BEING VERY CAREFUL
Gertrude Stein's Narrative Constructions of Self-Identification

Emily Ambash

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Bryn Mawr College Department of English

In *The World Is Round* and *Ida*, Gertrude Stein pairs storytelling with the construction of identity, showing the ongoing relationship between the formal elements of a story and their creation. These books feature characters for whom self-identification becomes not only a quest within the story but also a gesture toward Stein's authorial control and toward the false nature of any constructed character. As a commentary on the power of storytelling – the power both to create a character and to play out that character's conscious attempts at controlling her identity – Stein's continuous coupling of a narrative and the process of its creation results in work that demonstrates its own formation, telling the story of how a story about self-telling tells itself.

BEING VERY CAREFUL: GERTRUDE STEIN'S NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

> What is it that you like better than anything else, he asked and she said. I like being where I am. Oh said he excitedly, and where are you. I am not here, she said, I am very careful about that.
>
> – Gertrude Stein, *Ida* (29)

1. INTRODUCTION

Gertrude Stein's writing, known for both openness and inscrutability, emphasizes the methodology of writing and storytelling as a means of constructing and controlling identity within a narrative. Her work, called "a demonstration of possibilities of grammar for democracy" and exemplified by "spacious, living sentences" (Dydo 17), cannot be easily categorized or interpreted, primarily because Stein's methods insist on the ongoing relationship between process and product. As a result, the creation of a story is necessarily an integral key part of it and any self-awareness it demonstrates stands out a manipulation by its author. In Stein's novels, the internal and external parts of a narrative are intertwined as a result of Stein's emphasis on the process of writing. I see in her fiction a symbiotic, double-sided method of creation that creates little distinction between the various levels of the work. Process and product, subsequently, often seem to be one and the same, as Stein – or her various first-person narrators – often comments didactically on a work as she writes it. Irrationality and unpredictability make the form stand out, but it also highlights the irreverence of Stein's content, the meaning of which often depends on its relationship to the form. Instead of masking authorial intentions or stylistic devices, Stein constantly tells a story of storytelling through the process of writing. As a writer and theorist, she insists on the inter-, intra-, and extra-textual relationship between her writing and its formation. Recognition of Stein's emphasis on the transparent relationship between process and product leads me to propose that in her narratives focused on a single female character, such as *Ida* and *The World Is Round*, Stein expresses the definition and

evolution of that character's identity by using the character's search for it as a hinge connecting form and content.[1]

The process of the writing's creation and analysis stands out as an entryway into understanding the odd distinction between Stein's inconsistent style and her consistent interest in stylistic innovation. In looking at the body of criticism related to her authorial intentions, however, I cannot help noticing a strong emphasis on contextual, historical, or political analysis. With few exceptions, Stein's aesthetic intricacies have been taken as parts of larger social or thematic contexts: modernism, feminism, war, semiotics. Stein's texts lend themselves to poststructuralism by challenging accepted views of the relationship between the signifier and the signified; Stein's views on nouns, verbs, and conjunctions certainly take issue with more conservative analyses of language and meaning-making. Why not relate her to Derrida's interpretations of grammar, to Kristeva's semiotics, to Foucault's questions of textual authority? Her work sometimes seems to be trying to get to something deeper in the wake of war, to be trying out new stylistic tricks so as to find new and purer meaning – does that make her a modernist? Does the level of innovation instead suggest early versions of the postmodern? Critics' placement of her alongside Cubists also fits, since we know Stein had a close relationship with Picasso and Cézanne and shared many of their formative ideas.

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[1] These terms have a complicated history of usage in literary criticism, definition, and theory. "Form" is often separated into two sections – internal form or "style," which describes the literary devices employed within a work, such as metaphor and character, and to the patterns among them, and a larger type of "form" that describes the overall structure of a narrative and the way it creates meaning. For the purposes of creating a distinction between the *way* Stein writes and the actual story told (i.e., its plot, action, events), I will use the term "form" to refer to the manifestations, both obvious and implicit, of Stein's methodology: the shape of the story, the narrative voice and presence of the narrator, the transitions and framing structures used. Recognizing that theorists have struggled with the difference between "form" and "content," I will employ these terms only to show that for Stein they *do not* have a binary relationship. This vocabulary will be useful in order to distinguish Stein's methodology (the evident effects and designs of which can be designated as the "form") from the seemingly more passive or intransitive portions of her writing. Any use of these words is, however, acknowledged to be contestable and vague and to highlight, not dismiss, the confusing mediation of a text between author and reader. I intend to underscore that problem as it relates to my analysis of Stein's narrative constructions if identity. Since the genealogy of form is not by itself the focus of my study, which I must limit in scope, I will avoid further elaboration on the subject. See bibliographical entries for Moore, Richardson, and Margolin for critical examination of form independent of Stein studies.

Yet tying Stein to such specific contexts may run the risk of discarding essential components of her work. She stands out as a writer for whom the writing process itself often seems to be the *point* of what is written. An emphasis only on the relationship between the work and its external contexts neglects the writing's self-promoted blurring of internal and external boundaries. Understandably, however, a strictly formalist approach to Stein's writing does not seem particularly useful – not when she herself constantly insists, in lectures and essays, on having a place in twentieth-century literature, not when her legacy is determined primarily by her social life and its relation to modernist art and writing, and not when her so varied use of form tends to defy overall characterization. To look at her form in a vacuum not only might seem fruitless and difficult; it might also be a misguided goal, given that Stein's body of work is not limited to one type or genre of writing and bears no singular, obvious style.

Is it even possible to look at form independently of its external connections – especially given Stein's very well-known historical context? Moreover, why try? It *does* work to bring Stein into certain contexts, both in terms of reaching some understanding of her work and in terms of illuminating the circles with which she is compared. If Stein's fractured, fragmented sentences and her critiques of punctuation marks can be cited as precursors to postmodernism, should her intentions even matter? To go a step further, perhaps the categories we have invented more recently – in the wake of new work and newer theories – can help explain older work, like Stein's, retrospectively. The author's intentions may not have been decipherable using early-twentieth-century terms, but the interests and goals of new-millennium writers may prove relevant to understanding earlier writers like Stein. And why should we care whether, for example, Stein supported women or not, if her writing itself *can* be used in feminist critiques? As her characters come to find their identities in shaky worlds with unfamiliar grammar and

seemingly nonsensical language, can we not say that they are also finding their femininity, that they are also representing women outside of the text? Even focusing on certain of the works' external ties, like those related to women's social history or those related to structuralism, at the exception of others (to categorize too narrowly instead of not at all) does prove useful.

To try to explain the work using its internal elements instead of its context, Stein's own explanations may prove useful, since Stein herself expounds on writing – whether her own or more generally – both in terms of its product and in terms of its development. Touted as the conceiver of the "stream of consciousness" style, she refers to her works' nonlinear time as a "continuous present." Instead of placing things in linear narrative structures, Stein talks of "beginning again." She denounces question marks and commas, calling them superfluous and redundant: "A question is a question, anybody can know that a question is a question and so why add to it the question mark when it is already there when the question is already there in the writing" ("Poetry and Grammar" 129). Citing her dog's lapping of water as a source of rhythm and an understanding of grammar, she claims, in her lectures, to write in the present tense, from ongoing stimuli, from watching and listening and taking everything in. For Stein, thought is inseparable from writing; the process of writing *is* a process of experiencing life.

Why is her own theoretical writing (if it can be branded theoretical writing, given her own treatment of it as equal to fiction) not enough to settle the disputes and place her for once and for all in a certain temporal spectrum of criticism or analysis? I suspect that one reason Stein's writing lends itself both to an extreme openness of interpretation and also to a certain opaqueness and reluctance to categorization is that Stein's interests lie more in the process of writing than in the eventual analysis of its product. Stein discusses and demonstrates care for the present – not for the reader, who might see things as happening in real time, but for the writer,

who achieves not naturalistic mimesis but instead a reality digested and composed in the moment of its creation. Perhaps the weird distinction between Stein's seeming transparency – with a first-person narrator often suggesting that things should seem simple – and her admitted opaqueness – with most book covers and critics including a preface or disclaimer that forgives Stein's "difficulty" – comes from the fact that Stein's formulation of being real, accurate, or true differs from others'. Instead of achieving naturalism by trying to align her writing to existing narrative structure, convention, or voice, Stein focuses on being true to what she writes, the success of which she determines by *how* she writes it. The physical and mental acts of writing both contribute to that process, so that the diegetic elements of the writing cannot be easily distinguished from the non-diegetic elements. The things inside the writing (the story, the content, the narrative) are not, for Stein, separate – in their formation, in their intention – from the frame that houses them or the language that conveys them. This intertwining of form and content makes analysis of Stein's writing a challenge: how can one avoid relegating Stein's work to clear categorization or alignment with theoretical underpinnings but at the same time avoid saying that it bears no analytical substance or that the clarity of Stein's own process is inaccessible?

Looking at a specific theme might help open up Stein's methods. I am particularly interested in how Stein treats feminine identity, not because I want to know whether or not she counts as a feminist but simply because her narrative work often does center around a female protagonist and I want to know how that semantic element interacts with the formal (syntactic, structural, physical) elements of the work. I wonder to what extent Stein's interest in identity formation – which is inarguably a major element of much of her work, both fictional and theoretical – is tied up in her ideas about writing. Stein displays an interest in geography, with

the women in her books (and not only the women) moving, relocating, wandering, searching. How does the form of the book demonstrate this interest – or is the perceived interest just an inference based on a manifestation of form?

I want to know if Stein's women find their identity by working with or against the worlds in which they live – and, to a larger extent, the forms in which they exist. Does Stein treat character the way she treats writing? How does she treat the process of life? Given her avoidance of linear narrative, I want to know whether she is interested in accuracy or naturalism when it comes to identity creation. Does representing the "present" of her writing translate to a representation of a character's own present life? Is the character, by contrast, nothing but a figment of the writing, another element, like the format or vocabulary? What about Stein's obsession with names – names of people, places, things? Is she simply harkening back to her love of nouns, in focusing on names, or can we find out more about her writing process by looking at names both as a challenge to an identity and as a necessary adjunct of it? Characters like the subject of *Ida* change names, have multiple names, and give names. Characters like Rose in *The World Is Round* deal with the nominative nature of their names and continuously question whether a name relates at all to an identity, especially a still-forming one. Can a name lead to an identity, or does a name exist only once it has an identity to which to point? Do these specific, internal, formal elements of Stein's writing help explain the writing from an outside perspective?

These questions come back, circularly, to a question always at stake in looking at Stein's narrative writing: how does Stein's formation of form and content relate to how she deals with identity? The relationship between a name and a noun seems much more problematic for Stein than the relationship between form and content, which are assumed to be intertwined. How,

then, does the interdependent form-content relationship, and the writing process as a whole, help highlight the contrasting *difficulty* of the identity-to-name relationship? The theme of identity, if traced through a specific context (not just narrative, not just stylistic), can both benefit from and help demonstrate the usefulness of looking at Stein's process, with its emphasis on the way form and content coexist in the formation of a written work.

As one example, I will analyze a book called *The World Is Round*, which has been referred to as a children's book because it was written for Stein's young neighbor in France, because it features a young child as its main character, and because its design, illustration, and narration share a playful, colorful style. The book will help ground my exploration of how Stein combines the internal, semantic elements of a narrative with its stylistic components – and how both of those factors relate to outside contexts, literary or historical. The author's emphasis on the writing process shows itself in the book both through the use of a somewhat transparent narrator, one that steps in using the first person during an otherwise third-person narrative, as well as through the book's seeming self-awareness. For example, the narrator often hints at the physical nature of the written product: when a lion stops being used as a major plot element, Stein writes, "The end of Billie the lion" (30), recalling familiar ending devices of stories or books while actually continuing her own story. By gesturing toward conventional narratives, Stein shows how she is *processing* her process of writing: by integrating it as a key factor of the product. Her authorial intentions further present themselves at Billie's end by showing an awareness of the physical book, with the rest of the page (in editions illustrated by Clement Hurd) occupied by the rear ends of two lions, one a darkened shadow of the other (30), the illustrated *end* of a lion.

The book's self-evident playfulness and awareness of the complicated relationship between form, content, and authorship is intriguing particularly because of the way it affects the theme of identity. In *The World Is Round*, a little girl named Rose tries to figure out how to define herself and feel in control of her own identity. Her identity is so closely tied to what she knows *as a character*, however, that any sense of control over it automatically stands out as a gesture toward authorial control and manipulation. When she sings, "*And why is my name Rose*" (3), one must remember to define her not (or not only) as a confused prepubescent girl but also as a constructed character, something named by the author. Her questions of identity present themselves as literary questions, but that does not make them seem insincere, since, as a literary creation within a literary frame, Rose *does* live, breathe, and question things. Stein constantly reminds readers, however, that Rose *is* a literary creation – one that not only feels a lack of control but also quite literally can never have control (cannot live, breathe, question, *or* self-identify). This technique allows Stein to comment both on character, a diegetic element of storytelling that is of necessity also connected to non-diegetic, external factors of writing, and also on this particular character's goal, identity-making, as a constructed idea. The author's constant gesturing toward the writing process and toward the stylistic elements employed in creating Rose help show that Rose is part of a story, therefore showing that Rose's quest for identity is always going to be a story – and, perhaps, that identity *always* is a story. The book's extreme awareness of itself as a book provides a way of looking at control over identity by comparing it to the way an author tells, or creates, a story.

If, in focusing on a little girl's quest for some sort of self-identification, *The World Is Round* uses the process of writing to talk about both writing and identity construction, then Stein's later novel *Ida* goes a step further: it takes a different perspective on identification and

storytelling, showing not just why identity is a story but also how it functions. In *Ida*, the main character is a mature woman who maintains a sense of control over her identity – and yet Stein's emphasis on the writing process again makes the narrative (or the narrator) a constant reminder of Ida's role as a constructed character who has no real control over what the author is doing.[2] Ida constantly moves through society, attempting to prevent others from understanding her, insisting on her own self-interpretation. The narration ties these strategic attempts at controlling identity to a commentary on styles of storytelling, hinting at literary conventions even while describing Ida's personality: "Ida never said once upon a time" (132). By using Ida's attempts at self-control as gestures toward the role of the story in which Ida exists, the narrator undermines any possibility that Ida will gain control or that readers will forget her "constructed" quality.

The book therefore becomes an examination of the challenge of identifying oneself (by showing that there are always external factors placing identification on someone) as well as a look at the use of identity as a point of control within storytelling. The narrator's ability to comment on Ida's identity as more than identity – to relate it to literary conventions, to fairy tales, to fictional stories – shows that the narrator possesses a perspective on Ida's construction that Ida herself lacks. Since the fact that Ida lacks perspective over her own role as a character in a story is made evident to readers, however, her own attempts at self-identification *within* that story do not lack grounding; they simply must be understood within the constraints of storytelling. Storytelling here becomes not just a literal and literary enactment of the search for identity – as in *The World Is Round* – but also a multifaceted tool that the book uses to comment

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[2] The character of Ida pops up several times in the history of Stein's writing, which further confuses and complicates the identity at stake in the novel. Along with earlier versions and revisions of what would come to be the book, there exist remnants of Ida in "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights," a play Stein wrote during the same time period. Recycled bits of the language and the name, which in the play becomes Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, hint toward hindrances to self-identification there as well. To make the character's so-called identity even vaguer, much of the sing-song language, curiosity, and questioning ("Am I I," "Where oh where is there," "Why am I") that happens in the novel and the play can be seen earlier as a key quality of Rose in *The World Is Round*.

on social constructions. By making the fact that identity is not really real in the real world a given (readers receive from the narrator the immediate knowledge that Ida is a character), Stein comments on storytelling as a tool for *perceiving* control over identity.

The narratives of *Ida* and *The World Is Round* provide different perspectives on, or ways of interpreting, Stein's methodology – primarily because that methodology becomes, itself, a comment on identity-making. Each story focuses on the creation of identity through narration and constantly reveals itself as dependent on the author's control over form and content. As a result, the transparent quality of the storytelling helps demonstrate the constructed nature of identity and the use of narrative in shaping the construction of an identity (or identity-story).

2. THE ROUNDNESS OF ROSE

In *The World Is Round*, Stein sets up form and content as interdependent elements that constantly struggle with one another, with the main character held in the balance. The book raises questions about conventionality, gender, and control over storytelling. Critically, the story has often been analyzed in terms of its overlaps with feminist and semiotic theories, particularly because of Stein's combination of a unusual, nonlinear form and, at the end, events that hint at an acceptance of social and narrative contentions. Franziska Gygax, author of *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein*, relates Rose's shaky relationship with roundness to the common fear of female sexuality. The odd transition from childhood to adulthood (womanhood) manifests itself, in Rose and through the form of the book, as an uncomfortable acceptance of a changing identity – in this case, an identity clearly marked as a creation of the author. The form of the book feels inevitable, since it includes elements of a children's fairy tale, thus immediately setting up expectations in the reader. "A children's world is created," explains Gygax, "but at the same time there are statements that provoke questions also aimed at adults" (124), such as those about

the relationship between name and identification. Gygax says that for Rose the importance of language – one of the scariest manifestations of roundness – is that reconciling language with self-identification represents Lacan's "mirror stage" moment in a child's life. To see her round mouth disturbs young rose, but one assumes that retrospectively she will see it as the moment when she "acquir[ed] identity through language" (126). This explanation helps situation Rose's conflict of language within her larger problem of roundness; seeing her own language relegated to physical roundness confuses Rose, who, as a child, cannot yet identify herself using language (she does not benefit from explaining her name using her name alone; she sees little in the statement "Rose is a Rose") but also constantly feels the need to explain her identity through words. Since both Rose and the words she utilizes fall under the maneuverings of the author of the book in which they both exist, the character's confusion over how to identify herself using words takes on another level of significance.

For Gygax, Stein's focus on Rose's struggle to understand who she is represents confusion over budding sexuality; she sees Rose's newfound confidence in language as an acceptance of her femininity. Carving her name around a "tree with its phallic connotation" produces a circle – here "representing the female circle/cycle" (127) – a new meaning, so that when Rose takes on her *own* definition of roundness she does so in order to approach her *own* roundness. She is not merely accepting her name; she is also finding a new level of self-confidence despite the confusing round and phallic elements around her. Instead of fearing roundness, she decides to adopt it – to set it against something else, instead of herself against it. Although Gygax's insistence on the phallic nature of the tree and the femaleness of Rose's carved name may be a stretch, it nevertheless helps show how Stein's combination of form and content – using physical things to represent language, using the ending of the book to tie it back

to the beginning, melding Rose's journey with the consistently round form of the book – can be easily relegated to interpretation. Gygax works the ending of the story into her formulation of gender identity by saying that the "structural happy ending" is contradicted somewhat by the mood of it; that by *needing* Willy at the end of the book Rose loses some of the independent identity she has gained (as a character, whose independence is, here, evidently false). "Rose has accepted the world's roundness as it were," says Gygax, "and has overcome a tremendous struggle of self-doubt, but the sadness about her identity remains" (128). In other words, the content continues to undermine the form, even when the story ends.

Even if one ignores the function of gender in the book, one can still see that the relationship between form and content is characterized by constant fluctuation. Language, in particular, works both to tie form to content and also to separate the two elements of the story. In her essay on identity in *The World Is Round*, Dana Rust suggests that even the elements of stability (like the name she carves into the tree) and linearity (like the lists of animals she sees or the one-two, green-blue green-blue pairs she tries to rely on) that Rose finds are contradicted by the constant introduction of new types of roundness and vagueness. As such, says Rust, Stein uses the book to leave "a subversive message: because our world does keep going around and around, we may never know exactly 'who' we are." Rust insists that the grammar of the book itself is as round as the content: Stein allows words like "and" to serve multiple functions and signifiers like "Rose" and "there" to refer to multiple things or to lack clear referents. For example, the following sentence reinforces the confused relationship between Rose and her surroundings: "So Rose and the blue chair went away from there she never could go down not there not ever again there, she could never go anywhere . . ., poor Rose alone with a blue chair there" (48). Where is "there" if Rose is going "away" from there? Would "down" be there or

away from there? Is Rose really alone, if the narrator herself asks, "Did the blue garden chair have arms" (37) and if Rose can "embrace it there the blue chair" (44)?

As Rust explains, markers of conventional storytelling further remind the reader that this story is unconventional. Indicators of setting, like "there," lose their meaning when repeated and related to other uncertain elements of language, as shown above. Similarly, the narrator constantly sets up expectations of answers but then dispenses with them. Several chapters focus on cousin Willie's lion, Billie. Once Rose receives and then gives the lion away at school, however, the narrator declares that "that was all there was about Billie the lion" and explains that this is the "end of Billie the lion" (30). The rest of the story makes absolutely no mention of Billie – even though the book has set up the story of Billie as a major plot element up to this point. Similarly, early portions of the book introduce Rose's dog, Love, as a major character, even though Love later proves inessential, going away without any warning. The narrator here constantly introduces conventional transitions and story elements – like beginnings and ends – in order to subvert them, ensuring that they are as unstable as the world they describe.

Although these critical studies are useful at finding overlaps and differences between Stein's book and conventional narratives, looking at the form itself may be equally helpful in terms of understanding how it functions and relates to the content. One seemingly random chapter, titled ROSE THINKING, states simply: "If the world is round would a lion fall" (25). Since the concept of roundness takes a more abstract form throughout the majority of the book, with the world seldom acting as something one must cling to and stability usually relating more to personality than to physicality, Rose's musing here seems to have little effect on the rest of the book. Since Billie the lion falls off *abstractly*, however, not from the world but from the book, one must wonder in retrospect if the narrator was actually giving a signal to the way the book

functions – the roundness of the form itself. Stein has set up, in this tiny chapter, an uncommon way of looking at roundness (a physical way), and yet that way of looking may prove useful when taken in a nonphysical way. The form has made a *formal* gesture toward the content, which in turn may prove useful to understanding how the content can be explained by the form. Rust cites the end of the book as an equally disconcerting example of how the book's form confuses and backs up the roundness of its content: even though the narrator says that Rose and Willie live "happily ever after," she continues, in the very same sentence, to make that ostensibly linear and conventional statement vaguer by reminding us that "the world" *also* "just went on being round" (67). Even though Rose seems to have found her own identity in and in spite of the round world, the fact that the rest of the sentence purports to undermine or blur her "happily ever after" suggests that roundness takes precedence over happiness, that roundness may preclude self-identification after all – and, of course, that finding an identity is impossible in *any* story, round or not, since a character cannot really formulate her own existence. Even if Rose's linear journey ends in an ambivalent acceptance of the round world, with Rose at the very least accepting herself in the world (if not accepting the world itself), the world as defined and framed by the form of the book may not be ready to accept her as such. The book's roundness, a stand-in for its role *as* a book, makes it so that the content must struggle with the form.

Stein at once introduces the book as a story in which the plot does not take precedent over the setting, a single character does not exist without a whole world, and the narrative (with its narration) relies on its author. The main character here exists in tension with the book's given setting, challenging the values that characterize and necessitate her situation: "And then there was Rose" (2). Stein even complicates Rose's introduction, questioning her role as a character and its relation to the language used to define her. "Rose was her name," writes Stein, "and

would she have been Rose if her name had not been Rose" (2). Immediately, the book establishes problematic relationships between reality and language (can the narrator be trusted as a window to reality?), language and identity (Rose uses her own name to claim an identity), and identity and story (as a character in a story, the formulation of Rose's identity relies on the telling of that story).

When the first-person voice shows up, it is in a song, and it immediately reinforces the confusion. "*I am a little girl and my name is Rose*," Rose begins, but the rest of her song questions every one of those words, asking without question marks, "*Why am I a little girl / And why is my name Rose*" (3), and going on to question every element of both the setting in which she exists and the perceived identity of the character inhabiting that existence. The content of the first chapter and the chapter's title – "ROSE IS A ROSE" – together introduce the character and themes of the book and also instantly undermine them. The title, in all capital letters, comes across as a circular definition, uncertain, ambivalent. What is a rose, or a Rose, if Rose, or perhaps *a* rose, is, or is equated to, such a thing (or such a name)? Signification fails in the sense that the meaning of the statement, or the definition, is not translated clearly by the book to the reader. As a response, perhaps, Rose herself introduces the concept of linearity; she breaks down the elements of the circular definition and tries to find her own answers. What, how, why, where, which? she asks, and who and what are "I," "Rose," "name," "girl"? To situate herself in a book where, once upon some quite ill-defined, uncertain, unknown time, the only thing that defined the world was roundness, Rose asks questions – in this case, without punctuating them, instead simply stating the problems, introducing herself *as* questions. In doing these things, however, Rose is gesturing towards her own role as a character and towards her limited storytelling (or narrating) function. Even while playing out Rose's attempts to tell her own

identity-story, and giving them credence as such, Stein clearly gestures toward these attempts' function as things happening within a story, stories made by a character, *constructed* narration.

Throughout *The Word Is Round*, Stein creates a story about Rose's struggle with language and with language's complicated function as a window to self-identification. Stein establishes early on that Rose defines herself based on what she is not – namely, round – and how she is separated from her setting (she is "and then"). As an example, Rose does *not* like the moon, so she likes stars; we assume the reason is that stars are not like the moon. Yet Stein complicates this idea immediately: "Once some one told her that the stars were round and she wished that they had not told her" (9). The idea that the stars and the moon are alike, and then that everything else is also alike, disturbs Rose. To find a sense of self-definition, she needs more than a "rose is a rose" definition; she needs to differentiate things more conclusively from one another.

Looking to herself does not help Rose explain or accept the rest of the world; it only backs up the idea that things runs together. Rose finds that her physical connections to nature do little to reflect her sense of individuality – they instead show her what she feels she is not:

> [T]here was a looking-glass in front of her
>
> And as she sang her mouth was round and was going around and around.
>
> Oh dear oh dear was everything just to be round and go around and around. What could she do but try and remember the mountains were so high they could stop anything. (12)

Rose's own body and bodily functions, and the narrator's descriptions of them, further separate her from her setting, suggesting that the character lacks the control to define or understand herself. Looking at her own reflection is equivalent to looking at the moon and stars; instead of

putting a stop to the roundness, giving her a dynamic list, or suggesting to her a way to break the circularity of the language she uses, Rose finds that her own image of herself only confuses her.

Attempts to find physical self-definition continuously remind Rose that language is an obstacle to self-identification – one she must contend with physically as well as mentally. While climbing a mountain in the hopes that it "stop anything," planning to sit on top of it, feel powerful, and escape the patterns of roundness and stillness she sees around her, Rose finds that she herself – as an entity or idea – constantly drags herself back into those patterns. "Oh said Rose," out of surprise at the things she sees. "It was the first word she had said of all the many that had come into her head since she first began to climb. And of course," the narrator reminds us, "it was a round one. Oh is a round one" (56). Here, Stein uses Rose's physical reaction, unintentional (it was the first word that popped into her head) and unintentionally disturbing to Rose (serving as a reminder that the character does not control the language), as another reminder of the boring, patterned stimuli around and inside her. Soon "her eyes were round with fright and her hands and arms did hold her chair tight" (60), and Rose's body and mind serve as both an impetus for the climb and an obstacle to its success. (At the same time, her physical presence again gestures toward her literary function, her nonphysical value.)

Despite these conditions, Rose, the character-turned-storyteller, attempts to corral certain aspects of language and use them to identify herself. In particular, she uses her name to ground herself – aurally, physically, mentally – to the world that confuses her. If everything, from the sun to the stars, were "all going around and around / And not a sound" (11), Rose finds fear in silence. Language, however, is equally confusing when one (or one character) has little control over it. Stein writes: "Well when you are all alone alone in the woods even if the woods are lovely and warm . . ., even so if you hear your own voice singing or even just talking well

hearing anything even if it is all your own . . . then it is frightening" (51). Carving her name on a tree becomes a way for Rose to *insist* on sound, to combine a confusing word with a very specific physical definition. She would "just stand on her chair and around and around even if there was a very little sound she would carve on the tree Rose is a Rose is a Rose . . . until it went all the way around" (53). Rose combats undefined, uncertain roundness with roundness she owns. Even as she does so, however, Stein uses the narration the format of the book to insist on Rose's status as a character, as a thing that is *necessarily* only partially defined, necessarily relegated not to the narrator but the author. This element of the content (the character) does not really control the form, because both form *and* content must rely on authorial control.

The narrator shows how Rose must come to her identity using the tools of the world around her – which happen to be offered as elements of a story, inhibiting any real identity or any real ability to reach it. Since a clear perspective on her identity is off limits even to herself, it is not enough to invite the world to revolve around her; she must find a way to walk the world that ends in identification. Once Rose reaches the top of the mountain and is "all alone on the top of everything" (61), having gone on a journey with nothing but a chair (easy to define, easy to own) and carved her name along the way, she finds that she is not sure where she is or who she is; simply being *what* she is and being *there* is not enough to give her a clear-cut *who* or *where*. "*I am there*," she cries, "*oh yes I am there oh where oh where is there*" (63).

Yet the book ends the way it begins, suggesting that Rose's confusion is a natural result of the fact that she is a character, that she does not really control the story. Rose may be on the top of everything, on her own clear round meadow atop the mountain, but that gives her nothing to hold on to – nothing but the "*hard blue chair*" that she begs to "*hold me tight I'll sit in you with all my might*" (64), a chair that is just another element of the content, an element like

herself, an element the existence of which she does not determine. When she sees a search light going around, Rose immediately has something to compare herself to: "*I am here and you are there*," she declares (66). At the end of the book, "sometimes singing made Rose cry" (67), just like it did before, and "the world just went on being round," just like it was before. Rose finds a sense of herself – of Rose-ness – not by changing the world or creating a new world but simply by changing the way she relates to it. She aligns herself with the existing patterns she sees and attempts to *make* definitions out of the language she sees as ill-defined. Her tendencies – her plot elements – do not change much, with the same things bothering her and the same behavior filling her time (i.e., singing), but she nonetheless finds a way to combine her individual, linguistic, interpersonal, and physical views of the world. She connects "Rose" to a person, a tree, and a place; she connects Willie to "there" and then to "*you will*" – to behavior, to a future, to a relationship. At the end of the book, Stein shows that nothing has changed except for Rose. Just like the beginning, the last chapter reads like a fairy tale, with the existing logic being shaken up (Rose and Willie suddenly are not cousins any more, no explanation needed!), things staying exactly as they are, and characters living "happily every after" (67). If the first chapter introduces the idea that "you could go on [the round world] around and around" (1), the last page suggests that Rose, who at first was not even sure that she "would have been Rose" if she did not have her name (2), has found a way to say that even if conditions have changed, even if she dispenses with the language, even if things are defined only cyclically and relatively, she nonetheless can be one of the people to "go on" the world.

To relate to the world, however, Rose must change the way she views it. Initially, the constant circling of ill-defined things means for her a lack of control over her identity: "there was no hen there was no glass pen, there was only Rose, Rose Rose, Rose and all of a sudden Rose

knew that in Rose there was an o and an o is round, oh dear not a sound" (48). To combat the alienation she feels when confronted with roundness, she has tried to redefine roundness; she has carved "Rose is a Rose is a Rose" all around a tree trunk. The result is that "Rose forgot the dawn forgot the rosy dawn forgot the sun forgot she was the only one and all alone" (53). She removes herself from familiar associations by taking physical activities, physical things, physical places, and binding herself to them. She gives herself and her location a context and a definition. When night falls, however, having *so concrete* a sense of identity is just as scary as having one too abstract. She is "more there than anywhere" (63), but now being "there" provides a different source of confusion: she is *just* there, "yes there," but is that all that defines her? Only when Rose decides that she needs to know not only who she is, but also how she relates to the world around her, does she find a way to stop worrying about *what* Rose is and start being Rose.

Rose's journey ends, once she reaches the top of the mountain, with what would often be a fairy-tale beginning: love, marriage, children. However, the structure of the book, and the ending in particular, which seems to dispense with any result of Rose's journey, suggests that anything Rose did has had little effect. Her story simply ends, with Rose perhaps a bit more closely aligned to the setting but still merely a plot element, subject to the whims of the author and the form the author creates. Her problems do not resolve themselves; they merely lead to another story. If, at the beginning, Rose is an "and then," an extra, something separate from the world, she is, at the end, a part of it – she becomes, at last, a revolving point of the story. At the very least, Rose has found her own story; and storytelling, even if it ends up being round and constant in its form and its language, nevertheless grants Rose a small level of control. The end of the story, like the beginning, focuses on the world, not on Rose – but the fact that the majority of the book has focused on Rose's journey from, through, and to that world shows that Rose's

ability to know or control her own identity (and her perceived existence) depends in large part on following an existing story form and finding in it something of her own. That does not give her any power over the way the story ends, nor does it force the narrator to focus on her more than on the world's roundness, but it does ensure that she is finally "there" and that she finally knows where "there" is.

The shape of the world and of the story that describes it does not lend itself easily to the conflicts it presents, in that it simply proves another obstacle to the character's attempts at using narration to identity herself. The book ends relatively the same way it began, with everything round and everyone static; Rose must find a way through the book *despite* the style, even as the book's narration serves as a constant reminder that there would be no Rose without the way Rose is told. *The World Is Round* presents a form-to-content relationship in which form does not predetermine content but often seems to follow it: Rose's story is necessarily led by the form in which it is told.

Moreover, the diegetic and non-diegetic truths of the book, or givens, make themselves evident as elements formulated by the author, transparent in their creation. From the first page, the book takes what should be an assumed truth about the *real* world, the one outside of the book, and makes it a *surprising* truth about the book's setting. By telling us that the world is round (even by using such a statement as the book's title!), Stein introduces "roundness" as a scary, unfamiliar concept – not merely a physical one but one that describes patterns and relationships among people, properties of time and storytelling, and attitudes toward reality. The book questions non-diegetic truths by making readers step back and ask whether *our* world really *is* round, according to Stein's uncertain definition.

To base the book around Rose, in particular, adds another level of ambivalence: Rose's view of roundness, or perhaps Stein's view of Rose's view, immediately creates distance between Rose and the rest of the world – between "Rose" and "round." As Rose questions roundness, then, we must also question Rose. Do her righteous actions, those which allow her to redefine roundness and find her own place in the world (carving her name *around* the tree, moving vertically up a mountain, journeying back toward an end that mirrors the beginning), really set her aside from the diegetic setting in which she exists, or do they simply relegate her to the round world from which we initially separated her?

In other words, even if Rose's journey and the emphasis on the character of Rose complicate the transparency of the narrator and make any of the narrator's qualifying statements about the book's diegetic setting (such as "Once upon a time the world was round . . .") immediately subject to comparison with Rose (invoking Rose's introduction again: "and then"), the format of Rose's story *within* the book ends up oddly aligned with the story Stein has used Rose to question *about* the book. Instead of coming to any clear conclusion about whether or not Rose is really outside of roundness or whether Rose redefines roundness in her own mind, the story within the book – the story of Rose – functions instead as an exploration into the relationship between diegetic and non-diegetic elements of a story. By setting Rose aside from the setting, and yet still placing Rose's story within that setting, Stein creates a distance between form and content that insists on readers' awareness of both. Instead of determining authoritatively or irreversibly whether form follows content or content follows form, or whether the diegetic elements of a book (like Rose) have any control over the non-diegetic elements (like the setting), Stein uses the book to highlight those questions, to develop the rifts between the

inner and outer portions of the book, and to emphasize the authorial control she (not the narrator) maintains over both sides of each dichotomy.

3. IDA, IDENTIFIED

Ida, as another example of Gertrude Stein's interest in the intersection of character and text, form and content, storytelling and being, demonstrates the irreconcilability of language and meaning and the resulting confusion over a character's identity within a story. The form of the book follows and records Ida's wanderings even as it motions toward the lines, arcs, categories, and plots that those wanderings avoid and surpass. The book's content reinforces the idea of wandering, of having no beginning and end, of things and people being interchangeable, of names and other markers being unstable along with the things they stand for – and yet the drifting content always takes place inside a form the language and structure of which compel – confusedly, uncertainly – to interact with common associations and expectations. Stein continually hints at an awareness of, and a distinction from, those common narrative customs: "Ida never said once upon a time. These words did not mean anything to Ida. This is what Ida said. Ida said yes. . . ." (132). *Ida*, a late work, is a culmination not just of Stein's writing but of her literary career and of the present ideas of "meditation" that Stein was practicing at the time. The deliberateness of her style therefore is always balanced and challenged by the interpretations and interpolations of the literary circles toward which her critics, her criticism, and her work itself gestures. Perhaps Ida's constant self-reflection, her need to reaffirm herself and her perceived identity by controlling her words and actions (her social output in general), is the result of Stein's personal and aesthetic interests in identification, aesthetics, and authorship.

Tension in *Ida* between form and content demonstrates that, for Stein, neither is clearly predetermined; moreover, the unconventional always exists in relation to conventions and to the

concept of conventionality. As a result, the flexibility, decontextuation, and ambiguity of Stein's language always encourages consideration *as* unconventionality. Seminal Stein scholar Ulla Dydo explains that Stein's "rejection of the rigid conventions of language led her gradually to dissociate herself from all inflexible forms" in pursuit of "living sentences" (17). Peter Quartermain, looking at Stein's metonymic habits, explains further that her writing "cultivates its own indeterminacy of meaning because it takes place in and is part of a world that is itself indeterminate" (23). The indeterminacy itself – where each word and connection between words has multiple meanings and functions, where "referentiality and its lack becomes a structural principle" (26), where reduction complements elaboration – becomes a feature of the writing, not a result of it, both "bind[ing] this writing together and at the same time engag[ing] the reader in a commentary on the text which the text, in its ambiguities, itself performs" (26). Stein's works consciously work around established systems, then, not accidentally wandering but instead constantly and diversely questioning the idea of static meaning, cultural association, and stable grammar. They *actively* reject conventions and continuously perform their own inflexibility.

Although Quartermain and Dydo both focus on the formal, intertextual, and metatextual aspects of Stein's work, their close criticism differs from, and sometimes extends, decades of Stein scholarship that looked at Stein's stylistic methods less for their linguistic, semantic, metonymic implications and more for their overlaps with cultural and social theory. Although Stein's own lectures always imply that composition creates a constant counterbalance between transparency and opaqueness, many cultural and literary theorists interpret her work as either transparent or opaque, either taking her looseness of language and structure as a lack of method and control or deducing from her vagueness social and sexual intentions that Stein never proposed. While her contemporaries viewed Stein's friendship with mainstream Modernist

writers and artists as an artistic alliance even as self-proclaimed Modernists declaimed her work, many late-twentieth-century critics acknowledge more aptly Stein's place *outside* of clear-cut theoretical perspectives (modernist, anti-hegemonic, post-structuralist, feminist, deconstructionist), though they too recognize – perhaps even take for granted – those perspectives' enduring ability to make *their* meaning of her work. When Marianne DeKoven writes that "Stein occupies precisely that middle ground between (male) canonical centre and (female) margin which deconstructs (puts into question, makes visible) the hierarchical-idealist duality of centre and margin itself" (18), she demonstrates critics' tendency to examine Stein's work in a precise and balanced manner – and yet still to focus on its relationship with the mainstream, the avant-garde, and other categorical terminology.

A more recent study by Ellen Berry reexamines Stein's *jouissance* in the light of postmodern feminist readings, making use of Kristeva and others in order to look at *why* Stein destabilizes language and its meanings and, by negating any clear-cut division between canon and anti-canon, moves the criticism away from a "Modernist or not Modernist" mode of questioning and into a postmodern view of purposeful problematizing – in this case with a feminist, semiotic bent. Although Berry still focuses on theoretical divisions, she bridges the gap between Quartermain's close reading and earlier critics' extratextual, cultural interpretations by looking at meaning and lack of meaning as inborn elements of reading and writing. The reader of a Stein work, she implies, finds that her "desire for the signifier (adhesion to the rhythmic semiotic aspect of language) is curbed through the necessary imposition of a code (distance created through an interpretive framework)," a problem that ultimately causes the reader to "confront more directly the question of who is in control: reader, writer, or language itself" (19). Here, close examination of Stein's syntax and semantics does not neglect the critical playground

with which her writing has a tense relationship. In the case of *Ida*, Berry looks at the tension between wandering Ida and her more constricting narrator and – insightfully – at the specific problem of "doubling" that *Ida*'s form, in its extreme detail, creates. The book makes use of "a simulational aesthetic that mimes mimesis rather than enacting it and so replaces the conventional base of realist fiction" (166), Berry writes, using Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum to explain and complicate Stein's constant duplication, repetition, and multiplication and to show that Ida's wandering way of staying in one place betrays the lack, perhaps relative, of a place to stay (a clear identity). The narrator's distance from Ida herself, combined with an unclear distinction between character and book (*Ida A Novel* is its full title), creates a distinction between events and the description of events: "In this way, the ground of mimetic transparency (that imperative to depict a world in all its plenitude) is undercut through the narrator's informational amplitude that short-cuts visibility" (174). Berry goes on to examine Stein's "text of ongoing possibilities that creates an imaginative nonmimetic space within which a woman may wander and rest" (175), ultimately reconciling it with a "postmodern revisioning of melodrama" that displays and resolves the "crisis in female subjectivity specifically within a culture that (still) renders women as simulations of themselves." The ideological crisis is resolved, she says, when "a nonsubject both present and absent" gains the ability to wander away as a result of her simultaneous doubling and absence.

In her study on gender and genre, Franziska Gygax performs a similar type of interpretation, looking at feminist theories specifically *for* their consistency with Stein's formal exercises. She explains, for example, how Ida – as character, character's self-made twin or "twin," narrator, and novel – wrests language as a tool of identification and control: "it is through language that Ida tries to enter a relationship," explains Gygax, "even it is only a relationship

between her(self) speaking and her(self) listening" (31). Ida's doubling fits in, for Ellen Berry, with Walter Benjamin's ideas about reproduction and authenticity as well as with Peter Brooks' formulation of melodrama as a way of dealing with the problem of expressing the inexpressible, of using "inadequate" language to "give expression to material that evades conscious articulation" (Berry 157). Although Berry's emphasis on postmodern ideology and its critical divisions, and Gygax's unabashed focus on feminism, may complicate the depth of their focus on Stein's own methodology, these studies nonetheless prove more useful than critical perspectives *less* interested in methodological meanderings. In other words, even if the semiotic and aesthetic underpinnings of their arguments stretch Stein's text a little too close to the "associative" interpretations that Stein avoids, their arguments focus usefully on the *problems* of those interpretations, which result from postmodernism's overlaps and tensions with Stein's ideology.

Her ideology, which itself shifts and changes in accordance with her written experiments and her public reputation, may serve as a helpful way examine the significance of the writing process and the writer in the written work's development. In her lectures, Stein herself discusses the syncopation between a writer, a reader, and the writing: "Composition is not there, it is going to be there and we are here" (Stein "Composition" 25). Maintaining a critical distance from the writing may not, then, be antithetical to her intentions. At the same time, however, she suggests that a writer's work results more from entity than from identity and therefore that cultural and critical associations should not necessarily enter a work's composition. Masterpieces require being able "to know," Stein writes, "that is not to have identity and time but not to mind talking as if there was . . . and to go on being not as if there were no time and identity but as if there were and at the same time existing without time and identity," a process of composition that few can master ("Master-pieces" 155). Stein's lectures provide a starting point for examining the

relationship between a writer and her written work as well as their intended effects on the reader. To look at a reader as a potential critic and interpreter, however, perhaps one must find a corollary between Stein's ideology and the products of her own composition – to see, for example, if the wanderings and doublings that characterize Ida fall in line with the idea of composition expressed in Stein's lectures and texts on writing.

Ida is, at any rate, an example of a character who is "going to be there" (Stein "Composition"). Instead of starting with the assumption of a clear-cut identity or setting and allowing readers to find themselves at a starting point or origin of "here," Stein immediately introduces the idea of uncertainty and falsity along with the idea of Ida: "there she was Ida-Ida" (*Ida* 7). The only stable element in the book is Ida and her recognition of herself, and the narrator as a presence does little to introduce conventional elements, instead pointing out when and where they are lacking: "she did not understand so she said, she did not sit down so she said, she did not stand up so she said, she did not go out or come in, so she said" (136). Ida-ness becomes not an obstacle but rather a point of continuity, so that the patterns of repetition and resilience in the book function to remind the reader of what has *not* changed:

> Yes she said. It is natural enough that she said yes, because she did not catch up with anything and did not interrupt anything and did not begin anything and did not stop anything.
>
> Yes said Ida.
>
> It looks the same but well of course one can run away. . . . You can run away even if you say yes. (151)

Here, the form and content both serve to remind the reader that Ida is not merely a subject or object but also a verb, the one form of action or of *being* in the book – and that everything else

might be superfluous. The elements of *Ida* demonstrate the function of the self-written character, the one whose existence necessitates the book and whose pauses, disappearances, and searches for identity necessarily affect the style and form of their story (the story they tell in order to be told) – and yet who is still a result of style and form, of the story's creation, of authorship. Inasmuch as the book rests on Ida's self-creation *within* the story, that story also serves as a reminder that a character is a part of a, or *any*, story and that the creation of identity is always controlled by the author of a story rather than by the one identified inside it. The character's search for identity is always doubled, or overshadowed, by the author's process of formulating the subject of her story.

Ida is a character whose existence provides the one point of balance and certainty in the book. The plot and setting move fluidly and associatively, with Ida choosing to rest or to move, to marry or leave men, to talk to herself or hear herself speak; conventional narrative structures do not play into the form, which meanders and repeats itself. Character, instead, is taken as a constant – but Stein's character in *Ida* is a complicated entity whose own existence seems to rely on speaking, saying her name, telling stories about herself, and ensuring that others do not determine or assume things about her. Narration, in its ambiguity, defines her and relies on her. By shaking up normal formal elements and making content (here focused on self-identification) a point of disparity and contradiction, Stein problematizes conventional narratives and yet opens her story up to a different sort of certainty: Ida uses words and their reception to identify herself, just as the novel relies solely on Ida and the telling of her life in order to find and manipulate its words. As both character and book wander along interdependently, Stein practices her ideas (and questions) of authorship, textual determination, and identity. In contrast to Rose, however, Ida *already* has identified herself, within the confines of the story in which she exists, and

maintains a sense of control over her identity, even if, as part of a story, she actually lacks it. Instead of following a quest for self-identification, *Ida* focuses on shaping the character's assumed identity. The story mimics the author's process of subject formation in that it centers around a character who *thinks* she can tell a story about herself.

In *Ida*, narrative succession – or linear motion – determines the course of the plot, which meanders and moves constantly and consistently, but causes problems for the main character, for whom the idea of being subjected to linearity requires a type of existence that bothers her. "So much happened but nothing happened to Ida," writes Stein. "To have anything happen you have to choose and Ida never chose, how could she choose. . . ." (139). Instead of choosing, Ida simply relegates everything to "either this or that and sometimes both" (118) so that she is always either going somewhere or resting. To do anything in between is too confusing and involves a loss of stable self-definition, a lack of self-assurance. Ida's life "never began again because it was always there" (118), Stein explains; it keeps going in one direction or another – Ida's means of maintaining herself as a constant "there." Each new man and marriage "was not exciting, it was what they did" (62), and little changes except for names and other markers of language, suggesting that language lacks specificity and permanence. Ida herself stays the same, constantly moving and reexamining so as to prevent change *outside* her own control. Primarily resting and talking to herself, Ida interprets all of the events in her life according to her ideal trajectory – the one in which there *is* no marked trajectory of action or place and the only known point of stability is Ida.

By denying linearity using her nomadic behavior and her insistence on the potential for indeterminacy, Ida uses her life to wrestle with social and linguistic conventions that predetermine its form and frame. In an early exchange with a police officer (a badge of

established knowledge and norms), Ida demonstrates her capacity to recognize the multiplicity of meanings in both language and identity: "What is it that you like better than anything else, he asked and she said. I like being where I am. Oh said he excitedly, and where are you. I am not here, she said, I am very careful about that" (29). Here Ida asserts frankly that she likes the security of knowing that she is being herself. The officer's response indicates that he reads her "where" as a marker of location – *where* she is – instead of as a mere predicator of Ida-ness – where she *is*. When she responds, she does not clarify whether is speaking literally or not: she may mean literally that here is, physically, a place where she is not herself or that she simply prefers not to be in this place and usually avoids it. At the same time, she seems to negate the relationship between time and space, since the present conversation depends on Ida's being "here" in it physically, just as the metaphorical "I am here" must, according to ordinary expectations, always be true wherever Ida physically is. The narration here both highlights the limitations of language and embraces its capacity for complexity. Stein lays out all the striations of meaning without making any clear, singular preference, thereby demonstrating the lack of clearness, singularity, or the need for either.

In contrast to her social performance, however, Ida's conversations with herself *do* make a clear choice: they clearly identify Ida as *there*, enclosed in herself, aware of herself, being herself. "Now listen to me," she says at one point, "I am here and I know it, if I go away I will not like it because I am so used to my being here" (42). Hearing her own voice allows Ida to identify herself, to position herself in a concave relationship with the world. The clearest representation of Ida's self-replication is the fictional twin she creates early in life, the one who becomes a pageant star. Ida wants a twin because then "nobody would know which one I was . . . so if anything happened nobody could tell anything" (11). Creating a social persona for herself

gives Ida control both over how others perceive her and over her own mortality. Knowing that she is "here always, if not here then somewhere," she finds comfort in knowing exactly where "somewhere" is: the twin is specifically "not here" because "if you were I could not write to you" (19). For Ida, the twin is an Other she does not have to fear.

Ida's form of control early in the book is writing itself – authority through storytelling. Although her invented twin is a bolder version of Ida, a "suicide blonde" (11) living in public, Ida maintains authority over her, in essence constantly holding on to the ability to collapse her "elsewhere" version of herself back into the "here" version by becoming a killer: "If you make her can you kill her." Multiplying herself so that others cannot do so for her, Ida relies on storytelling – talking and writing letters to the twin – as a means of protection and preservation. When Ida stops writing letters to her double, the reader receives no more information; the twin as a vehicle stops serving its purpose. When a man recognizes that "Ida was not the same as Winnie [the twin]" (26) and pursues her, she begins focusing again on other people, and she develops a sort of pride in her own name. Telling the story of her own, singular life then becomes just as refreshing – if not quite as safe: "I say to myself, Ida, and that startles me and then I sit still" (35). Storytelling, and being the one to tell her own story, grants her a sense of control. Her choice of action, choosing to stay indoors or to rest or to move, further allows her to feel secure, even as she no longer distances herself from her name. *Not* telling a story – resting – becomes an equally powerful way of trying to maintain control over her identity. Since the author makes the story go on, however, Ida's attempts at controlling her identity simply serve to highlight the constructed, false nature both of her and of her storytelling function.

The story itself and Stein's method of storytelling function in fluctuating balance and counterbalance, with *Ida* gesturing toward the conventional novel (the one characterized by an

omniscient third-person narrator, the one with a climax and denouement) but always staying outside of the conventions' limits. The book constantly underscores the presence of those limits and calls them into question. Stein uses common narrative language, which, with questions and turns of phrase that provoke in readers clear-cut expectations (e.g., in the case on page 32 of this essay, a literal response to "where are you"), creates awareness of its uncommon use. The narration itself employs the cues of convention, the phrases that indicate beginnings and ends – "one day" and "then" and "finally" and "there was" – even as Stein constantly asserts that for Ida "[t]here was never any beginning or end" (133). The language used fits in with Ida's conception of things happening after and before one another, building up and moving on but always as means rather than ends. One paragraph states simply, "And so nothing happened to her yet. Not yet," and yet the very next sentence begins, "One day . . ." (30-31). Every line, while introducing content that does relay information and action, undermines its own position and sense of certainty. Just as the content (Ida's life) constantly questions the ordinary form of a narrative about a woman, the form itself questions what it narrates, constantly uprooting the content it contains.

4. CONCLUSION

Both *Ida* and *The World Is Round* are works in which the main character's attempt to find and shape her identity is not only a major plot point but also a marker of the author's control over that identity, its discovery or claim by the character, and the way both the identity and its association with the character are expressed. Neither form nor content (neither the internal nor the external connections that characterize the writing) can take precedence in an analysis of these works because Stein's methodology insists on continuous control over both, to the point where the writer does not let go of the written work once the writing process is complete. To expose

the problematic relationship between language and formulations of identity (as well as between story and reality), Stein allows characters to deal with their own control or lack of control over language. Even as the characters do so, however, the books' structure constantly calls attention to the characters' nature as created beings whose own sense of control is in actuality subject to Stein's authorial control. Even when the characters attempt to use storytelling for self-identification, that storytelling always takes place within another story, automatically framing the characters' quests within Stein's boundaries. Identity-making becomes, in turn, a window into story-making, because the characters' stories rely on and gesture towards Stein's creation.

Probing these books has not only allowed me to explore Stein's methods; it has shown me that the books are themselves explorations of method. To tell a story about Stein's methodology, one can and should look at the stories. Her interest in storytelling is indistinguishable from her interest in the creation of stories and in the creation of a symbiotic relationship between form, content, and authorship. Consequently, the methodology she uses as a storyteller cannot be separated from her writing process. Stein's own self-identification as a writer finds a parallel in her stories' relative self-creation: her characters' ability to find themselves depends not only on what Stein writes *of* them but also on how Stein writes *through* them, demonstrating through their attempts at self-identification the power of storytelling to identify itself and of writing to enact its own process of creation. My examination of Stein's methods suggests, in turn, the need for – and the varied, self-replicating purpose for – ongoing questioning of the relationship between form and function, interpretation and identification, Stein and studies of Stein.

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