892), p. 160.

mar" echoes some of James' theories, especially in the distinction she makes between static words (nouns) and dynamic words (verbs, prepositions). What is original is her use of James' theories as the basis of a distinction between poetry and prose. Here, prose is based on verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions (the "flights"): the words that support syntax. These words function along the horizontal axis and have to do with contiguity: they combine to hold the words of the sentence in relation to one another. Poetry, on the other hand, is based on the noun or the substantive; the "perchings." Roman Jakobson's linguistic analysis of aphasia indicates that these parts of speech have to do with the operation of selection (the vertical axis).⁷ Thus, Stein's distinction between prose and poetry is based not merely upon stylistic or formal considerations, but rather on a distinction in emphasis upon what structuralists have since identified as two linguistic, and even mental, operations: similarity (or selection or system) and contiguity (or combination or syntagm).

Though one can see the germs of some of these ideas in James' theories as set forth in *Psychology*, Stein extends and applies them in her creative writing. James describes consciousness as a continuous flow, distinguishes between static and dynamic parts of speech, and discerns two types of association. The first is based on contiguity, meaning habitual association of things existing together in time and space. (This kind of association James identifies as performed even by animals.) The second type is based on similarity of entities not linked in space or time.⁸ However, James does not extend this distinction from the realm of association and use it to bifurcate the whole of linguistic operations along these lines as do the theories of structuralism.

Stein's contribution is the creation of an aesthetic based on James' theories and on pragmatism in general, as Robert Haas points out.⁹ Through this effort, she arrives at two types of obscurity which function, perhaps coincidentally, as practical illustrations of linguistic theories that were yet to be published at the time she was creating those two styles. (Even the first and most limited formulation of these structural theories in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* was published until 1916,¹⁰ approximately four years after *Tender Buttons* was written, circa 1912.) Furthermore, her writing, which suppresses, first, the vertical axis at the expense of the horizontal axis, and, then, vice versa, foreshadows Jakobson's observations about the sublimation of, first, one of these two linguistic operations and, then, the other as it occurs in the speech of aphasic patients. Jakobson did not publish

⁷ Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," *Fundamentals of Language* (Netherlands: Mouton & Co., Printers, 1956), pp. 71-72.

⁸ See chapter entitled "Association" in James' *Psychology*, especially pp. 255-265.

⁹ Robert Haas, "Another Garland for Gertrude Stein," in *What Are Masterpieces* by Gertrude Stein (New York: Pitman Publishing Corp., 1940), p. 21.

¹⁰ Barthes, p. 9.

these observations until 1956 in "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances."¹¹ Of course, in aphasia, the suppression of either of the two linguistic operations of contiguity and similarity is entirely involuntary and pathological, while Stein's theoretical writings indicate that the creation of each of her two obscure styles was quite consciously undertaken for certain theoretical and aesthetic reasons – all arguments about "automatic writing" to the contrary!

The key stylistic interest in *The Making of Americans*, and in other works of Stein's participial style, is syntax. Grammatically correct but eccentric sentences spin themselves out and grow, clause linked to clause, until they are of paragraph length. She asserts that nothing "has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences . . . I like the feeling the everlasting feeling of sentence as they diagram themselves."¹² Her long, repetitive sentences convey the feeling of process and duration, and of the time it gradually takes to get to know a person or to come to grips with an idea. She felt that sentences were not emotional (i.e., the syntax or "internal balance" of the sentence is a given) but that paragraphs were. She illustrates this principle by reference to her dog's drinking water from a dish. The paragraph is emotional in that it prolongs the duration of the idea or perception until the writer feels satisfied. This feeling of satisfaction is subjective and not arrived at by following rules of grammar. By extending the sentence to the length approximately of a short paragraph, Stein was trying to achieve an emotional sentence. Many of the stylistic idiosyncracies of her "participial" style function to extend the length of the sentence. What follows is a passage located near the end of *The Making of Americans*:

Certainly he was one being living when he was being a being young one, he was often then quite certainly one being almost completely interested in being one being living, he was then quite often wanting to be one being completely interested in being one being living. He certainly then went on being living, he did this thing certainly all of his being living in being young living. He certainly when he was a young one was needing then sometimes to be sure that he was one being living, this is certainly what some being living are needing when they are ones being young ones in being living. David Hersland certainly was one almost completely one being one being living when he was being a young one. Some he was knowing then were certainly being completely living then and being then being young ones in being living then, some were quite a good deal not being one being completely living then when they were being young ones in being living. David Hersland did a good deal of living in being living then when he was a young one. He was knowing

¹¹ Jakobson and Halle.

¹² "Poetry and Grammar," p. 216.

very many men and very many knew him then. He remembered some of them in his later living and he did not remember some of them. He certainly was one almost completely then interested in being one being living then.¹³

In this characteristic paragraph (consisting of only nine sentences), Stein uses many grammatical and stylistic strategies to extend the syntax and physical duration of the utterance. For example, one way to extend the syntax is to create very complex sentences, such as "Some he was knowing then were not quite completely being ones being living then, some were a quite a good deal not being ones being completely living then when they were being young ones in being living" (*Making of Americans*, p. 801). It is characteristic of her writing that, although she may link clause to clause, she often will suppress the use of relative pronouns such as "that" or "who." This method makes it more difficult to divide the sentences into individual clauses, forcing the reader to take a more active role in struggling to follow the sentence structure. Another simple, but less orthodox, means of extending the syntax is by fusing two or more sentences through the comma splice: "He certainly then went on being living, he did this thing certainly all of his being living in being young living" (*Making of Americans*, p. 801). One should note, here, that the sparse use of commas also functions to make the reader work harder to follow the sentence.) Another device for stretching the sentence almost to paragraph length is the mechanistic linking together of many independent clauses by a series of conjunctions:

Some are certainly needing to be ones doing something and they are doing one thing and doing it again and again and again and again and they are doing another thing and they are doing it again and again and they are doing another thing and they are doing it again and again and again and such a one might have been one doing a very different thing then and doing that then each or any one of them and doing it again and again and again. (*Making of Americans*, p. 803)

Stein's first style is full of participles that function as nouns or adjectives and verb forms as well, a use which critics have termed a philosophical choice. Participles prolong the time span to achieve a sense of duration and process. Moreover, the participle, and particularly the gerund, also help portray the pragmatic conception of the world as a constantly on-going event. However, it should be noted that when Stein substitutes, "When he was being a young one" for "When he was young," the sentence is lengthened by two syllables. Her substitution of the participle for a simpler form of the verb has the cumulative ef-

¹³ Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress*, Complete Version, (New York: Something Else Press, 1966), p. 801. Hereafter, references to this work appear parenthetically within the text.

fect of substantially lengthening the sentence, especially in view of the fact that, as Hoffman points out, "Probably more than half her verb forms use some form of the progressive ending."¹⁴ The Stein sentence is also lengthened by the fact that she so often insists on the "changing of an adjective into a substantive. Rather than saying 'Everybody is real,' [she] changes 'real' into 'a real one.'"¹⁵ Again, this method has the cumulative effect of lengthening the duration of the reading or the utterance.

In *The Making of Americans*, Stein stretches syntax almost to the breaking point and simultaneously limits her vocabulary. She moves farther and farther away from the concrete noun-centered vocabulary of the realistic novel. In part, the movement is due to her subject matter. *The Making of Americans* is a monumental attempt to create a chronicle of one family which could serve as an eternally valid history of all people, past, present, and future. Herein, she presents people as generalized types, and uses the characters in the novel to represent all human possibilities. This method led her from the essentially conventional narrative which dominates the beginning of the book to the generalized and theoretical kind of digression dispersed throughout the novel, but especially prominent towards the end of the book.

Although the long passage cited earlier concerns David Hersland, Stein has supplied very little concrete information about him because she was trying to turn particular and perhaps personal facts (the Hersland family is considered to be autobiographical by most critics) into universally valid generalizations. This effort is reflected in the dearth of conventional nouns and the wealth of pronouns. This is a move towards obscurity in that the referent of a pronoun is more vague than that of a noun. Verbals are used instead of conventional nouns and adjectives: "alive" becomes "being living." The same phrase is also used as a noun: David Hersland is interested in "being living" rather than in life. Probably this construction reflects Stein's desire to emphasize the transitive linguistic processes over the substantive ones in prose.

Conventional verbs are replaced by participles, which prolong and de-emphasize whatever action is being described. The participles contain very little concrete information. In the passage under discussion, there are only five participles, although each is repeated a number of times (*being, living, wanting, needing, knowing*). The least specific participles are those most often repeated. *Being* and *living* each occur nineteen times in the paragraph.

There are few conventional adjectives in the passage, aside from the participles. As for adverbs, *certainly* occurs a number of times, here, as it does throughout the book. Some critics think that Stein, in this case, is attempting to reassure herself and her reader of the

¹⁴ Michael J. Hoffmann, *The Development of Abstractionism in the Writings of Gertrude Stein* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965), p. 133.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

universal validity of her typology. In addition, the fact that she must say *some*, *many*, and *a good deal* more and more often is seen as her growing recognition of the limitations of what she is doing. The adverb *then* is prevalent in the novel, perhaps related to her attempt to bring all knowledge gained over the passing of time into the present moment. It is also natural that a style which extends syntax will contain many relational words, like prepositions and conjunctions.

The stylistic concerns of Stein's early prose, in both *The Making of Americans* and the early (pre-1912) portraits, are the extension of syntax and the simultaneous circumscription of vocabulary, which is limited not merely in terms of the quantity of words, but also in the degree of specificity allowed to appear. The result is a very vague and generalized portrayal of the subject matter. Thus, *The Making of American* fits very neatly her requirements for prose. It is concerned with syntax, and contains many verbs, adverbs and conjunctions, while it reduces the vocabulary, and for the most part, eliminates conventional nouns in favor of pronouns and gerunds.

It is interesting to compare these observations about her prose style with Jakobson's observations about the two aspects of language as they relate to the speech of aphasics. Like Stein's writing, aphasia manifests two basic types of obscurity (although, of course, the obscurity in aphasia is pathological and involuntary, while that in Stein is a voluntary stylistic choice). Jakobson delineates two types of aphasia, each related to an inability to function in terms of one of the two linguistic axes which Roland Barthes has described as "system" (vertical axis) and "syntagm" (horizontal axis). Jakobson refers to these axes respectively as "selection" and "combination":

Any linguistic sign involves two modes of arrangement:

1) Combination. Any sign is made up of constituent signs and/or occurs only in combination with other signs. This means that any linguistic unit at one and the same time serves as a context for simpler units and/or finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit. Hence any actual grouping of linguistic units binds them into a superior unit: combination and contexture are two faces of the same operation.

2) Selection. A selection between alternatives implies the possibility of substituting one for the other, equivalent to the former in one respect and different from it in another. Actually selection and substitution are two faces of the same operation.¹⁶

He points out further that "speech disturbances may affect in varying degrees the individual's capacity for combination and selection of linguistic units, and, indeed, the question of which of these two operations is chiefly impaired proves to be of far-reaching significance in describing, analyzing, and classifying the diverse forms of aphasia."¹⁷ Some of

¹⁶ Jakobson and Halle, p. 60.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Jakobson's observations regarding the language produced by patients suffering from an inability to perform the operation of selection are somewhat similar to what can be observed in the prose style of *The Making of Americans* and the early portraits. This similarity is not really surprising, since Stein is herein *voluntarily* suppressing the operation of selection by severely limiting her vocabulary and attempting to eliminate nouns. Jakobson describes some of the speech patterns of aphasics suffering from a similarity disorder as follows:

. . . the more a word is dependent on the other words of the same sentence and the more it refers to the syntactical context, the less it is affected by the speech disturbance. Therefore words syntactically subordinated by grammatical agreement or government are more tenacious, whereas the main subordinating agent of the sentence, namely the subject, tends to be omitted. . . . Key words may be dropped or superseded by abstract anaphoric substitutes. A specific noun, as Freud noticed, is replaced by a very general one, for instances *machin*, *chose* in the speech of French aphasics. In a dialectal German sample of "amnesiac aphasia" observed by Goldstein, . . . *Ding* "thing" or *Stueckle* "piece" were substituted for all inanimate nouns, and *uberfahren* "perform" for verbs which were identifiable from the context or situation and therefore appeared superfluous to the patient.

Words with an inherent reference to the context, like pronouns and pronominal adverbs, and words serving merely to construct the context, such as connectives and auxiliaries, are particularly prone to survive.¹⁸

As it will be seen, some of Jakobson's observations about the language of aphasics with a contiguity disorder seem to indicate that this particular form of pathological obscurity shares certain characteristics with Stein's second stylistic interest, which she identified as poetry. For example, *Tender Buttons* represents a radical change from the early prose style of *The Making of Americans* and of other works to that which she called poetry. From prose, with its emphasis on syntax and its suppression of vocabulary, she moved to a concern for poetry with its emphasis on vocabulary and its suppression of syntax. This change manifests itself in a shift of linguistic emphasis from the operation of combination (horizontal axis) to the operation of selection (vertical axis).

Tender Buttons attained "a certain notoriety" in the press and attracted polemical criticism, perhaps because it seemed to "veer off into meaninglessness," at least in conventional terms.¹⁹ But the work is more than a literary curiosity. Its marked stylistic change appears to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁹ Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 125.

have been a breakthrough that influenced the direction of much of Stein's future work. ". . . *Tender Buttons* represented her full scale break out of the prison of conventional form into the colorful realm of the sensitized imagination."²⁰

In *The Making of Americans*, her concerns were those of imposing order upon the world by classifying its inhabitants into universal and eternally valid types, of creating a history of all human possibilities. This goal called for a language that expressed generalities in a very precise way. Her attempts to portray the "bottom nature" of a person, the essence which lay behind his superficial particularity, continued in her early portraits.

Gertrude Stein had tried numerous techniques in her previous efforts to match her conception of a person with a style. She had generalized and reduced her vocabulary in order to make true statements, however simpleminded. She had constructed long, cumulative sentences on the model of This-is-the-house-that-Jack-built to convey the feeling of slowly becoming familiar with a person.²¹

However, by the time Stein wrote *Tender Buttons*, her attention was no longer focused on the universals of experience, but now on the process of experiencing each moment in the present tense as it intersects with the consciousness. In *The Making of Americans*, she had subordinated particularity and individual differences to the type, an approach which she eventually abandoned. "But by rejecting her knowledge of types, she was faced with each experience as a unique thing, with even its importance unprejudiced, as simply different."²² She had simplified and generalized reality so as to impose an order upon it, but finally she "concluded that greater fidelity of representation might be achieved if she simply recorded the verbal responses her consciousness made to a particular subject, while minimizing her own manipulation of them."²³

In her lectures (written with the hindsight of many years, which perhaps lent her stylistic development more coherence than it had in actual fact), Stein discusses her new desire to see the world and return to the sensual particularity of experience as it was immediately available to her consciousness. After doing her portraits, she slowly became bothered by the fact that she was omitting a looking at the world. "So I began to do this thing, I tried to include color and movement, and what I did is . . . a volume called *Tender Buttons*."²⁴

The Making of Americans, with its historical orientation and its goal of classifying people according to type, necessitated remembering

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Donald Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 74.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," *Lectures in America*, pp. 188-189.

the past. Classification is based on resemblances, on similarities, which must be held over time in the mind. In her early portraits, Stein freed herself of the narrative and dealt with the presentation of perceptions one moment at a time, but these perceptions were not dealt with "in the raw." They had to be edited, selected, and generalized so that the person could be analyzed and presented in his essential reality. However, in *Tender Buttons*, she came to terms with the chaotic nature of real experience and "the existential swarm of her impressions."²⁵ The physical world is experienced as unique and immediate in each present moment as the consciousness receives data.

In any attempt to deal with Stein's writing, the word "abstract" is bound to come up. This term has been a problem in Stein criticism because it is not usually defined clearly. Even Michael Hoffman's book, *The Development of Abstractionism in the Writing of Gertrude Stein*, fails to come to terms with "abstract." Hoffman's definition of *abstractionism* is essentially the dictionary definition, "the act or process of leaving out of consideration one or more qualities of a complex object so as to attend to others."²⁶ That Stein follows this approach, as any artist must, is obvious. However, this definition does not seem adequate to deal with important questions like Stein's refusal of verisimilitude. Because of the vague definition, Hoffman, thus, uses *abstract* to describe all of Stein's work without clarifying the distinctions between *non-representational*, *plastic*, *arbitrary*, and *abstract*, although he seems aware of the development of diverse styles in her writing. Stein's relationship to the Cubists, to whose work she compared her own, is an important question that cannot be examined without these kinds of distinctions. When Hoffman compares her work to that of the Cubists, he shares the common failure to be consistent and rigorous in his distinctions between the stages of Cubism as it developed over time.²⁷ John Malcolm Brinnin, in *The Third Rose*, alone saw that developments in the Cubist styles (analytic and synthetic) parallel stages in Stein's stylistic development as well.²⁸ This observation is potentially useful in clarifying the distinction between the two kinds of obscure writing that Stein produces.

²⁵ Bridgman, p. 124.

²⁶ Hoffman, p. 28.

²⁷ In his chapter, "Portraits and the Abstract Style," dealing with Stein's early portraits (1908-1912), Hoffman states that she wanted to use language "plastically" as the Cubists did. However, he fails to point out that neither Stein nor the Cubists created "plastic" art until 1912. Until that time, their art, although abstract, was mimetic. Cubist art did not become "plastic" until the development of Synthetic Cubism (1912), nor did Stein's writing become "plastic" until she wrote *Tender Buttons* (1912). Hoffman further confuses the issue by referring to the fragmentation of forms by Braque and Picasso, a phenomenon related to analytic cubism. Moreover, he further confuses the issue by referring to what "the painters of the period" were doing and by examining Picasso's *Girl Before A Mirror*, but it is hard to see how this explanation could clarify what was happening in 1908-1912, since it was painted in 1932. See Hoffman, p. 170.

²⁸ John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose: Gertrude Stein and Her World* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), p. 134.

Too often, the term *abstract*, when used in regard to Stein's writing, is taken to mean non-representational, which her writing almost never is. She never really abandons subject matter. In her early work, the subject matter was the representation of types of people, which appears to have led to an interest in the process of perception itself. In the style which *Tender Buttons* exemplifies, the subject matter is the intersection of the object with consciousness. As attention is focused on the process of perception, that process becomes as much a part of the subject matter as the object perceived. "As I say a motor goes inside and the car goes on, but my business my ultimate business as an artist was not with where the car goes as it goes but with the movement inside that is of the essence of its going."²⁹ In fact, Stein insisted on subject matter and disapproved of abstract art. That the Cubists' work was never abstract, i.e., never non-representational, is not always clearly understood, and confuses the comparison of Stein's writing to some of the work of those painters.

Subject matter is certainly not abandoned in *Tender Buttons*, nor does that book "signal an abandonment of control. Her practice was to concentrate upon an object as it existed in her mind . . . Gertrude Stein perceived that [the object] was immersed in a continuum of sound, color and association, which it was her business to reconstitute in writing."³⁰ In *Tender Buttons*, the subject matter was not limited to a description of the objective world, but included mimesis of the intersection of the real world with the consciousness of the artist.

Nevertheless, it is possible assert that the vocabulary of her early writing moves towards abstraction, if one means that it moves away from the concrete, that it is very general and contains few concrete nouns and verbs of action:

He was one being living, then when he was quite a young one, and some knew him then and he knew some then. He was one being living then and he was being one and some knew he was that one the one he was then and some did not know then that he was that one the one he was then. (*The Making of Americans*, p. 952)

Tender Buttons has a less abstract vocabulary in that it contains many more concrete nouns, sensual adjectives, and action verbs than does her earlier style:

The stove is bigger. It was of a shape that made no audience bigger if the opening is assumed why should there not be kneeling. Any force which is bestowed on a floor shows rubbing. This is so nice and sweet and yet there comes the change, there comes the

²⁹ "Portraits and Repetition," pp. 194-195.

³⁰ Bridgman, p. 124.

time to press more air. This does not mean the same as disappearance.³¹

However, in a different sense, *Tender Buttons* taken as a whole is more abstract than *The Making of Americans* in that its words are used in a plastic, arbitrary way, and in that it is less concerned with traditional, discursive description.

In the previous centuries writers had managed pretty well by assembling a number of adjectives and adjectival clauses side by side; the reader "obeyed" by furnishing images and concepts in his mind and the resultant "thing" in the reader's mind corresponded fairly well with that in the writer's. Miss Stein felt that process did not work any more. Her painter friends were showing clearly that the corresponding method of "description" had broken down in painting and she was sure that it had broken down in writing. . . .

o o o o

Miss Stein felt that writing must accomplish a revolution whereby it could report things as they were in themselves before our minds had appropriated them and robbed them of their objectivity "in pure existing." To this end she went about her house describing the objects she found there in the series of short "poems" which make up the volume called *Tender Buttons*.³²

As the concerns of Stein's writing gradually shift from an interest in orderly analysis of the world to an interest in the immediate perception of the world by the consciousness, her writing appears to deal more and more with the word itself: with the mental images called up by and associated with the word (signifieds), and with the qualities of words as things in themselves (signifiers). "Her imagination was stimulated then not by the object's particular qualities alone, but also by the associations it aroused . . . and by the words themselves as they took shape upon the page."³³

Perhaps coincidentally, a similar shift in emphasis was occurring in the painting of the Cubists around the time *Tender Buttons* was composed.³⁴ Their earlier struggle, in Analytic Cubism, to see reality without the conventional and learned *trompe l'oeil* of perspective focused their attention on the elements of composition and led them to the realization that the artist could use these elements arbitrarily rather than mimetically:

³¹ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), p. 64. Hereafter, references to this work appear with the body of the text.

³² Thornton Wilder, "Introduction" to *Four in America* by Gertrude Stein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), pp. viii-ix.

³³ Bridgman, p. 124.

³⁴ Bridgman, in a footnote on p. 125, indicates that it is unlikely that *Tender Buttons* was not composed earlier than 1912.

. . . in the winter of 1912-13 a fundamental change came about in the pictorial methods of the true Cubists. Whereas previously Braque and Picasso had analyzed and dissected the appearance of objects to discover a set of forms which would add up to their totality and provide the formal elements of a composition, now they found that they could begin by composing with purely pictorial elements (shaped forms, planes of color) and gradually endow them with an objective significance.³⁵

The Cubists had arrived at "the conclusion that they could create their own pictorial reality by building up towards it through a synthesis of different elements."³⁶ That the elements of signification might have an importance in their own right and be used arbitrarily by the artist to create not a mirror of reality but an authentic new reality (the work of art as *tableau-objet*) was an important realization for this group and a conclusion that Stein seems to have arrived at, perhaps independently. Stein now realized that words need no longer be merely the means to the expression of another reality, but may become freed of their normal mimetic function (still retaining their meanings and associations) and be used plastically by the writer. In her lectures, she describes her growing concern with the quality of language as a thing in itself:

I began to wonder at . . . just what one saw when one looked at anything . . . [D]id it make itself by description by a word that meant it or did it make itself by a word in itself

I became more and more excited about how words which were the words which made whatever I looked at look like itself were not words that had in them any quality of description

And the thing that excited me . . . is that the words that made what I looked at be itself were always words that to me very exactly related themselves to that thing . . . at which I was looking, but as often as not had as I say nothing whatever to do with what any words would do that described that thing.³⁷

Like the Cubists, Stein abandons conventional description of an object, although she is still concerned with the object as her "model," but she inverts the traditional descriptive relationship of word to object. Rather than the word evoking the mental image of the object, the object evokes words (associations, etc.) which the artist arbitrarily assembles into an independent linguistic object related to, but not descriptive of, the model or referent. In Analytic Cubism, the artist abstracts form from the given object and creates a representation of the object (however

³⁵ Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (New York: Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Portraits and Repetition," pp. 191-192.

unconventional) on canvas. In Synthetic Cubism, forms have their genesis in the artist, although he uses them to create an object on the canvas. The function of the painting is no longer to describe or represent another reality, but to exist as a thing in itself. In Stein's early works (*The Making of Americans* and others, of her participial style), words are used to abstract generalities about the world to analyze or describe it on paper. However, in *Tender Buttons*, the words are not conventionally descriptive of the object, but have their genesis in the writer and in the associations which the object evokes in him. The function of the writing is not to describe the given object, but to become an entity in its own right.

In *Tender Buttons*, with the new attention to the immediately present moment and the abandoning of traditional description, Stein turned from her earlier "portraits" of people to the treatment of inanimate objects and seems to have felt some bond with the painters of still lifes. Dealing with human beings "inevitably carried in its train realizing movements and expression and as such forced me into recognizing resemblances, and so forced remembering and in forcing remembering caused confusion of present with past and future time." Consequently, she turned from "portraits of men and women and children" to "portraits of food and rooms and everything because there I could avoid this difficulty of suggesting remembering more easily . . . than if I were to describe human beings." Stein also felt that this was a problem she shared with the painters:

I began to make portraits of things and enclosures . . . because I needed to completely face the difficulty of how to include what is seen with hearing and listening and at first if I were to include a complicated listening and talking it would be too difficult to do. That is why painters paint still lifes. You do see why they do.³⁸

Indeed, as the Cubists turned from an analysis of a given reality on canvas to a synthesis of a new reality from the pictorial elements, the Cubists, (Picasso especially), produced fewer portraits and more still lifes. Perhaps the reason for this move is similar to the one that brought about the change in Stein's writing: dealing with inanimate objects allows the artist more freedom to treat the subject in an arbitrary manner. After all, the public expects a portrait to be a likeness of the model, who has the annoying habit of exhibiting his face in public, thus allowing it to be compared with the painting. But a still life is a small piece of reality that the artist arranges at will, and when he is finished, he can dismantle it, leaving the public nothing with which to compare the painting.

The new realization of Synthetic Cubism (that pictorial elements could be used arbitrarily) was marked by a return to color and texture

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

in contrast to the predominantly grey paintings of Analytic Cubism. For Stein, the new interest in the sensory experiences of the present moment and the new-felt freedom in the use of words manifested itself in a richer, more sensual vocabulary, in contrast to the spare and spartan one of her earlier struggle to classify everyone into universal types. "The idea had entered her mind that lyricism contained a fuller measure of truth than could ever be encircled by making endless laboriously deliberate statements."³⁹ The evocative power of the word called for more "decorative" approach. Freed from her concerns with remembering and classifying, she began to concentrate on the present moment and all of the phenomena therein, including the words called up by those phenomena and their effect upon her conscious mind. Thus, instead of the genderless pronouns, verbs of being, prepositions and conjunctions, and the virtual elimination of concrete words in her earlier style, there is a renaissance of the particular: concrete nouns, sensual adjectives, and specific verbs.

This new interest in the word itself, and especially in the noun and the associative powers of the word, was what Stein considered the essence of poetry. In *Tender Buttons* and other works that she held as poetry, the chief linguistic operation is association (given various labels by structuralists such as substitution, selection, system) and choice of words. The association of words and concepts by similarity or opposition, and the selection of a word from a group of synonyms, are operations that function along the vertical axis of language. Interestingly enough, the *Tender Buttons* style also suppresses syntax (the horizontal axis) while it is expanding vocabulary. Construction of syntax becomes increasingly fragmentary until syntax disappears altogether in some of the more extreme passages.

In *The Making of Americans*, the chief stylistic interest is syntax, but in *Tender Buttons*, the central concern seems to be diction, the selection of words based on association (in terms of both similarity and opposition). The long sentence-paragraph is abandoned as more attention is forced on the noun:

. . . after I had gone as far as I could in these long sentences and paragraphs . . . I then began very short thing . . . and I resolutely realized nouns and decided not to get around them but to meet them, to handle in short to refuse them by using them and in that way my real acquaintance with poetry was begun.⁴⁰

* * * *

I began to discover the names of things, that is, . . . to discover the things . . . to see the things to look at and in so doing I had of course to name them not to give new names but to see that

³⁹ Bridgman, p. 103.

⁴⁰ "Poetry and Grammar," p. 228.

I could find out how to know that they were there by their names or by replacing their names They had their names and naturally I called them by the names they had and in doing so having begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry . . . it made the *Tender Buttons*.⁴¹

However, as Stein begins to abandon her extension of the sentence and enriches her use of diction, the result is not more conventional writing but rather a new style, equally obscure, if not more so. It is even harder to read, in the traditional sense, than her first obscure style, because, in part, there is a disjunction between the two axes of language in this second style. One word often does not appear to have any relationship to other words in the sentence except in terms of their existence as pure words (in terms of grammatical structure, or rhyme, or word play). Of course, words cannot be divorced from their meanings; thus, each word (signifier) calls up a mental image or idea (signified), but *Tender Buttons* cannot be read with a conventional concern for subject matter because one cannot use the total configuration of these mental constructs to reconstruct the "subject matter." Sometimes a sentence in *Tender Buttons* may appear to have a normal syntax and to be orthodox grammatically, yet the words selected do not relate to each other in a traditional and discursive way. "The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared. Sugar is not a vegetable." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 9.) These sentences are grammatically correct, though their punctuation is not conventional. One may achieve the feeling that the sentence would be perfectly comprehensible if the context were supplied. Stein is using both syntax and diction, but because of the disjunction between the two axes of language, the sentence does not "mean" in a conventional way.

Sometimes in *Tender Buttons* Stein explores the patterns of speech, repeating syntactical patterns, at the same time somewhat arbitrarily plugging in terms from the pool of associated words in her vocabulary:

Almost very likely there is no seduction, almost very likely there is no stream, certainly very likely the height is penetrated, certainly certainly the target is cleaned, come to set, come to refuse, come to surround, come slowly and age is not lessening. (*Tender Buttons*, p. 70.)

She explores the rhythm and patterns of speech that are present, even when discursive meaning is not. Like "Jabberwocky," this passage conveys a feeling of speech, even though its words do not relate to each other in a conventional way.

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein's sentences become shorter as her emphasis shifts to diction and association rather than syntax. She ex-

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

plains in a lecture that lines of poetry are shorter than prose because

. . . such a way to express oneself is the natural way when one expresses oneself in loving the name of anything. Think what you do . . . when you love the name of anything really love its name. Inevitably you express yourself . . . in the way poetry expresses itself that is in short lines in repeating what you began in order to do it again. Think of how you talk to anything whose name is new to you a lover a baby a dog or a new land . . . Do you not inevitably repeat what you call out and is that calling out not of necessity in short lines.⁴²

Often in *Tender Buttons*, lines that appear to be sentences are not sentences at all: "Cutting shade, cool spades and little last beds, make violet violet when." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 54.) Obviously, this fragment promises to be a sentence until it is truncated by the period after "when," a word normally expected to introduce a subordinate clause. The disjunction between diction and syntax manifests itself in false predication. For example, how can shade, spades, and beds make violet? Here, each word is quite independent from those which precede and follow it in the speech chain, at least as far as the mental images or signifieds are concerned. (Obviously, however, there are relationships between some of the words in terms of sound.)

Stein uses punctuation in other ways to break up the continuity of the sentence: "This makes and eddy. Necessary." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 54) Also: "Cream cut. Anywhere crumb. Left hop chambers." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 54.) She carries the disintegration of syntax even further, presenting a list within the horizontal structure of the sentence. (A list is usually a group of items associated with one another because they are similar in some way.) "Alas a doubt in case of more to go to say what is is cress. What it is. Mean. Potatoes. Loaves." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 54.) In some of her writing following *Tender Buttons*, Stein even entirely abandoned syntax and made lists of words or phrases in vertical columns on the page.

Again, one observes that some of the stylistic phenomena of Stein's second "obscure" style, emphasizing vocabulary and the noun while suppressing syntax, are strikingly close to Jakobson's observations about the language of aphasics suffering from a contiguity disorder, in which ability to use syntax becomes weakened or disappears, leaving the patient with *only* a vocabulary in extreme cases:

The impairment of the ability to propositionalize, or generally speaking, to combine simpler linguistic entities into more complex units, is actually confined to one type of aphasia . . . the opposite of is actually confined to one type of aphasia . . . There is no word-

⁴² "Poetry and Grammar," p. 234.

lessness, since the entity preserved in most of such cases is the word, which can be defined as the highest among the linguistic units compulsorily coded, i.e., we compose our own sentences and utterances out of the word stock supplied by the code.

This contexture-deficient aphasia, which could be termed contiguity disorder, diminishes the extent and variety of sentences. The syntactical rules organizing words into a higher unit are lost; this loss, called agrammatism, causes the degeneration of the sentence into a mere "word heap . . ." Word order becomes chaotic; the ties of grammatical coordination and subordination . . . are dissolved. As might be expected, words endowed with purely grammatical functions, like conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, and articles, disappear first, giving rise to the so-called "telegraphic style," whereas in the case of similarity disorder they are the most resistant. The less a word depends grammatically on the context, the stronger is its tenacity in the speech of aphasics with a contiguity disorder and the sooner it is dropped by patients with a similarity disorder. Thus the "kernel subject word" is the first to fall out of the sentence in cases of similarity disorder and conversely, it is the least destructible in the opposite type of aphasia.⁴³

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein's primary concern is words and their associations, and her selection of words often is imbued with a spirit of love and play:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun Poetry is doing nothing but losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns.⁴⁴

Sometimes the selection of words is obviously related to the object:

A Petticoat

A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm.
(*Tender Buttons*, p. 22.)

Without too much effort, one detects the associations between word and object. Petticoats are lightweight and often white; a petticoat that shows is a disgrace which might provoke a modest blush. (Stein has been greatly overread, but it seems safe to identify the obvious and public association.)

Even when the associations of word to object are chiefly based on associated meanings, similarities of spelling and sound may play a role:

⁴³ Jakobson and Halle, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁴ "Poetry and Grammar," p. 231.

A Method of a Cloak

A single climb to a line, a straight exchange to a cane, a desperate adventure and courage and a clock . . . all this makes an attractive black silver. (*Tender Buttons*, pp. 13-14.)

The "single climb to a line" might relate to the shape of the cloak, and the cane is related to the cloak as an object of apparel. (Both the cane and the cloak have a nostalgic, perhaps nineteenth-century flavor of elegance.) But the two phrases, "A single climb to a line" and "a straight exchange to a cane," have identical rhythmic patterns as well. The "desperate adventure" and "courage" might be related to the connotations of "cloak and dagger." Black may be the color of the cloak which is "attractive;" perhaps silver was evoked by the sight of the lining of the cloak and the associated phrase, "silver lining." But clock seems to be associated with cloak because of the similarity in spelling and sound. In terms of association on the level of mental constructs (signifieds), Stein uses both association based on contiguity (defined by James as association of objects habitually found together in time and space, and identified by Jakobson as metonymy) and on similarity (which Jakobson identifies as metaphor.)⁴⁵ Both kinds of association are operations of selection which function along the vertical axis of language. But the metaphorical type of association seems to predominate in *Tender Buttons*, as one might expect, given that "metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder and metonymy to the contiguity disorder."⁴⁶ Moreover, the operation of association is stressed not only in terms of images and concepts (signifieds), but also in terms of the qualities of the words as words (signifiers).

Stein often plays with the qualities of words as *words* in *Tender Buttons* and chooses them on the basis of their associations with other words as signifiers. For instance, she often uses rhyme within the line: ". . . all the joy in weak success, all the joyful tenderness, all the section and the tea, all the stouter symmetry . . ." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 35.) Similarly,

Chicken

Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third, alas a dirty third alas a dirty bird. (*Tender Buttons*, p. 54.)

and: "The sister was not a mister." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 65.)

She also associates words on the basis of alliteration: "The sight of a reason, the same sight slighter, the sight of a simpler negative answer, the same sore sounder, the intention to wishing, the same

⁴⁵ See James' chapter "Association" in *Psychology*, as well as the discussion of the metaphoric and metonymic poles in Jakobson and Halle, "Two Aspects of Aphasia," *Fundamentals of Language*.

⁴⁶ Jakobson and Halle, p. 76.

splendor, the same furniture." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 12.) She even uses onomatopoeia:

Chicken

Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking with a chicken.
(*Tender Buttons*, p. 54.)

Playing with the sounds and meanings of words also leads to puns, as in the following, seemingly evoking the associations of Washington, Wellington, and veal Wellington:

Veal

Very well very well. Washing is old, washing is washing.
(*Tender Buttons*, p. 53.)

Additional punning occurs in the following:

Milk

Climb up in sight climb in the whole utter needless and a guess
a whole guess is hanging. Hanging, hanging.
(*Tender Buttons*, p. 47.)

She even plays with the spelling of words: "and easy express e. c." (*Tender Buttons*, p. 55.)

The devices used here are certainly traditional, or at least they seem so now: indirect associations of imagery, obliqueness, fragmented syntax, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, etc. What is it, then, that so many have found upsetting? Perhaps it is the lack of discursive meaning or the fact that the "subject matter" cannot be reconstructed from the images like a jigsaw puzzle, but these may be inappropriate expectations with which to approach Stein's writing.

It is ironic that, in spite of Stein's intention in writing *Tender Buttons* to capture immediate experience while consciousness grapples with it, there have been so many problems in the reading of that book. One problem inherent in the work itself is the disjunction of the two axes of language making it almost impossible to read the work for conventional discursive content. Moreover, this problem leads to another: the effort of trying to "figure it out," to reconstruct the content, not only exhausts the reader, but overdistances him from the work itself. Such an effort is futile anyway, for *Tender Buttons* demands to be dealt with in its own terms. The reader is given none of the literary allusions that the reader of Pound, Eliot, or Joyce can hold on to. As for inventing glosses for the little pieces in *Tender Buttons*, Sutherland points out that it is possible and amusing to create them, but that "it is perfectly idle":

Such a procedure puts the original in the position of being a riddle, a rhetorical complication of something rather unremarkable in itself.

It would be rather like an exhibition of the original table tops, guitars, pipes, and people which were the subject matter of cubist paintings. The original subject matter is or was of importance to the painter as a source of sensations, relations, ideas, even, but it is not after all the beholder's business. The beholder's business is the picture in front of him, which is a new reality and something else, which does not add up to the nominal subject matter.⁴⁷

As Sutherland suggests, perhaps what the reader of Stein is required to do is to look *at* the work, rather than *through* it. One cannot look *through* it because it is an opaque, rather than transparent, style. If one does look *at* the work, what does one see in *Tender Buttons*? He see the word presented as an entity in its own right. By forcing the reader to attend to the word, Stein makes the word seem new, again. In this effort, she does not ignore the meanings of words, as so many critics have claimed. However by presenting each word in an unusual context, she directs attention not only towards its sound but towards its sense as the reader is forced to grapple with each word, one at a time. One is forced to attend to the word, and to language, with a sense of bewilderment and perhaps with a sense of wonder and discovery:

Nouns are the name of anything and anything is named, that is what Adam and Eve did and if you like it is what anybody does, but do they go on just using the name until perhaps they do not know what the name is or if they do know what the name is they do not care what the name is And what has that to do with poetry. A great deal I think⁴⁸

The role of poetry, then, is to give the word back its youth and vitality:

. . . you can love a name and if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently, more persistently, more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves. And so that is poetry really loving the name of anything⁴⁹

Stein's fascination with language, both its sound and its sense, and her interest in exploring the way it works are certainly evident in *Tender Buttons*. Her intuitive grasp of the principles of its operation is manifested not only in her theories, but also in the very nature of the two so very different kinds of obscure styles that she created.

Richard Bridgman and Edmund Wilson are among those critics who attribute the relative unintelligibility of Stein's work to her need to write about her private passions and her simultaneous need to be

⁴⁷ Sutherland, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁸ "Poetry and Grammar," p. 229.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

discreet about the nature of those passions. As Stein herself might have said, "Interesting, if true." But the only relevance of this sexually motivated evasiveness is that it may have served as an impetus for her innovations with language. In *The Making of Americans* (as well as in other works of the same style), she stretches the contiguity of the sentence as far as it will go without snapping, at the same time reducing, to a minimum the vocabulary available for selection. In *Tender Buttons* and similar works, the available vocabulary becomes practically limitless while the syntax is shortened, destroyed, and even disintegrated into lists. As Jakobson's observations about aphasia indicate, conventionally intelligible language can only occur when both aspects of language are fully operative. Although one can only speculate that Stein's innovations grew out of a desire and a need to be unintelligible, one *can* say less uncertainly that her obscurity was a necessary consequence of the nature of her innovative experiments with language.

The Feminine Role in *Robinson Crusoe, Roxana, and Clarissa*

by

J. Karen Ray *

At first glance, it may appear strange to attempt a comparison of three such disparate novels as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* and Richardson's *Clarissa*. After all, what do a man marooned on a tropical island, a society courtesan, and a near saint have in common? In spite of the many obvious differences, the position of woman as illustrated in these novels provides several correspondences. The feminine condition can be considered from various standpoints: in terms of economic position; in terms of woman's role, both sexual and social as circumscribed by the prevailing social code; and in terms of the psychological position of woman in relation to herself and her world. The woman's economic position, as determined by the patriarchal system was one of complete subjugation to the male. An eighteenth-century woman had few legal or economic rights separate from the largess granted by husbands or fathers. As Ian Watt points out, "the legal position of women in the eighteenth-century was very largely governed by the patriarchal concepts of Roman law. The only person who was a *sui juris* was its head, usually the father. A woman's property became her husband's absolutely on marriage; only the husband could sue for divorce" ¹ The woman's role was further delimited by a rigid social code which dictated her sexual and public behavior. Sexually, the code demanded not only chastity but the abdication of her physical desires, at least before marriage. The woman's role was to submit, not to desire or to enjoy. Socially, too, her role was one of submission and dependence; she was not to appear too intelligent, too demanding, or too fully developed as a person. Woman's role, in short, was to reflect masculine glory rather than to display feminine value. Psychologically, the position of woman emerges as more symbolic than actual. She has no real value outside of marriage, and within marriage she functions as a symbol of the maternal, of domesticity, stability, and confinement rather than as a vital force of her own. It is against this background that the position of women emerges in *Robinson Crusoe, Roxana, and Clarissa*, and the tensions created by these rigid restrictions and the rejection of and struggle against them function as major formative devices in each of the novels.

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¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 141.

Considering the feminine role in *Robinson Crusoe* is, in many respects, a paradoxical task since women very seldom appear in the novel. Nevertheless, woman seems to be an implied presence throughout the narrative. In fact, woman as symbol serves as one of the prime motivating factors for Crusoe's repeated pattern of flight.

When Crusoe first leaves home, it is from security, stability, domesticity, and refined civilization that he is fleeing. The elder Crusoe counsels the boy to stay at home, for there he would find that "temperance, moderation, quietness, health, society, all agreeable diversions, and all desirable pleasures, were the blessings attending the middle station of life."² It is this very temperance, quietness, and moderation from which the restless Crusoe repeatedly flees, and these are the forces of civilization of which woman is symbol. That encircling, confining, domesticity of the female, maternal force restricts Crusoe, and he rejects it in an affirmation of the contradictory masculine force of dynamism and freedom. The two dominant images of Crusoe's odyssey are the sea and the island. Both represent freedom, independence, and the dynamic masculine force. Each time he is confined to the shore, domesticity restricts him, and he yearns to break the bonds and be gone. When he is comfortable and thriving on the plantation, he cannot resist the urge to risk one more sea voyage (pp. 33-35), and later, in spite of his misfortune on the island, and in spite of the urging of the spokeswoman for the domestic, the Captain's widow, he is barely dissuaded from escaping again. Indeed, the book ends with yet another flight from hearth and home; "But my wife dying, and my nephew coming home with good success from a voyage to Spain, my inclination to go abroad, and his importunity, prevailed and engaged me to go in his ship to sea as a private trader to the East Indies" (p. 244). The new voyage provides a reiteration of the cycle, man seeking freedom apart from civilization and its confining symbol, woman.

A second, more literal, illustration of the feminine position is found in Crusoe's actual relationships with women. While on the island, there is no indication that he misses female companionship or its sexual concomitants. After his fourth year of solitude, he reflects, "I had neither the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life" (p. 105). As Watt points out, "on his island, Crusoe also enjoys the absolute freedom from social restrictions for which Rousseau yearned — there are no family ties or civil authorities to interfere with his individual autonomy."³ Later, he does condescend to marry, but the whole relationship is summarized as, "not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction" (p. 244). These brusque words give an adequate indication of the position of woman, at least in Crusoe's mind.

Thus, although women themselves play a small part in *Robinson Crusoe*, the symbolic value attached to the role that they play is an

² Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. James Sutherland (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 6. Future quotations are from this edition and will be cited in the text.

³ Watt, p. 86.

important indication of the feminine position. In the first novel, Crusoe, as symbolic of masculine freedom, flees the restricting ties of domesticity, and in the later two, Roxana and Clarissa rebel against the forces that bind them to this confining, subjugated role.

Defoe's last novel, *Roxana*, reveals the opposite side of the question of the position of woman. Unlike Crusoe, the central figure is feminine, and her relationships are distinctly social, revealing the woman's role directly and literally, rather than symbolically. As Martin S. Day observes, Roxana is, in many respects, a "modern" woman;⁴ she is a rebel against the traditional social view of the feminine role. Roxana vehemently rejects that confining domesticity to which women were bound and from which Crusoe fled.

The economic subjugation to which women were restricted and Roxana's eventual defeat of the stereotype are clearly demonstrated by the courtesan's career. It is feminine dependence and the feminine inability to earn a living which render her destitute and helpless in the first place, and it is only through masculine succor that she is saved from starvation and, in turn, launched on her infamous career. This early experience with helplessness in the face of economic disaster leaves Roxana with the determination to win personal security and independence, even if it means a rejection of the traditional feminine role. Watt highlights the economic plight when he declares that Defoe, "dramatized the gravity of the problem in the morally desperate expedient which Roxana is forced to adopt to overcome the legal disabilities of women."⁵ Roxana's rebellion against these financial disabilities is clearly demonstrated by her constant struggle for economic independence, by her shrewd investment and financial management as a "she-merchant," and, most succinctly, by her own declaration in refusing marriage to the Dutch merchant. She argues that, "the very Nature of the Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and everything to the Man, and the Woman was indeed, a meer Woman ever after, that is to say, a Slave."⁶ Roxana, thus, rejects the traditional economic role of woman and prefers to be her own person, financially and socially.

That Roxana rejects the social as well as the financial restrictions of the eighteenth-century code is abundantly clear. By choosing the career of a whore rather than wife, Roxana denies the psychological implication that woman has no value outside of marriage, the sexual implication that woman has no physical desire but that for chastity, and the social implication that woman's role is one of submission. Roxana's denial of the domestic role is illustrated by her repeated refusals of marriage and by her treatment of her children. Though

⁴ Martin S. Day, *History of English Literature 1660-1837* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), III, 223.

⁵ Watt, p. 142.

⁶ Daniel Defoe, *Roxana*, ed. Jane Jack (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 148. Future quotations are from this edition and will be cited in the text.

she repeatedly rewards her consorts with offspring, her attitude toward her progeny is a rather cool maternity. She candidly admits her feelings toward the Dutch merchant's son are less than warm; "I did not love the child nor love to see it" (p. 228), and this attitude is a far cry from the traditional maternal role. That Roxana defies the feminine sexual code is illustrated rather obviously by the career she pursues and facetiously by her declaration to the merchant that "if she had a-mind to gratifie herself as to Sexes, she might entertain a Man, as a Man does a Mistress" (p. 149). Thus, Roxana clearly represents a rebellion against the prevailing position of woman in eighteenth-century England. She rejects the sexual and social role in order to obtain economic independence, and, therefore, denies all of the canons of the feminine code. Her stance is best defined in her own words as she defiantly declaims, "seeing Liberty seem'd to be the Men's Property, I wou'd be a *Man-Woman*; for as I was born free, I wou'd die so" (p. 171).

Clearly, there are manifold differences between Roxana and the divine Clarissa, but in many ways Defoe's courtesan and Richardson's heroine are fighting the same battles. Although their reactions to the situation are different, many of the problems that these two women must face are created by the traditional position of women in society. Willingly or unwillingly Clarissa is, like Roxana, economically, socially, and psychologically at war with the prevailing feminine code.

The subjugation of the female demanded by a patriarchal society is at the core of much of Clarissa's problem. The dominance of the Harlow men, from the elder Uncle John to son James, is demonstrated in almost every speech they make. In their minds, it is clearly the man's role to command and the woman's role to obey. Both Clarissa and her mother reinforce this prerogative, and the words *duty* and *obedience* are continually in their mouth. Even the sprightly Anna Howe defines the feminine role as one of submissive domesticity: "Were the mistress of a family . . . to know how to confine herself within her own respectable rounds of the needle, the pen, the house-keeper's bills, and dairy for her amusement; . . . then would she render herself *amiably* useful, and *respectably* necessary."⁷ Although Clarissa applauds these sentiments, the crux of her problem is found in her father's words, "if you mean to show your duty and your obedience, Clary, you must show it in *our* way; non in *your own*" (I, 78). Herein lies the conflict. Clarissa fully intends to submit to parental authority, as long as her father does not insist that she marry Mr. Symmes, Mr. Mullins, Mr. Wyerley, or the odious Mr. Solmes. In other words, Clarissa is perfectly willing to bow to parental prerogative so long as her father's proposals meet her own conditions. Thus, in

⁷ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1967), II, 118-119. Future quotations are from this edition and will be cited in the text by volume and page.

spite of her repeated assertions to the contrary, it seems that Clarissa's insistence on the right to refuse is at least an indirect rebellion against the accepted role of woman as submissive to masculine rule.

Clarissa's attitude toward woman's role in marriage demonstrates this same paradox. Although Clarissa often reiterates her opinion that a husband should be his wife's master, she places her own conditions on this role, too. Ann Howe declares that Clarissa thinks, "more highly of a husband's *prerogative* than most people do of the *royal* one" (IV, 45), but Clarissa's actions seem to belie this sentiment. She does, indeed, affirm a husband's authority, but only if the husband is worthy of her submission. It is their inability to meet her standards that makes Clarissa refuse both Solmes and Lovelace. In rejecting Solmes, Clarissa declares, "if I am to be compelled, let it be in favour of a man that can read and write — that can *teach* me something; for what a husband must that man make who can do nothing but command; and needs himself the instruction he should be qualified to give?" (I, 56). Later, she refuses Lovelace by declaring, "I think my soul above thee! Thou hast, in mine, a proud, a too proud heart to contend with!" (II, 283). These are hardly the words of a submissive woman, and Clarissa's defiance of the two lovers and her father seems to be a rejection of the feminine social role, at least in the face of masculine failure.

Like Roxana, Clarissa also confronts problems resulting from the economic position of women. A large part of Clarissa's conflicts with her family stem from her grandfather's bequest to her. By leaving his fortune to the youngest female heir, the old man defies the primary economic tenet of the hierarchical, patriarchal society. The economic position of woman is neatly summarized by James, who declares that, "daughters were but encumbrances and drawbacks upon a family" (I, 54), and by making Clarissa financially independent, the elder Harlow challenged this traditional view. Clarissa herself does not directly or consciously defy tradition since she resigns the power of her estate to her father and, even in the midst of severe economic distress, refuses to litigate with him for control. But the fact remains that it is her potential for economic independence that is a prime motivation behind her family's persecution of her. Her Uncle Antony, for example, angrily declares that surely she "would not give them reason to apprehend that she thought her grandfather's favour to her had made her independent of them all" (I, 30). Furthermore, it is this financial independence that supports Clarissa's wish to remain single. She repeatedly argues that her only desire is to retire with her beloved Mrs. Norton to her grandfather's estate. This condition is clearly incompatible with a social code which contends that woman's only value is found within the marriage bonds and that woman must be, not independent, but economically and socially subservient to man. Thus, in spite of her verbal acceptance of the traditional feminine role, Clarissa's economic independence, her desire to remain single, and her refusal to submit to masculine authority, except on her own terms,

all seem to indicate a rejection of the accepted social, economic, and psychological position of women.

The three apparently disparate novels, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana*, and *Clarissa* actually have a great deal in common. All three illustrate the secondary position of women in eighteenth-century society, and each in its own way demonstrates a rejection of this role. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the hero is an embodiment of the masculine view of the code. Here, woman is represented as symbolic of a maternal, confining, civilizing domesticity. It is from these restrictions that Crusoe flees in search of freedom and independence. The domestic world which Crusoe rejects is symbolized by the feminine role which Roxana and Clarissa reject. In *Roxana*, the heroine is seeking economic security plus financial and social independence, but this independence is beyond the scope of the realm circumscribed for woman. Thus, she defies the economic, the social, and the sexual code in order to win freedom. Psychologically, Clarissa's search parallels Roxana's. Richardson's heroine has the potential for economic security and independence, and she is seeking the social freedom to realize this potential. She, of course, does not defy the sexual code in the pursuit of her goal, but she does reject the psychological and social domination of man as prescribed by the tradition. Thus, each of the novels represents a rejection of the restricted eighteenth-century view of the position of woman.

The Music of Sequence: George Moore's *Esther Waters*

by

June O. Underwood °

George Moore's *Esther Waters* defies Victorian expectations of subject and structure. Moore's heroine, Esther, a servant girl who bears and raises to manhood an illegitimate child without suffering the usual novelistic punishment (death) for her sin, is a fixed character, one who does not change or mature to new knowledge within the novel. Moore's deliberate skill in casting an unchanging protagonist as sole interest and narrative focus in an era of multiple plots, talkative narrators and maturing heroines helps bring that era to a definitive end. But Moore depended in part for his success upon the initial expectations of the reader; he depended upon the reader's coming to the realization that this novel was different from the conventional novel.

The traditional Victorian novel took its form from an arrangement in which financial interests specified a particular structure for the novel. Guinevere Griest in discovering the importance of the circulating library in defining novel form says: "The way in which [Victorian] novels reflected the tradition is most readily apparent in their structure. It is obvious also in the use of incident, the tendency to extended description, multiple plots, encouragement of character portrayal, lavish details, and the author's digressions, reflections, or chats with the reader."¹ Publishing the novel in three volumes (the format used by the most important library, Mudie's) meant that the authors of such books were constrained to fill out pages of the novels with some kind of matter. The best novelists, of course, turned this necessity into a virtue.

The material perhaps most acceptable to the public was that which carried action and suspense. And no Victorian novelist was adverse to pleasing his public. Kathleen Tillotson, in *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, quotes Thackeray: "In the days of the old three-volumes novels, didn't you always look at the end, to see that Louisa and the Earl (or the young clergyman, as the case might be) were happy? If they died, or met with other grief . . . I put the book away."² Since books were frequently circulated one volume at a time, the general reader was held in suspense about the final ending until the last volume arrived. And the desirability of maintaining the reader's interest through that last volume, for the profit of library and publisher, is obvious.

° The author is a member of the Department of English at Emporia Kansas State College.

¹ *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Blomington, Indiana, 1970), p. 10.

² (London, 1954), p. 25.

Thus, each volume carried its own rising action, through multiple plots, to keep the reader involved. Tillotson says, "The three-volume form matched a formal literary design; in many novels the structural divisions are as clear as the three acts of play" (p. 23).

Often the novel began its circulation in weekly or monthly serials coming out in the three-volume library edition before the last serial part was published in order to give the circulating library an edge on the market. The effect of serialization is also important to form. Tillotson says, "The suspense induced by 'making 'em wait' was intensified by being prolonged — to see what happened next the reader had to wait a month at a time" (p. 25). The emphasis on suspense, on what happened, was part of the work of major novelists as well as minor ones. Dickens, when he was editor of *Household Words*, had a battle with Mrs. Gaskell over *North and South* because she could not or would not bring her weekly installment to an end at an arresting point.³ For the great authors of the era, the insistence upon a plot full of incident and suspense was not necessarily a hindrance. Again, to cite Tillotson, "It goes without saying that the endings do not deal in the grosser kinds of suspense, familiar in the old film serials. The surprises favoured belong to the refined sort which includes the fulfillment of what has been unconsciously expected" (p. 45). But to George Moore, always in rebellion against what he perceived as standard practices, the possibilities of that kind of novel were dead. While his early novels (*A Modern Lover*, *A Mummer's Wife*, and *A Drama in Muslin*) were conventional, by the late 1880's he evolved new critical stances. In his autobiographical *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) he says: "The successors of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot have no ideal and consequently no language."⁴ The form that was interrupted, to be continued next week or next month, led to jagged, disorganized structures. There were other models to be followed.

The realistic school following on Wagner's footsteps discovered that a novel had much better be all narrative — an uninterrupted flow of narrative. Description is narrative, analysis of character is narrative, dialogue is narrative; the form is ceaselessly changing, but the melody of narration is never interrupted (*Confessions . . .*, p. 158).

Moore evolved critical doctrines which refute suspense laden plots and serialized "make 'em wait" attitudes. He says that prose should move in a "rhythmical progression of events, rhythm and inevitableness" (p. 162) with an "immense harmonic development of the idea; and fugal treatment of the different scenes" (p. 96). A simple method of establishing a sense of inevitability without the melodramatic use of foreshadowing and movement toward a climactic scene is to establish

³ A.B. Hopkins, "Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 9 (August, 1946), 366-76.

⁴ Ed. Susan Dick (Montreal, 1972), p. 172.

recurring patterns. If the patterns are strong enough, the sense of design is achieved without relying upon older devices. He says, "Only by a skillful use of anti-climax may we attain these perfect anti-climaxes. . . . In such great pauses are great stories ended."⁵ Finally, Moore scoffed at stories which held the reader's interest in what was going to happen. He wrote to John Eglinton of a novel he was reading: "You can guess how bad it was when I had to sit up all last night to finish it."⁶

Thus, in *Esther Waters* Moore is reacting to certain kinds of structure in the Victorian novel which he feels are passé; he proposes to replace them by adhering to other forms, derived in great part from the ideas of the French symbolists and naturalists. Concepts of rhythm and form, in conjunction with new subject matter, gave Moore an impetus to create *Esther Waters*.

Esther is an unchanging heroine, the complete focus of attention, serving as a center of consciousness; there is no obviously intrusive narrator to guide or mislead the reader. The novel is a sparse, one-volume affair, with few sub-plots or well-defined characterizations other than Esther. However, Esther is not a Jamesian heroine coming to new awareness and maturity; the drama of the story does not lie within the realm of the maturing protagonist.

Malcolm Brown paraphrases Moore on character:

The writer's job is to reveal in a few simple strokes and at the outset the essence, the complex unity, of each character and to devote himself thereafter to the myriad behavior manifestations of his creation.⁷

Esther's story is one of the endless minute permutations of the life of a servant girl, moving through various situations, with varying successes. She is simple, has a bit of a temper, and some passionate moments; she is devoted to whatever or whomever (employer, husband, son) she is financially or emotionally connected with, and these loyalties give shape to the different periods of her life. Esther is absolutely unconcerned with time; she has little conscience, no reservoir of hidden guilt, and in her absolute "thisness" lies her strength and fascination.

Brown says:

With the disappearance of the drama of the sovereign free will, the focus of attention in Moore's novels fixed upon the unfolding spectacle of the behavior of given characters in given situations, moving through endless permutations.⁸

⁵ George Moore, "Introduction" to *Poor Folk*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Boston, 1894), p. xvi.

⁶ As quoted in Malcolm Brown, *George Moore: A Reconsideration* (Seattle, 1955), p. 211.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 215.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213. While Brown gives Moore extended credit, I feel it is perhaps only in *Esther Waters* that this focus is fully successful.

Esther Waters is carefully worked out to avoid the traditional move toward crisis and climax. There is no dramatic sequence of complication, crisis, and denouement. Instead, Moore uses a repetitive movement, featuring small crises, mostly economic, which are never fully resolved. Esther moves in and out of situations, quitting them when they become too much for her or being fired at the whim of her employer. She can never be sure of having secured a good and/or final position. She holds at least fifteen distinct jobs from age fifteen to thirty; these fifteen do not include those positions which are referred to vaguely, or the times she is between jobs, living in cheap rooming houses or with friends. Each job features its own small or large complication and crisis, but these never form a whole within the novel.

There is no sense of accumulating action within the plot. Esther's jobs do not either become steadily better or steadily worse. Her past is not always the reason for her leaving her position; sometimes she is dismissed on the grounds of her attractiveness; sometimes she quits because the work is too hard or because she does not make enough money. At one point she must go to the workhouse, but this does not form the nadir of her experiences. It becomes simply one more among innumerable experiences. At another time she almost succumbs to prostitution, but finds herself rejecting the possibility without knowing why. The episodes feature certain kinds of crises, but one is not adjunct to any other. They are distinct, separate episodes. The lack of accumulative plot effect could turn the novel into episodic discontinuity; it does not because what we do accrue is a sense of Esther's present-mindedness, her lack of future orientation, her lack of remorse, guilt, foresight, or hope.

With each event being separate, unrelated except by Esther's presence, our sense of Esther's stolidity is enhanced. We are continually having to grant Esther credit for her patience and fearlessness; we must re-evaluate our own expectations in the light of her character. Since the novel does not move to a crescendo, the reader has a sense of violated expectations, of untraditional renderings of a mode he has come to expect will work in certain ways. This violation of our expectations, built up in a century of three-volume novels, is important because it adds an extra tension and drama, that of the reader's recognition, slow but sure, of new modes of structuring events.

Moore's use of the "suspended cadence" (he praises a plot for having "never a full close, always a suspended cadence"⁹) changes our conception of foreshadowing. When Esther refuses to work in her traveling clothes the day she arrives at Woodview, the cook "[turns] her out of the kitchen." This incident closes the chapter. In the next, she awakes remembering her dismissal:

⁹ In speaking of *L'Education Sentimental* in "A Tragic Novel," *Cosmopolis*, 7 (1897), 49-50.

Esther raised her arms as if to cross them behind her head, but a sudden remembrance of yesterday arrested the movement, and a shadow settled on her face . . . Mrs. Latch had closed her kitchen against her and she had to go to her room. Even if they paid her fare back to London, how was she to face her mother? . . . But she had done nothing wrong. Why did the cook insult her?¹⁰

Because the previous chapter ended with Esther's rejection of the cook's demands, our tradition of dramatic structure expects a crisis: The first complication of action within the novel will result in a movement toward some development of plot and character. *Jane Eyre*, for example, has forebodings about her marriage ceremony — and well-founded they are.

Nineteenth-century novel readers are accustomed to chapter breaks which are meaningful in terms of impending events; contemplations like Esther's were meant to build tension. Esther's broodings ought to foreshadow a confrontation, dismissal, consequent degradation, some kind of ultimate triumph or failure. Our expectations are particularly strong because the scene comes at the opening of the novel, immediately after the exposition has been presented and because we are locked into Esther's point of view. In fact, this sense of imminent injustice and impending doom is erroneous. Esther is not dismissed. Moreover, the tension of expectation dissipates slowly, uncertainly, without any sense of finality. It is on page nine that Esther is contemplating the loss of her job; it is on page twenty-eight that we are told that "two or three days passed without anything happening that seemed to point to staying or going." Esther is shown going about her work without the expected martyrdom occurring. The reader's indignation is allowed to disappear slowly. We come gradually to realize that our sense of plot is out of place.

Later, when Esther, burdened with a child and with no job or money, is released from the charity hospital, the workhouse looms as a possibility. She loathes and fears it: "She tried to reconcile herself to the idea that she might do worse than to accept the harsh shelter of the workhouse. Her nature revolted against it" (p. 146). She gets a job as wet nurse but soon discovers that neither her employer, nor the woman who cares for Esther's child, want her to have a living baby: Mrs. Rivers, because Esther's child will distract attention from her own child, and Mrs. Spires, the "baby farmer," because she can charge extra to allow the child to die. When Esther realizes this situation, she quits her job and forcibly removes the child from Mrs. Spires. Without job or shelter, she walks the streets, baby in arms.

¹⁰ *Esther Waters* (London, 1920), p. 9. This edition represents important revisions of the 1894 edition. By 1920 Moore has focused more closely on Esther as sole interest deleting outside plots; he removes the observer narrator and reinforces our sense of Esther as camera by using informal and colloquial speech. Only in the editions which incorporate the revisions through 1920 can a sense of the novel such as I experienced be gained. All further references will be to this edition.

Her heart beat violently, her thoughts were in disorder, and she walked on and on, stopping to ask the way, and then remembered there was no whither she might go unless the workhouse, no matter, any whither . . . Was she to die, she and her child? Why she more than the next one? Why not go to the workhouse for the night? . . . She drew her shawl about her baby and tried once more to persuade herself into accepting the shelter of the workhouse. It seemed strange even to her that a pale, glassy moon should float high up in the sky and that she should suffer; and then she looked at the lights that fell into the river from the Surrey shore, and wondered what had she done to deserve the workhouse. And of all, what had the poor innocent child done to deserve it? If she once entered the workhouse she would remain there. She and her child paupers for ever (p. 166).

Exhausted, at last she stops and dozes in a park; a policeman comes to move her on; she asks the way to the workhouse.

This ends a chapter in which Esther has gone through some very difficult moments and at last has had to succumb to the worst of all possibilities. Yet the workhouse experience, so long dreaded, so thoroughly avoided and thought about, is, at the beginning of the next chapter, dismissed in a couple of sentences. The chapter begins:

Those who came to the workhouse for servants never offered more than fourteen pounds a year, and these wages would not pay for her baby's keep at nurse. Her friend the matron did all she could, but it was always fourteen pounds, till at last an offer of sixteen pounds a year came from a tradesman in Chelsea . . . (p. 169).

There is no more mention of the workhouse.

This swing toward resolution and then the withholding of it suspends the action. There are other places in which such suspensions occur. In Chapter 24, Esther meets Fred's parents and sees them sitting side by side, holding hands. The picture affects her deeply: "The attitude of the old couple was so pregnant with significance that it fixed itself on Esther's mind" (p. 200). Yet there are few other references to the scene or the people involved. One would expect that the poignancy of the picture would occur later to ring in an insistence on Esther's pathetic, isolated state. But the picture is presented and dropped, serving neither for pathos nor irony. Through this partial development, left unresolved, we come to know Esther's peculiar combination of esthetic and moral perceptions, her lack of regret or even conceptualizing about what might have been. She neither anticipates the future nor broods over the past. Poignant moments like the one above are focused upon and then forgotten; the author refuses to resurrect them, since his character does not.

Brown says that Moore's characters "erected a superstructure . . . of courageous rituals of acceptance, which gave rise to the manifold

concrete acts of their existence occupying them from the cradle to the grave" (p. 212). The idea of ritual perhaps comes closest to the sense of rhythm and repetition, of observance of and acquiescence to the moment, found in *Esther*. The "endless permutations" are given form by the ritualistic rhythms and acceptances in the novel. Esther accepts whatever comes to her without rebellion. There are times, as when she is working for the Bingleys, when the work becomes too much for her. She must quit and does so, without much thought. "Once she had spoken, Esther showed no disposition to retract . . ." (p. 174).

After leaving this job, she takes three weeks off, weeks spent very pleasantly, and the incident with the Bingleys is forgotten, just as, when she gains another position, the restful interlude is forgotten. Esther's temperament is such that she exists within the present and neither regrets nor yearns after the past. This insistence upon the present is repeated until we come to expect its reenactment.

When Esther's husband gets involved in horse racing, she accepts his activities in spite of her religion which condemns it. The horses come and go, win and lose, and are, both for her and for the reader, undifferentiated. There are too many; they make only small differences in Esther's life. Even when Esther knows that the racing will bring about the downfall of the tavern and ultimately her husband's death, she accepts it without fuss.

The changes in Esther's life are not felt to be triumphs. Nor are they defeats. She is neither sentimentally nostalgic nor melancholy over past injustice. When she goes back to Woodfield at the end of the novel, she is more comfortable, but not triumphant. Her son causes uneasiness; her mistress may die. There is an acceptance of that situation which is as full but not any more final than the others in the book. The "ritual of acceptance" becomes a prime factor in Esther's character.

There are a number of important thematic strands in the novel which are not worked out consistently or fully. Esther's religious nature is important, as is her joy and hardiness in motherhood, and the debilitating influence of betting on horses. But these strands form no continuous themes.

Thus, many critical studies point out areas of interest in the novel, but overlook the necessity for continuity in thematic structure. Douglas Hughes in his "Introduction" to *The Man of Wax* calls it the moving tale of the "strength of the maternal instinct"; yet there are long sections where we neither see nor hear of Jackie.¹¹ Peter Ure in "George Moore as Historian of Conscience," (*The Man of Wax*, 87-106), calls it a tale of moral conscience with Esther's "Them's my good" being her basic human compassion for those around her, a rejection of moral abstraction. However, Esther has, for the most part, no choice in her manner of living; the struggle is not for virtue but for survival.

¹¹ (New York, 1971), p. xiv.

Gambling is important in the Woodview and King's Head sections of the novel. These two parts compliment one another nicely, one depicting the prosperous appearance of horse-racing, the other the ultimate corruption it entails. But in neither of them do Esther's maternal instincts, which occupy her after she leaves Woodview and before she marries William and is established at King's Head, play a large part. We see and hear very little of Jackie after Esther is established with William.

Esther's religion, perhaps the most continuously pervasive element in her character, has little importance except when she has time for it, when she is not occupied with survival or family. This is not hypocrisy, but acceptance on Esther's part. The acceptance of the immediate, because it is total, repetitious, and elementary, takes on the quality of a ritual.

Thematically, then, Esther never has a religious crisis; she is a good mother but unable to live a life separate from her son. She sees the corruption of gambling, the thieving and suicide brought on by it, yet she does not confront it as a personal issue. When married, she accepts a wifely role, yet returns to independence readily. Her goal is to survive, to do what is immediately necessary, to live as she sees important at that moment. Without abstracting, without future orientation, Esther does not make a continuous strand of themes in her life. The continuity of the novel is supplied by Esther's character through her acceptance of the events of her life; the discontinuity of thematic material is in keeping with that character.

Moore's insistence upon "form" allowed him to control the incidents of the novel without relying on traditional dramatic impact, or on ideas and thematic content. He does so through establishing various kinds of rhythms. E. K. Brown notes (but does not discuss in detail) a "pure case" of rhythm in the novel: "Verbal repetition, complicated, enriched by variation, is used very strikingly."¹² And Moore in his looking for the "rhythmical progression of events, rhythm and inevitableness (two words for one and the same thing)" (*Confessions*, p. 162) indicates how the structure of this particular novel might develop.

Esther moves through a series of positions and relationships, always a dependent, either servant or wife, with her destiny outside her control. The stability-instability cycles of her life recur, the good times alternating with the bad. The three large sections in which she has relative security (Woodview, King's Head, and Woodview) are interspersed with instability, jobs taken and left, episodes quickly forgotten. The all-encompassing circle of her return to Woodview (with its strict verbal repetition) gives finality to the structure. The lack of dramatic tension is displaced by the sense of order and movement, contingent upon accident and fate, but never fatal or irrevocable. The insecurity of Esther's position is balanced by the placidity of her temperament.

¹² *Rhythm in the Novel* (Toronto, 1950), p. 11. Brown has no more discussion than this on the novel.

The secondary characters form a secondary rhythm to the novel which consists of a repetition (with variation) of elements seen in Esther. Sarah and Margaret Gale display temperaments which echo certain aspects of Esther's. Margaret is warm-hearted, impulsive in a rather more good-humoured way than Esther, but still given to rash actions at times; Sarah is susceptible to male flattery. Further, the situations in which Margaret and Sarah find themselves resemble Esther's. Margaret gets into trouble with a male employer and is dismissed from her job. Esther gets pregnant by William and is dismissed. Later, the son of one of her employers attempts to seduce her, and she is fired for his actions. However, Margaret turns to prostitution; Esther resists. Sarah, in getting involved with Bill and the gambling at King's Head, succumbs to the temptations of both and steals and pawns her employer's silver; Esther is tempted to steal money from an employer, but resists. These recurring echoes of elements and situations with the variations they involve generalize, as Esther cannot without seeming self-righteous and self-conscious, the perils of her situation. Even Mrs. Spires, the "baby farmer" who relieves mothers of burdens by relieving babies of their lives, has a small part in the echoing rhythm; Esther, while working at the Bingleys, thinks that the burden of Jackie "wouldn't become lighter, but heavier and heavier" (p. 173). Mrs. Barfield is an elderly shadow of Esther, having married into a horse-racing family while retaining her strict fundamentalist morality. Her family comes to ruin, and the racing and gambling show the corruption which gambling entails. William's gambling ventures at King's Head also bring ruin. Mrs. Barfield's daughter dies of consumption in Egypt; William dies of consumption while betting his last cent in an attempt to go to Egypt. When Esther moves back with Mrs. Barfield, both women have sons who visit them seldom, but cause them anxiety.

At the same time that Moore is working out repetitions of character traits, he is continually working with verbal repetitions.

She was afraid to think; for thinking did no good. She musn't think, but must just work on, washing the bedclothes until she could wash no longer. Wash, wash, all the week long; and it was only by working on till one o'clock in the morning that she sometimes managed to get the sabbath free from washing. . . . She thought of the endless week of work that awaited her in the cellar, the great copper on the fire, the heaps of soiled linen in the corner, the steam rising from the washtub, and she felt she had not enough strength to get through another week or such work (p. 400).

The repetition here of "wash," "think," of the on-going time span "week" is unobtrusive but serves to connect paragraphs and so aids in forming a unified structure.¹³

¹³ Jean C. Noel, *George Moore: L'Homme et L'Oeuvre* (Paris, 1966), pp. 513-24, extensively discusses verbal repetition in *Esther*.

Echoes, balances, symmetry, all act as forming devices on a plot which is episodic and on themes that are discontinuous. Moore has replaced dramatic continuity with structural formalism. In doing so he maintains some tension simply by violating expectation, by having his unintellectual heroine live a rhythmic but undramatic life. The slight monotony of the book is offset by the *tour de force* of fused sensibility which it embodies.

In *Esther Waters* the unchanging characterization controls the techniques of narration, situation, diction, and structure. The rhythmic formalism and fused sensibility the novel displays bring together realism and aestheticism in a wholly new way. Esther does not change and our increasing knowledge of her strength and character, combined with the massive detail and ever-functioning rhythms, gives us a new conception of the novelistic heroine. Esther is both good and static; by employing radical techniques Moore has maintained her as protagonist and perceiver without authorial intervention. The "music of sequence" triumphs over old forms.

A Commentary on
The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight

by

Faye Vowell *

The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight is one of those delightful, almost forgotten, pieces of American literature which one occasionally encounters. The journal itself recounts a trip made by horseback between Boston and New York, with an intermediate stop in New Haven, in the year 1704. But the account is lifted out of the ordinary by the fact that the journey was made by a thirty-eight year old woman. A middle class American woman capable and assertive in her own right, Sarah Kemble Knight contradicts the stereotypes of the delicate female, and the shy, sheltered housewife. She is not only a successful business-woman, but also the mediator in settling her niece's estate, on the pretext of which she makes her journey. Brave, despite her assertions to the contrary, Knight is a truly remarkable woman whose sometime pose of helpless female is belied by her adventurous actions. Madame Knight uses her awareness of the power of words effectively to make a statement about life in colonial New England. Besides its use as an historical document, *The Journal* lays claim to further consideration by its skillful use of personae, its humor, and its vivid backwoods dialect.

Previous critics have given *The Journal*, at best, only a passing reference,¹ and most begin their studies of American humor and its accompanying distinctive idiom with A. B. Longstreet and other Southwestern humorists. Yet an examination of Madame Knight's journal will reveal it to be a closer progenitor of Southwestern humor than Byrd's *Histories of the Dividing Line*, to which it is sometimes compared. In fact, Madame Knight's journal occupies an intermediate point between the works of Byrd and Longstreet in terms of its use of persona, language, and kind of humor. Though Byrd and Knight were contemporary, Byrd is very much the aristocrat striving to impress an absent English audience. Even the audience of his peers, to whom the *Secret History* was directed, operates under these basic assumptions. Thus, Byrd's persona describes the incompetence of the North Carolina surveyors and lazy North Carolina colonials from a superior moral vantage point. The final form of the *History* detaches the persona almost totally from the action, and the entire story is told in his words,

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¹ Walter Blair, *Native American Humor* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1960), p. 4, states, "By contrast two rare frivolous souls of colonial times, Sara Kemble Knight and William Byrd, in their treatment of typical details, foreshadowed American humor." See also Willard Thorp, *American Humorists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 5.

without the intrusion of the "vulgar common speech." In *Georgia Scenes*, Longstreet also uses the framing device of a gentleman narrator, yet he consciously allows his other characters to speak in the vernacular. In addition, the attitude of his narrator toward the lower class is not as derogatory as that of Byrd.

Knight's *Journal* falls somewhere in between and even points the way to later developments. Though the narrator feels definitely superior to many of the people she encounters, she is not at all detached from the action. Neither is she of the nobility. In fact, she is refreshingly middle-class, as revealed in her language and that of the other characters. *The Journal* itself chronicles a journey made to conclude a business deal, and Knight subscribes to the American business ethic in several places. However, she does have certain literary pretensions in common with the upper class, and at times breaks out in passable occasional verse, as well as less literary rhyme. Though her journal reveals a certain English influence, its debt is less than that of Byrd. Rather, the liveliness of her humor and language, with its sprinkling of anecdotes, is clearly related to later American humorists. The most distinguishing facet of her language is perhaps that its humor is not used to make palatable sadism and violence, as Kenneth Lynn suggests is the purpose of Southwestern humorists in *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*. Knight's humor is more in the comedy of manners tradition, directed against herself and others, toward some universal human failing. However, to understand the humor and language of Madame Knight's work, one must look at the journal as a whole and at the different personae she creates.

The historical Madame Knight was known as a teacher, recorder of public documents, and a successful businesswoman. Yet when her journal was first published in 1825, the editor assumed it to be fiction.² The journal itself shows evidence of careful rewriting, obviously from the daily diary, which Knight mentions frequently. There is also a definite indication that the journal was written for an audience, through such "casual" statements as that of an invitation to dine with Governor Winthrop: "I stayed a day here Longer than I intended by the Commands of the Honorable Governor Winthrop to stay and take a supper with him whose wonderful civility I may not omitt."³ Functioning in some ways as a guidebook, the journal also contains such diverse elements as detailed descriptions of the towns of New York and New Haven and points in between, a thumbnail sketch of people and customs in both the towns and the country, a recounting of the horrors of travels, and successful business deals. What better way to express these various subjects than through several personae, or one persona

² A very good article for bibliographical information is Alan Margolies, "The Editing and Publication of 'The Journal of Madame Knight,'" *Bibliographical Society of America Papers*, 58 (1964), 25-32.

³ George Parker Winship, *The Journal of Madame Knight* (New York: Peter Smith, 1935), p. 68. All subsequent references will be to this text.

with different voices for use at different times? This is what Knight has done, using four main roles or voices for her persona: the frightened female traveller, the curious recorder of facts, the acute business-woman, and the superior, and at times sarcastic, commentator.

Knight refers to herself occasionally as a "fearful female traveller" and in the first part of the journal dwells on her fears of the dark night and crossing swift rivers:

The Canoo was very small and shallow, so that when we were in she seem'd redy to take in water, which greatly terrified mee, and caused me to be very circumspect, sitting with my hands fast on each side, my eyes stedy, not daring so much as to lodg my tongue a hair's breadth more on the side of my mouth than tother, nor so much as think on Lott's wife (p. 10)

Sometimes seing my self drowning, otherwhile drowned, and at the best like a holy Sister Just come out of a Spiritual Bath in dripping garments. (p. 11)

She pretends to be repeatedly frightened by her guide with stories of coming dangers, yet her fear is almost always undercut with humorous allusion, as well as by the confident tone in other places. For instance, Madame Knight, though thirty-eight years old in an age when life expectancy was not much greater, sets off on a journey on October 2 at three in the afternoon, hardly a time of the year or the day to expect easy travelling. She chooses to journey on after dark to reach a self-appointed goal. Subsequent timorousness on her part seems a bow to convention, especially when far greater danger of being lost in a snowstorm later confronts her and she betrays no fear at all. She simultaneously assumes the pose of gentlewoman accepted by society, and deflates it through the vigor of her actions. She is no helpless, sheltered lady; rather she is a new breed of American woman, equally capable of caring for himself and of posing as a "fearful female" when it furthers her purpose.

This conventional guise also gives her the opportunity to compose some verses to "Fair Cynthia" and to speak in rather elevated language that seems out of place when contrasted with the other voices. "Now was the Glorious Luminary, with his swift Coursers arrived at his Stage, leaving poor me with the rest of this part of the lower world in darkness . . ." (p. 11). But here, again, Knight is only manipulating an accepted poetic pose, while her actions burlesque it. When at the end of her journey she desires "sincearly to adore [her] Great Benefactor for thus graciously carrying forth and returning in safety his unworthy handmaid" (p. 72), the reader again senses an acquiescence to literary tradition in the style and imagery. Thus, the guise of "fearful female traveller," with equal emphasis on the *fearful* and the *female*, is useful when Knight is being consciously literary and is quite undercut when contrasted with the other voices.

The voice to which it is most directly antithetical is the many-faceted one of the businesswoman or woman of affairs. Knight chooses what time and with whom she will travel, bargaining with her guide for a good price. Further, though she has gone to settle the inheritance of a relation, she snaps up a chance to make a profit on a quick deal herself:

Mr. Burroughs went with me to Vendue where I bought about 100 Rheem of paper w^{ch} was retaken in a flyboat from Holland and sold very Reasonably here – some ten some Eight shillings per Rheem by the Lott w^{ch} was ten Rheem in a Lott. (p. 52)

At times, Knight foreshadows the modern American business ethic in her standard of morality: correct conduct in business matters overrides other concerns, even religion. In a comment about the people of New York she says, "They are not strict in keeping the Sabbath as in Boston and other places where I had bin, But seem to deal with great exactness as farr as I see or Deall with" (p. 54). And like a good business woman she refuses to be deflected from her purpose, no matter what the inconvenience (p. 67). This sense of purpose and dispatch becomes more noticeable toward the latter part of the journal. Days become condensed and less attention is given to humorous detail. It is as if, nearing the end of her business, Knight wishes to wrap things up and get them out of the way.

Knight's third guise as the curious recorder of facts is quite compatible with that of the businesswoman; in each she takes a practical view of the world around her, carefully observing and recording all relevant details. The persona of recorder of facts is most dominant after the arrival in New Haven, since from this point the focus of the journal seems to change. Heretofore, the narrative has focused on the hardships of the journey and the oddities of the rural people encountered; now, more attention is given to manners and customs in an urban setting, the first evidence of which is Knight's description of New Haven. Anxious that neither she nor the reader misses a detail, she discusses law, religion, customs such as Lecture days – Election Day, Training Day, marriage customs, food, the Indian question, and merchant practices. Moreover, like a good logician, she states first the good points, then the bad. The tone throughout is informative and casual. At no time does the reader wonder about Knight's opinion of these things, for she repeatedly interjects her comments with humorous asides and anecdotes.

This thorough, opinionated inquisitiveness is apparent in her description of New York. There, she even notes the architectural details of the houses in comparison with those in Boston. On the return trip from New York, she comments on many of the small villages, which she had ignored before. No vestige of the "fearful female traveller" remains as she assesses the scene before her. "This is a very pretty place,

well compact, and good handsome houses, Clean, good and passable Rodes, and situated on a Navigable River, abundance of land well fined and Cleerd all along as wee passed" (p. 59). Thus, the latter part of the journal becomes a very factual travel book or guide book to that part of the country, though it is still leavened with humor.

The final, probably most delightful, voice is that of a superior, sarcastic commentator who comments on and participates in the action. The most pervasive and, thus, most fully developed, this voice binds the others together with the characteristic humor and viewpoint of a sophisticated city woman, passing judgment on country bumpkins. An instance of this observation is seen from the very beginning when she characterizes some tavern drinkers as "being tyed by the Lipps to a pewter engine" and slyly describes the figure of the guide as "a Globe on a Gate post." Perhaps it is Knight's very human annoyance with apparent stupidity that so appeals to the reader. For example, she expresses this annoyance in pithy terms when a dull-witted country wench is slow to give her food and lodging at a tavern:

Miss star'd awhile, drew a chair, bid me sitt, And then run upstairs
and putts on two or three Rings, (or else I had not seen them before,)
and returning, sett herself just before me, showing the way to
Reding, that I might see her Ornaments, perhaps to gain the more
respect. But her Graman's new Rung sow, had it appeared, would
have affected me as much. (p. 7)

In language at once vivid and concrete, Knight deflates the girl's attempt to impress her; her use of the "sow" comparison is especially insulting because it is directed from one woman to another. But to fully understand the effect of this voice one must also examine the type of humor and the idiom used to create it. This passage demonstrates one of the ways humor surfaces in the *Journal* and agrees with Kenneth Lynn's description of frontier humor, "the humor [is] the vernacular and the vernacular [is] the humor."⁴ In using this persona to tell numerous anecdotes and relate the incidents of the journey, the author reveals her awareness of the power of words and her ability to manipulate them.

Knight's vivid description of the way merchants do business in Connecticut makes the reader feel he is present at the scene. Her language is graphic, if not too flattering, and the words the country bumpkins speak reinforce and complete the picture. Yet one is also aware of the regional tension in her portrayal, critical of both classes of people from Connecticut:

Being at a merchants house, in comes a tall country fellow,
with his alfogeos full of tobacco; for they seldom Loose their Cudd,
but keeping Chewing and Spitting as long as they'r eyes are open,

⁴ Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown & Co., 1959), p. 31.

. . . At last, like the creature Balaam Rode on, he opened his mouth and said: have You any Ribenin for Hatbads to sell I pray?
 . . . Bumpkin Simperts, cryes its confounded Gay I vow. (p. 42)

The bumpkin's female counterpart does not fare much better. Knight's tendency to make names descriptive is apparent in the characterization of "Jone Tawdry" who "curtsees" fifty times before she speaks and then speaks in an awed, ignorant tone: "Law you . . . its right Gent, do You, take it, tis dreadful pretty" (p. 43). These portraits, together with those of the other rustic Knight encounters, create the figure of the typical New England bumpkin, the ancestor of the archetypal Yankee.⁵ Yet Knight is also quick to point out that they only lack education, "for these people have as Large a portion of mother witt, and sometimes a Larger, than those who have bin brought up in citties" (p. 43). Cohen and Dillingham's description of Southwestern humor well applies to this situation:

When the narrator abandoned his gentlemanly pose and made the characters themselves speak, he was laying the foundation for a new style in American writing. Rich in similes, metaphors, and in exaggerations, this backwoods language is characterized by concreteness, freshness and color.⁶

Knight's narrator, rather than her characters, most forcefully exhibits this kind of concrete, fresh language. In addition, she clearly points the way to this treatment of humor through her manipulation of dialect, long before Longstreet, who is more popularly seen as the originator.

Along with the creation of comic stereotypes and usage of common speech, Knight uses certain words and images which comment on the prejudices and concerns of her time. Religion is often a tool used to produce the mocking, humorous tone so pervasive in the journal. The Quakers are twice an object of derision. Once, describing a locquacious hostess, Knight says, "I began to fear I was got among the Quaking tribe, beleeving not a Limber tong'd sister among them could out do Madm. Hostes" (p. 3). She speaks of the hostess "catechis'ing" John for going with her, and doubts the truth of her "Call" to fulfill this mission.

In her later description of the towns, Knight invariably comments on the church and on how the inhabitants keep the Sabbath. The villagers of Fairfield receive her special attention. She notes they are

⁵ For discussions of the Yankee figure in early American literature see Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of National Character* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931), pp. 12, 14; Jennette Tandy, *Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), p. 2; and Walter Blair, pp. 8, 9.

⁶ Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham, *Humor of the Old Southwest* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1964), p. xvii.

"litigious" and do not agree with their minister. "They have abundance of sheep, whose very Dung brings them great gain, with part of which they pay their Parsons sallery. And they Grudg that, preferring their Dung before their minister" (p. 63). As a kind of divine retribution, she notes they get their comeuppance; they were "once Bitt by a sharper who had them a night and sheared them all before morning." Here, the stereotype of the thrifty Yankee who makes use of everything rises to the surface, as Knight illustrates the popular moral that scoundrels tend to get what they deserve.

Knight is also quite free in her allusions to the devil, who is not the same object of awe and terror as early Pilgrims imagined him. In an extended rather labored metaphor, she compares a bad innkeeper to Satan, thus rendering them both ridiculous. "I questioned whether we ought to go to the Devil to be helpt out of affliction. However, like the rest of Deluded souls that post to ye Infernal dinn, Wee made all posible speed to this Devil's Habitation" (p. 20). In these casual references to religion and her uses of religious metaphor, Knight typifies the attitude of the common New Englander, of whose carelessness or laxness one is not too aware when reading only the religious treatises of the time.

Another interesting detail revealed through Knight's use of language is the New Englander's prejudice toward the English, the Negro, and the Indian. Understandably perhaps, all connected with the Indian is deplorable to her, and the very word *Indian* becomes pejorative. Poor food is described as "Indian fare," a poverty stricken backwoodsman is described as "an Indian-like animal [who] . . . makes an Awkerd Scratch with his Indian shoo" (p. 25). Indian customs are disparaged and the English censured for emulating them in their practice of divorce. The Black also comes in for his share of indictment, and, again, the English are tainted by an association with them.

. . . too Indulgent (especially ye farmers) to their slaves: sufering too great familiarity from them, permitting y^m to set at Table and eat with them (as they say to save time,) and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand.

This intolerant attitude toward those who differ from her in class or race is probably a clue to an understanding of one of the several anecdotes Knight tells:

A negro Slave belonging to a man in y^e Town, stole a hogs head from his master, and gave or sold it to an Indian, native of the place. The Indian sold it in the neighbourhood, and so the theft was found out. Thereupon the Heathen was seized, and carried to the Justices House to be Examined. But his worship (it seems) was gone into the feild, with a Brother in office, to gather in his Pompions. Whither the malefactor is hurried, And Complaint made, and

satisfaction in the name of Justice demanded. Their Worships can't proceed in form without a Bench: whereupon they Order one to be Immediately erected, which, for want of fitter materials, they made with pompions – which being finished, down setts their Worships, and the Malefactor call'd, and by the Senior Justice Interrogated after the following manner. You Indian why did You steal from this Man? You sho'dn't do so – it's a Grandy wicked thing to steal. Hol't Hol't cryes Justice Junr Brother, You speak negro to him. I'le ask him. You sirrah, why did You steal this man's Hoggshead? Hoggshead? (replys the Indian,) me no stomany. No? says his Worship; and pulling off his hatt, Patted his own head with his hands, sais, Tatapa – You Tatapa – you; all one this. Hoggshead all one this. Hah! says Netop, now me stomany that. Whereupon the Company fell into a great fitt of Laughter, even to Roreing. Silence is comanded, but to no effect: for they continued perfectly Shouting. Nay, sais his worship, in an angry tone, if it be so, *take mee off the Bench.* (pp. 34-36)

This anecdote is interesting for several reasons. On the surface, it is a naive and rather crude joke, yet with closer scrutiny, it becomes something else. It reveals prejudice against the Indian and Black, but also a refreshing ridicule of authority. The participants are an Indian, a Negro, and two white Judges. The Negro and Indian are the stock dishonest, sly characters. Surprisingly, they are presented in a better light than the judges and could even be said to triumph in this joke. The two judges are out in the field gathering pumpkins when they are called upon to render a decision. Yet, like the two generals in *Catch-22* who know they have no authority without their badge of office, they build a bench of pumpkins. Like typical lawyers, each has his own idea of how to proceed, and each only succeeds in making himself a laughing-stock. In comparison with the lowest members of society, these justices are made to seem even more ridiculous.

The effect of this joke is totally dependent on word play, emphasizing, again, Knight's manipulation of language. The Indian does not know the meaning of "Hoggshead," and the pantomime of the judge make him believe that the judge is referring to his own head as a Hoggshead (perhaps the first pig joke in our history). Yet there is a nice discrimination between types of language, also. The first judge is interrogating the Indian incorrectly because he is "speaking Negro" to him, "it's a Grandy wicked thing to steal." The junior judge thinks he will succeed by speaking what he considers to be Indian to him. Since he has to pantomime part of the action, his opinion of the Indian's mentality is quite low. "Tatapa – You, Tatapa – you; all one this. Hoggshead all one this." The justice reacts the way one would to a foreigner and tries to make him understand by loudly repeating the words, which in this case sound like bad TV Indian dialogue. Perhaps this comic stereotype is also older than heretofore imagined.

Thus, humor for Sarah Kemble Knight becomes a vehicle to express her view of reality. Language is the medium to convey the humor, and she effectively experiments with language, with the use of the vernacular, to portray her view of life in colonial New England. Unconsciously or consciously, she reveals an attitude toward religion and toward business which is closer to that of Ben Franklin than that of the Mathers; her language reveals the sectionalism already surfacing in New England, especially in her criticism of the Connecticut colony. Furthermore, in her use of anecdote and concrete language she lays a foundation for the stereotypical Yankee and creates a persona with four distinct voices.

The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight is not great literature, yet it is worthy of more consideration than it has been given in American literary history. Its social considerations are just as important as its historical ones. *The Journal* gives an insight into the life of a colonial woman who defies stereotype. She is cultured enough to be aware of society's genteel expectations of woman and of English poetic traditions, while she is practical and American enough to reject them when they do not suit her. She also reveals of independence of women in America, both in the realm of finance and of adventure. She is, indeed, a representative of the "liberated woman," in a time and place where we expect no liberation.