

ABSTRACT

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Close reading and syntactical analysis are used as the foundation of a method that, through the language of music, seeks to describe a means by which Stein's and Loy's poetry creates meaning. Passages are broken down into parts that function in much the same way as the musical elements rhythm, melody, and harmony. While the sound of the poetry is discussed to some degree, the primary focus of the thesis is to describe the ways in which components of the poetic language interact to create possibilities of meaning in which the effect is dependent upon musical relationship.

THE CONSERVATORY OF LANGUAGE

by
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To my sister Abby, who sings like crazy.

Biography

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The Conservatory of Language

I. Introduction

Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy seem to have been aware of some connection between them. Stein did, after all, say in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that Loy “has always been able to understand” (Weiner 153). Likewise, Loy’s poem titled “Gertrude Stein” terms the poet “Curie/ of the laboratory/ of vocabulary” (1-3). In spite of their mutual admiration this peculiar artistic kinship is, perhaps, not immediately recognizable. A cursory glance at the literary work of each would likely evidence more differences than similarities. One might, for example, reasonably conclude that Stein obscures the ordinary while Loy finds in obscurity a striking ordinariness. A discriminating examination, however, yields something far more telling. Stein and Loy both share an interest in language as a process in itself. Stein suggests that we *think* about things that we normally *look* at, while Loy suggests much the opposite, making visual what is normally mental. An examination of the poets’ methodologies reveals where their work converges and where it differs.

Stein and Loy are similar in three main ways. First, both use rather opaque language. For Stein, this quality manifests itself in the density of her syntax, while in Loy it is found in the obscurity of her vocabulary. In both cases the effect is similar in that it serves as a constant reminder that the work at hand is poetry, unlike a William Carlos Williams poem, for example, which achieves a level of transparency that almost encourages one to forget that it is words on page.

Second, both Stein and Loy have an overt interest in the intellectual dimension of language. This idea is more readily seen in Stein, as Loy’s “meanings” are often transparent,

while Stein's frequently remain opaque. Both poets, however, consciously explore the ways in which language determines the thought process.

Third, Stein and Loy both rely heavily on syntactic order, using it to create nuances that influence the connotative power of words and images. While this can be said of nearly all writing, and especially poetry, Stein's and Loy's sentences are set apart because they create a sense of obscurity in which the poets operate.

Both Stein and Loy have a propensity to use language in such a way as to focus attention on the language itself. Stein, for example, draws from a rather simple vocabulary, but uses this vocabulary to build sentences and poetic structures that gain complexity from the very simplicity of their components. A word, for Stein, means only what the surrounding words will let it mean. Loy, on the other hand, uses a diction that edges on the bombastic, often sending the reader off in search of a dictionary. For Loy, words may be considered as objects that often function as a relic of a time and a system of thought that seems ill at ease in its new poetic surroundings, but is nonetheless there, buttressing the present with the past, and rooting what is known to us through the poem in ideas that have long been forgotten. While the denotative meanings of Loy's lexical antiques can be unveiled, the connotative meanings are less easily discovered, as they disappeared as the words fell out of common usage. The denotative meanings of these words remain unchanged in Loy's poetry, but their vagueness of connotation renders them a poetic blank slate. As such, these words absorb the connotations of their contextual surroundings, meaning only what they can mean in the context of the poem.

In examining the styles of Stein and Loy, it is all too inviting to become enamored of meaning to the point that the poetry itself gets lost in the explication. Ironically, this tendency

to try to force the poetry to mean something specific seems to stem from the very difficulty of such a task. Stein's work, especially, is often treated as a code that, once broken, will yield a specific meaning. For example, as Lisa Ruddick says of *Tender Buttons*:

I intend to show that *Tender Buttons* can be unlocked, to a far greater extent than has been supposed. Various critics have made inroads into isolated sentences and poems in *Tender Buttons*. Furthermore, some readers have identified a lesbian "code," and one has interpreted *Tender Buttons* as a hieroglyphic account of Stein's disengagement from Leo and attachment to Alice (190-191).

While Ruddick and other critics often incorporate compelling, isolated examples of close reading, such as Ruddick's discussion of connotations in the first poem of *Tender Buttons* (193-198), their conclusions often tend toward the "pass-key" school of Stein explication. This is not to say that their discoveries are always without merit, but to suggest that depending on them too strongly tends to place the focus of the criticism more on the ingenuity of the critic than on the actual examination of the work at hand.

For this reason I intend to suggest a method of reading these poets that requires examination to be based on form, thus placing the focus not on what is meant, but *how* it is meant. A useful critical method for accomplishing such a task is to closely study the syntax of particular poems, and then to consider the poems as entities using the language of music. The works reveal an underlying "musical" structure through which the poems create meaning. As music is made primarily by arranging preexisting tones, poetry is made primarily by arranging preexisting words. It is through context, then, that both artistic mediums convey their meaning.

Specifically, the critical method I propose for reading Stein and Loy involves breaking passages down into rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic components. In so doing, I hope to reveal a means of discovering the structure on which each poet's work is built. By revealing such a structure, I may then study in greater detail the ramifications of each poet's other stylistic choices—for example, Stein's blatant use of words as objects and Loy's frequent insistence on intertwining imagery. Likewise, such an approach will likely bring to light some interesting questions about each poet's use of temporal and spatial elements in general, thus perhaps opening the way for a future approach to the influence of visual art on Stein and Loy's work.

Though I will study the poems as “musical” entities, the actual “sound” of the poems is not the primary focus. Instead, my primary area of interest is the manner in which distinct, component pieces of the poems, as will be described later, can be seen to relate to one another in much the same way as certain elements of music. The object of this study is to outline a very real process within the poetry itself that is best described by a comparison with music, and in so doing, reveal a means of exploring the structure of meaning within the poems. While I do not ignore the effect of sound entirely, I suggest that sound harbors meaning mainly through suggesting a theoretical, rather than sonic, connection to music. As Susan Langer suggests in *Feeling and Form*, “Anything that binds figures together, contrasts or softens them, in short: *affects the illusion*, is a musical element (151). Though Langer here refers primarily to the absorption of language into vocal music, this idea is further reaching when considered in terms of her statement that “the more one reflects on the significance of art generally, the more the music theory appears as a lead” (*Feeling* 24).

The primary distinction that I make between language and music (in the literal sense), is that music conveys its meaning only through sound, while language can, and often does, convey meaning in silence. While it is true that music can be studied in its written form, it is important to realize that what is being studied is simply a representation, if only a partial one, of sound. As such, written music, without the possibility of the sound of music, is meaningless. Language, on the other hand, does not convey meaning primarily through sound. For example, it is clearly more profitable to teach the deaf to read words rather than music. This is true for the simple reason that while language is, to a great extent, connected to sound, it is, in most of its usage, fully capable of communicating a large part of its meaning silently.

II. Application

“Rhythm” in music is the simplest pattern of beats that reveals the time signature of a song. Thus, four equal beats per bar for 4/4 time and three equal beats per bar for 3/4 time, etc. Melody refers to the part of a song that defines it tonally, separating it from others. Harmony is all non-melodic tonal occurrences; for example, the chords behind a vocalist.

Considering the poems in musical terms, it is then possible to explore the relationships between the different parts of the poem while still maintaining an integral connection between them. Considering a specific part of a poem as melodic, for example, requires that it relate structurally to the rhythm. Likewise, a harmonic idea depends for its existence upon knowledge of the melodic idea which, in turn, necessitates an understanding of the rhythmic component.

Rhythm, the underlying structure of music, is the easiest element to define. In its simplest form, it can be understood as the cadence in music to which one claps his hands. As will be made clear later, however, the basic rhythm can be subdivided. For example, one could clap twice in the amount of time allocated to a single beat. The importance of understanding this division is that a single bar melody contains notes whose time value equals that of the underlying rhythmic structure when added together. Thus a definite link exists between rhythm and melody.

As for poetry, rhythm, in this thesis, refers to the thing most directly being discussed in a given poem or passage. It is, as in music, the basic foundation of a selection, as it is the one component that fully maintains its identity when considered alone.

Melody, the part of a song that can be hummed, depends on both horizontal and vertical movement, with “vertical” indicating movement in pitch, and “horizontal” indicating the subdivision of the underlying rhythm in which it exists. Melody is also directly related to harmony in that only certain harmonic structures fit a particular melodic structure—chords, for example. In simplest terms, this means that one cannot arbitrarily harmonize a melody with any desired chord. While “melody” typically refers to the part of a song that is its most specifically defining feature, it also applies to an improvised melodic line that follows the original harmony of a song, but is otherwise different. For example, in a jazz recording the original melody of a song is typically played first, followed by melodic improvisation that “sounds good” in relation to the original harmonic structure, but does not contain the same order of horizontal and vertical elements as the song’s original, defining melody. I will briefly describe the poetic manifestations of these musical components, which will shortly be described in greater detail as they relate to Loy’s “Parturition.”

Melody, in poetry, describes the component of a work that provides a specific context for the rhythmic component. Melody tells us something new, but, as its existence depends upon rhythm, there is a direct connection between the two. Thus as in music, poetic melody subdivides the underlying rhythm, while also adding information that cannot exist in rhythm alone. Likewise, it is possible to find within a poem various melodies that, though perhaps quite different, comment on the same rhythm.

Harmony is the part of music that supplies music with a connotative quality outside that of the rhythm and melody. It can be thought of as a means of adding texture to a song which does not specifically change the melody. Harmonic structure for a particular song is

not fixed, but variable. However, in all its variations it must retain some connection to both rhythm and melody.

As it applies to poetry, harmony gives direction to the melodic and rhythmic components. While rhythm indicates what the controlling image or idea if a poem is, and melody tells us what the unique aspect of that image or idea is, harmony comments on the perceived meaning of combined rhythm and melody.

Such a musical method is in keeping with much that has already been said of Stein's and Loy's musicality, though the focus is different. As Leonard Bernstein says of Stein:

It is always a dangerous thing for an artist to try to exceed the bounds of his esthetic medium. He has to be a kind of genius to get away with it. An artist has at his command patterns and orders that exist as a continuum in a specific medium; and to stray from these usually means a fiasco in the end—especially in the case of the two media of words and music. (132-33)

Bernstein suggests that Stein does more than simply make words sound musical, for most poetry may be said to have a music-like quality when listened to. Rather, Bernstein proposes that Stein finds something in music that allows her to transcend the common “patterns and orders” of poetry. While Stein's compositions are obviously constructed from words, the connective tissue of syntax that ties the words together is of a musical nature insofar as the connections between words become, like the intervals between musical tones, more important than the words themselves.

As William Carlos Williams remarks of Stein's work, “The feeling is of words themselves, a curious immediate quality quite apart from meaning, much as in music different notes are dropped, so to speak, into repeated chords one at a time, one after

another—for themselves alone” (19). Williams here makes the essential connection between Stein’s concept of words as objects and the way in which meaning is created in music. Though both consist of individually meaningless components, they both achieve meaning through the order supplied by context, and context apart from meaning is syntax, thus tying in with Langer’s assertion that music is “the most highly developed type of purely connotational semantic” (Philosophy 101).

Like Stein’s words, musical tones are objects that, heard without context, convey no meaning. All that can be said of a single tone is that it is what it is: C#, E, A, whatever the case may be. Only when notes are placed in context with other notes, occurring either consecutively, as in a melody, simultaneously, as in a chord, or both, and arranged within time (rhythm), is meaning possible. As the system is built entirely of components that are, taken individually, without meaning, it seems that the order of the system itself is the sole proprietor of meaning. For example, Stein’s poem “A Purse,” in the “Objects” section of *Tender Buttons*,

A purse was not green, it was not straw color, it was hardly
seen and it had a use a long use and the chain, the chain was
never missing, it was not misplaced, it showed that it was
open, that is all that it showed. (1-4)

While “purse” has denotative meaning, its meaning is general and thus greatly uncertain in the same sense that a lone musical note is uncertain. “Purse” alone fulfils no specific grammatical position. It could, for example, serve as a verb, as in “purse your lips to speak,” or a noun, as in “my purse is empty.” Context allows one to dismiss the possibility that “purse” denotes an action as it is clearly the subject of the sentence. The connotative

possibilities of “purse” are not limited by this assessment, as it remains possible to imagine lips pursed, for example, in a manner that “is hardly seen.” However, context provides a means of connecting, for example, “purse” and “green.” As “purse” seems to function as a noun, is logical to assume that “green” refers to the literal color green rather than to the metaphorical green of something like “green with envy.”

This is not to say that common verbal language does not depend on context for meaning, as clearly it does, but to a lesser extent than music. For example, in common usage words have denotative meanings, and often connotative meanings, even outside of context. Therefore, upon hearing the word “dog,” we can imagine a dog, and we can use our knowledge of the word’s possible connotative meanings to imagine an ugly person, perhaps. A note without context, however, may reasonably be imagined to fulfill any tonal position: root, fifth, flat ninth, etc., as any specific note is capable of fulfilling any musical position given the correct context, unlike common verbal language in which it would not be profitable to use the word “and,” a conjunction, for example, to fulfill the position of “not,” an adverb. A note is thus sound with denotative meaning—its frequency can be measured, but without connotative meaning, whereas a word often has both denotative and connotative meaning.

As for Loy, the connections between her poetry and music are less direct. Joshua Weiner suggests that her poetry has a musical quality stemming from “alliteration and intricate assonantal embedded rhyme” (158), indicating that the sound quality of Loy’s poetry harbors much of its meaning. Virginia Kouidis (173), on the other hand, suggests that Loy’s poetry derives its power from logopoeia, Ezra Pound’s term for poetry that works by “stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional) that have remained in the receiver’s consciousness in relation to the actual words or word groups used,” and not from melapoeia,

Pound's term for poetry that creates meaning by "inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of the speech" (Pound 63). As my concern is to use a musical comparison to describe the relationship between Loy's ideas, and not to demonstrate that the poem is an example of melapoeia, Kouidis's assertion actually buttresses my argument as there is a definite kinship between the way musical elements interact and the way in which the components of logopoeia interact, much as Williams seems to suggest about Stein.

As examined in relation to Williams' comment, which hints at a logopoeian quality in Stein, the part of Loy's poetry that I am interested in focusing on is its structure and not its sound, though the sound is important. The power of Loy's poetry is greatly reduced if its meaning is treated as its main purpose, to be grabbed hold of and pinned down for examination, but an analysis of its structure unfolds more complex purposes. For example, Loy's "Mexican Desert" begins:

The belching ghost—wail of the locomotive
trailing her rattling wooden trail
into the jazz—band sunset. . . .(1-3)

To speak of the "meaning" of this first stanza in terms of things that can be directly known requires that one of the primary devices of the poem be largely ignored. The title "Mexican Desert," along with the most basic reading of the poem suggests that the poem evokes an image of a landscape. Looking more closely, however, one finds that the landscape itself is perhaps the least interesting aspect of the poem. Instead, of primary interest in the poem is the suggestion of how the landscape is created, as it presents a far from static image. The second line, "trailing her rattling wooden trail," for example, seems to mean simply that the train is following the train track and causing it to rattle. However, the following line, "into

the jazz—band sunset. . . .” provides an ambiguous image in that it is difficult to know in exactly what way “jazz—band” modifies “sunset.” The effect of this line is that the ideas of spatial and temporal are forced together so that to know what Loy’s sunset (part of her landscape) requires that one know something about what jazz is. Even with this knowledge, however, it is not possible to meaningfully pin down and examine exactly how the sunset is like a “jazz—band.” This ambiguity in no way detracts from the power of the line—quite the contrary, it seems to enliven it. As the “sunset,” the “locomotive,” and the “wooden trail” are all parts of the same landscape, it is possible to consider, for example, that the “rattling” of the “wooden trail” caused by the “locomotive” is likewise part of the “jazz-band” that contextually defines the “sunset.” Without recognizing the associations and ambiguities, one cannot fully appreciate the poem.

Music consists of processes that depend on context for meaning. Melody and harmony share a peculiar connection because a change in one signals a change in the other—embellishing the harmonic structure, for example, invites complementary melodic embellishment, and vice versa. The change, however, is not always readily apparent. If, for example, a particular melody is reharmonized without being otherwise directly altered, it will be *perceived* differently, which is to say it will have a new set of connotative meanings associated with it. As Howard Morgen describes reharmonization, the most basic, “static” chord changes (harmony) of a song are like “. . . a superhighway that gets you directly to your destination, but there’s not much to see along the way,” whereas “Hearing a song reharmonized is like taking scenic side roads with lots to see—even stopping off for a delicious meal and refreshments—yet getting to your destination in the same time it would

have taken with the superhighway” (117). As with music, it is often possible to find more than one harmonic structure within Stein and Loy’s poetry.

The “musical” components of Stein’s and Loy’s work are much less concrete than in actual music. There is, for example, no obvious melody in a poem which one might hum and no time signature to signal its basic rhythmic division, and no literal chordal sequence to indicate its harmonic structure. The identification of these elements is thus left to the critic. However, the principles of relationship set forth in music theory provide a strong foundation for making such decisions. Application of the principles requires something of a poetic “ear” in that the primary requirement for all decisions regarding correlations between poetic and musical structures rests on the capability of the selected poetic component to logically fulfill the musical position assigned to it. A furtive image from a Loy poem that primarily expands the connotative possibilities of another, more direct image, serves a harmonic function by providing a particular context in which other elements of the poem exist.

Loy’s “Parturition” is an example. It begins

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction
The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me (1-5)

The process of birth may logically be seen as the rhythmic foundation of the poem, as it is the poem’s basic idea. The pain of birth may then be seen as melodic, as it is the imagery of pain that most clearly combines with the underlying concept of birth, providing the poem its momentum. The images evoking the effects of pain, “bland sun,” for example, are harmonic

inasmuch as they both depend on the idea of birth and pain for the specific meaning they have within the poem. These images also supply the idea of the pain of birth with a certain set of connotations that are not necessarily always linked with pain. “The business of the bland sun/ Has no affair with me” is harmonic because its meaning is elusive unless it is seen to modify the melodic concept of pain. “I am the centre/ of a circle of pain” is melodic because, when considered in context of birth, it has some meaning, e.g., “I am giving birth and it is painful.” Seen as harmonic, “The business of the bland sun/ Has no affair with me” suggests that the pain of birth has in the poem the connotative quality of causing emotional detachment from the experience.

Incorporating this connotation into the paraphrase above, it now says something like “I am giving birth and it is painful and as a result I am outside the influence of the sun,” which reduces to “I am giving birth and the pain is out of this world.” While “Parturition” can likely be broken down into musical elements in a way different than in the example above, the same logic applies. That there is, perhaps, no definitive means of assigning musical identities to poetic components simply reaffirms that this musical method of reading is not a simple form of explication but rather a means of diagramming a verbal machine that lacks a singularity of purpose.

Note that many songs share a basic rhythmic and harmonic structure. Blues, for example, frequently exhibit the same 4/4 time signature and the same harmonic structure, and are separated only by their unique melodies. While it is possible to distil a generic, basic harmonic structure from a melody, such as following the twelve-bar structure common in blues,

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
I	IV	I	I7	IV	IV	I	I	V7	V7	I	I

in which the roman numerals refer to the scale tone on which the chord is built, it is also sometimes possible to place the same melody in a modified harmonic context. For example,

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12							
I7	IV9	I9	I7+9	I7-9	IV9	IV-9	I7	VI7	VI9	IIIm7	IIIm7b5	V9	V7-9	I7	IV7	I9	V7+5	.

In the second example, coloration is added to the basic chord structure and extra chords are used to produce a “turnaround” effect, but the harmonic structure otherwise remains quite similar to its prototype.

While the melody in Stein or Loy’s poetry is not directly changed when the harmony is modified, it is perceived differently. In other words, the context in which the melody is heard has changed. One may, for example, consider the identity of pain, rather than the effect of pain, as the harmonic element of “Parturition.” For example, pain is portrayed as a “circle” and a “cosmos of agony” (6). Revising the harmonic structure in this way reveals that within the rhythmic context of birth, and the melodic context of pain, the speaker becomes, in the logic of the poem, the center of the universe through experiencing pain, e.g., “I am the centre/ Of a circle of pain” (1-2). While the harmonic structure can be modified, it must be modified only in a way that complements the melody, and thus the arbitrary addition of tones is not a valid approach.

Exploring Stein and Loy in musical terms reveals a strong relationship between the two. Both are infinitely capable of de-centering the sources of linear meaning in their poetry in such a way as to permit, and perhaps even require, that meaning not be mistaken for a monolithic entity. The result of such a quality is to make the meaning of the poems not a sum total of the processes found therein, but instead the recognition of the very processes of meaning.

While this musical method of criticism is valuable in examining the work of both Stein and Loy, its application is clearest in relation to Stein's work. The disparity in ease of application seems to rest primarily on Stein's clear treatment of words as objects, which provides a convenient and easily illustrated way of breaking the poems down into component parts. Conversely, applying the method to Loy requires that considerable thought be put into discovering exactly which groups of words constitute workable images that can be demonstrated to exist independently. As a result, I give a great deal of space to "Lunar Baedeker" for the simple reasons that it is both representative of Loy's technique and is of manageable length.

III. Stein

Composition as Explanation: Syntax and Music

Gertrude Stein's style is marked by its ability to suggest meaning without, in any traditional sense, always making sense. It is, in essence, a reordering of value rather than a rejection of value. Stein's concern is not primarily with creating meaning, but with the process by which meaning is created. The meaning Stein evidences is in and of language itself, playing on the significance of rearranging the hierarchy of language. Meaning, however, is not an exclusive truth arrived at by a paring away of inconsistencies until a sound structure is revealed. Rather, meaning is shown to be a sum of possibility. What one discovers in reading Stein is not what things mean, but how they mean. As a result syntax, the very mechanics of language, becomes to a great extent the subject. Stein's *Composition as Explanation* provides a convenient basis for an exploration of her style as it seems to comment on its own structure. First, I will examine the work through syntactical analysis and close reading, and then I will use the findings to place the work in a musical context.

For all her seriousness Stein is also quite humorous, and her art is frequently playful. Without recognizing the humor, Stein's convolutions seem at best daunting—her ideas often becoming but an intellectual vitamin tablet to supplement a repetitious bread and water stylistic diet. With the humor, we eat for pleasure. Stein's musicality is in large part responsible for her humor since music, perhaps to a greater extent than other art forms, produces its emotional effect in such a way as to conceal the connection between emotion and technique.

Stein's method in *Composition as Explanation* may be seen as an attempt to rid language of assumptions. To do so, Stein removes the syntactic center, and thereby challenges "meaning" by avoiding a concrete point of reference that limits the influence of lexical uncertainty. In other words, Stein views words as equal to, if not greater than, syntax in their effect upon meaning. Traditional syntactic structure predetermines the meaning of many of the words in a sentence by compelling the reader to subjugate these words to the syntactic idea of the sentence. For example, consider Noam Chomsky's well-known sentence "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" (15). According to Chomsky, because of its syntax we recognize this group of words as a sentence despite the fact that it seems to mean nothing. Chomsky demonstrates the individual words to be grammatical components first in forming a sentence, with their lexical value, or meaning, being of secondary importance. In keeping with what I will refer to as common syntax, then, the recognition of meaning depends primarily upon the recognition of acceptable patterns, but is to some extent independent of these patterns. Insofar as the idea of the sentence to a great extent precedes its verbal manifestation, one knows before he completes the sentence which words partially predetermine the meaning of others. For example, though it seems illogical, it is clear that "colorless," and "green" both determine in part the meaning of "ideas." The relationship of the words to one another is known from the outset, and limitations are thus placed on their ability to "mean" individually.

The problem of predetermined meaning, however, does not exist in music. While it is true, assuming a succession of notes has a tonal center, that context provides each note with a denotative value (the notes position in the tonic scale, for example), the note can occupy more than one position at a time without creating an illogical situation. For example, in the

key of C major, F natural may at the same time fill the position of both the fourth of a C natural scale, and the minor third of a D minor triad. “Meaning,” however, is not restricted in that, despite the possibility of assigning various denotative meanings to F natural, its meaning is entirely the effect of the musical phrase. Unlike language, as in Chomsky’s sentence above, in which words in large part bring their denotative meanings into the sentence, musical tones are far more plastic. Stein, it seems, tries to achieve this level of plasticity in poetic language.

Stein does not dismiss traditional syntax. Rather, she questions its ability to determine the absolute function of words within a sentence—she treats the hierarchy of syntax as a formalized set of assumptions rather than as an unqualified certainty. In effect, she suggests that such assumptions constrain the possibilities of meaning by encouraging one to arrive at conclusions prematurely. What Richard Bridgman says of Stein’s concept of “generations” in *Composition as Explanation* seems to be equally true of her concept of words: they are “‘all alike;’ only the relationships of their components change” (168). Thus time, the framework in which generations occur, is much like syntax, the framework in which words occur. What is perceived as a shift in a word’s meaning is actually but a change in the word’s relationship to other words. Such an understanding of words is a definite move toward a musical understanding of language.

Stein attempts to free her writing of syntactic assumptions primarily through repetition, which operates much like musical rhythm. The primary function of her repetition is to create in the text an ongoing present that continuously reminds the reader that a particular thing is still happening, is influencing and being influenced by each syntactic setting the repeated word or phrase exists in. Stein’s repetition of “exactly” in *If I Told Him*:

A completed Portrait of Picasso, for example, reflects the temporal immediacy of a painted portrait.

Exactly do they do.

First exactly.

Exactly do they do too.

First exactly.

And first exactly.

Exactly do they do.

And first exactly and exactly. (42-48)

Through repetition, “exactly” becomes the dominant feature and, as a result, the dominant idea of the passage. “Exactly,” is, then, the rhythmic unit into which the accompanying words must fit. However, “exactly,” though the dominant idea, is made meaningful only in its relation to the other words. Each instance of “exactly” depends upon an understanding of how Stein uses the word before and after a specific instance; for example, literally, as in “that is exactly where he was standing,” or figuratively, as in “he looks exactly like a fish.” By repetition, the connotations of “exactly” grow, with each manifestation forcing a reconsideration of the last. Stein uses “exactly” in such a way as to divorce the word from its common function. Stein’s usage fails, in the typical sense, to intensify a relationship between ideas, as is the common use of “exactly.” Instead, “exactly” becomes the subject, as it becomes necessary search within the other components of the relationships to find its meaning. Stein breaks the pattern that makes “exactly” meaningful. Thus, Stein forces “exactly” into an awkward independence that extends to the accompanying words, so that they too are freed from the predetermined relationship.

Repetition then might be seen as much like the rhythm of a piece of music. Like a musical rhythm, it can be isolated—there is no question as to what is being repeated. However, just as melody cannot exist without rhythm, Stein’s composition fails to exist without repetition and it becomes something else entirely. The simultaneity of disparate meanings is lost without repetition, and thus the idea of an ongoing present that shapes one’s interpretation disappears. Repetition is not simply a means of drawing attention to a particular aspect, but the creation of possibility that informs the “melody” of the non-repeated words. The non-repeated words are melodic to the extent that their movement, or sense, is shaped by the rhythm of repetition in which they exist without being entirely determined by it.

To examine Stein’s method musically, consider the effect of converting a waltz into common time. While the absolute values of the melodic notes change, their relative values do not. Thus, the melody is recognizable in both time signatures. However, the melody functions differently depending on which time signature is chosen in that when it is broken down into rhythmic units, it evidences a subdivision of the underlying rhythm. The melody of a waltz must contain the rhythmic features of a waltz, whereas the rhythm of the waltz, isolated from the melody, implies nothing specific about the melody, as melody is defined by both vertical and horizontal movement.

The first paragraph of Stein’s *Composition as Explanation* typifies her use of rhythmic repetition:

There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking. By this I mean so simply that anybody

knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them
then different from other generations and this is what makes everything
different otherwise they are all alike and everybody knows it because
everybody says it. (453)

In the first sentence, the repeated word “difference” functions in a number of ways. The first “difference” is as a noun, naming the subject of the sentence. The following “difference,” however, at least in one sense, gives a quality of the preceding “difference.” This function of the second “difference” is clear if the first “difference” is replaced with another noun. For example, “. . . nothing that makes a dog a difference.”

The rhythm of repetition offers a third possibility for both instances of “difference” in the first sentence. Though the reading is outside the specific area of interest stated for this study, I include it because it provides an example of the impact sound can have, and will I hope encourage a further consideration of the theories presented in this thesis on a fuller range of poetic modes of meaning. That said, it is possible to understand “. . . a difference a difference . . .” as a repetition of both the sound and sense of the words: a doubling of the idea, and thus a doubling of the syntactic structure. The meaning of the sentence changes to that of an identical sentence without the repeated “a difference.” The sentence now states that “there is singularly nothing that makes a difference except . . .” In other words, “a difference a difference” can be read the same way as “really really” in the phrase “really really big,” in which the repeated “really” does not significantly alter the actual meaning, which is “very big.” While this reading seems, admittedly, a stretch, it is valid in that the sound-identity of “difference” does not change. One *hears* that they are the same, hence one’s recognition of repetition.

Further validation of the above idea is found in the fact that the common idiom “makes a difference” appears in the sentence before the second instance of “difference.” “Makes” is thus attached to “difference” in a very specific way before repetition is able to change the rhythm of the passage. In this sense, the second instance of “difference” echoes a piece of a larger unit: “makes a difference.” The second “difference” destabilizes the integrity of the idiom it partially echoes. In so doing, as she calls the integrity of syntactic relations into question, Stein encourages one to regard not only the structure as a whole, but its individual pieces as well.

In changing the function of “difference,” Stein also subtly changes the function of “except.” If “difference” is interpreted through common syntax, “except” informs us that we are about to find out what makes a “difference” what it is, qualifying the word “nothing.” If “difference” is read as an exact doubling of a single idea, however, “except” signals that the reader is about to discover what makes a difference in the sense of “what matters.” Interestingly, “except” still qualifies “nothing.” However, we see a change. In the first example, “except” refers the reader back to the process of making “a difference a difference,” which is, in this syntactic understanding, the primary action of interest. In the second example, however, “except” signals that the important action is about to come. As the action is, according to the sentence, that which “makes a difference,” with “difference” acting as a synonym of “matters,” “except” thus provides forward motion rather than turning the sentence back on itself as in the first example.

The word “different” can also be interpreted differently depending on the reading of the sentence. Applying common syntax, “different” is directly related to “difference.” It is something “different” that makes a “difference a difference.” If “a difference” is simply

being doubled, “different” is no longer a logical extract of “difference” in regard to meaning, as “a difference” is now synonymous with “matters.” The sound resemblance, however, remains intact. The aural similarity that ties these words together serves to bring attention to their interaction, for highlighting their similarity in sound also suggests a connection in sense.

An example of this connection in sense is the interaction between “exactly” and “exactitude” in “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso.”

Exactly as as kings.

Feeling full for it.

Exactitude as kings.

So beseech you as full as for it.

Exactly or as kings. (14-18)

“Exactly as as kings” is followed by “Exactitude as kings.” In the first example, “exactly” implies that some process or action is directly analogous with a feature not of “kings” directly, but a feature that is “as kings” or in other words “*like* kings.” If we assume that this line takes its subject from a previous line in the poem, because of the doubled “as,” the sentence says that something or someone, is “exactly like something that is like kings.”

“Exactitude” becomes a possible identity for this feature. “Exactitude” maintains the root idea of “exact” found in “exactly,” but transforms it into a trait of kings rather than a means of forming a connection with kings. Thus, the feature of kings being discussed is present not only in the idea of kings and the (absent) idea being compared to them, but in the comparison itself. “Exact” is continuously present and fuses together the ideas of being and similarity.

“Exactitude as kings” suggests that the quality of being exact is like (as) kings. While “as”

can mean either similar to, as in “it’s as hot as seven hells in here,” or precisely like, as in “it is as tall as the building,” exactitude is binary—either something has the quality of being exact or it does not.

The process of repetition continues in the second sentence of *Composition As Explanation*, building upon the possibilities of meaning found in the first. We learn that “composition is the difference.” “Difference” is given an actual identity for the first time here. Whereas the first sentence is concerned with that which “makes a difference,” in two distinct senses, this sentence is concerned with “the difference,” a definite thing, which is identified as “composition.”

The importance of the repeated “difference” lies in the relationship between the first two sentences. Approaching them through common syntax, the first sentence indicates only that “difference” is the result of generations looking at different things. That the “difference” thus created exists between generations is not established. The “By this I mean” of sentence two, however, indicates that the difference is between generations. If the first sentence is understood with “difference” to mean “matters,” the second sentence then contains two possible meanings for “difference” which may echo the sense of either understanding of its previous instances.

Stein’s melodic words function in much the same way. The structure, or rhythm, provided by repeated words allows the words to be understood as a subdivision of the rhythmic idea that also contains information not present in the rhythmic idea. “Rhythmic idea” refers to the sum of all possible meanings that a repeated word contains. It is rhythmic because each possible meaning provides a beat within which all corresponding melodic words must assimilate to each other. Stein creates a new form of syntax that allows her to

surround a subject without limiting the influence of the words of a sentence to a single function. Stein does not do away with common syntactic structure, but rather creates a parallel structure that gains its momentum through its contrast with what is expected. The transformation of “exactly” from descriptor to subject as described earlier is an example.

Stein’s style is a method of turning a text in on itself, focusing on the relationships of the words to one another rather than on an external idea. In so doing, Stein creates a syntax that reduces the assumptions about words that harness meaning, and as a result limit possibility. The effect is that the process of meaning, or the set of relationships that do not exist in a paraphrase of the plain—sense meaning of the passage, usurps actual meaning, and language is free to carry the entire weight of connotation present in each individual word. Sense becomes secondary to sound, and in listening one is able to hear the continuity that encourages the reader to connect rather than disassemble the relationships through which meaning is created among words.

Tender Buttons: Playing With The Changes

Objects begins with the section titled “A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass.” Even before the text of the “Carafe” section, however, Stein has set forth the principles on which *Tender Buttons* is built. An examination of Stein’s word choices sheds much light on these foundational principles. Stein creates a system of lexical interrelationships that multiplies connections between words. These multiple connections allow a single phrase or passage to point in various directions at once, leaving one to search for an increasingly elusive point of reference. It becomes

seemingly impossible to permanently fix a given word within a particular grammatical, denotative, or syntactical category with any certainty, thus suggesting the musical quality of her language.

In the title, both “carafe” and “glass,” may accurately be termed “things that hold beverages.” Classifying “carafe” and “glass” in this context, however, depends primarily on “carafe,” as it has but one common definition, whereas “glass” can mean any number of things. Thus “carafe,” in this relationship, restricts the meaning of “glass.” The relationship between “blind” and “glass” demonstrates this restriction, by presenting another lexical category in which “glass” operates. “Blind” suggests the general category of sight, into which “glass,” as in “pane of” or “optical instrument,” fits nicely. Stein thus allows “glass” to exist simultaneously in at least two categories, and by extension demonstrates that, insofar as “a carafe” is “a blind glass,” these categories are transferable.

Stein continues using the process of lexical categorization as a means of expanding relational possibilities in the body of the poem.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single
hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing.

All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling.

The difference is spreading. (1-4)

“A kind in glass and a cousin” is an example. “Kind” and “cousin” suggest the general category of similarity, with “nothing strange” and “not unordered” expanding it.

“Spectacle” moves away from the similarity category, as it suggests difference, in the sense of a strange sight or occurrence. In suggesting difference, however, the idea of

similarity is reaffirmed by “spectacle” because a spectacle requires the prior recognition of similarity. In another sense of the word, a “spectacle” is a device used to see, or distinguish. “Spectacle” thus joins the “sight” category, becoming synonymous with “glass” in the sense of optical lens as discussed in regard to the title. In this sense, “a spectacle” is, in fact, “nothing strange” as it is a member of an existing, identifiable category.

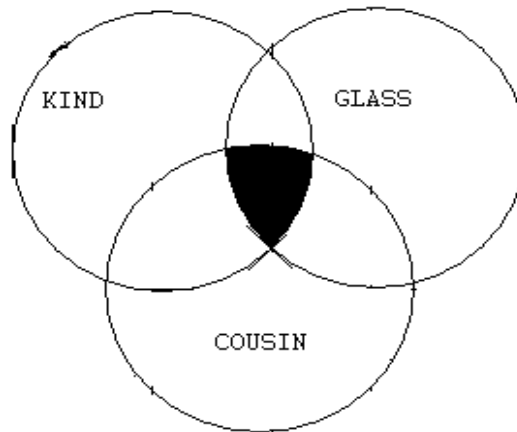
The methods used to explore Stein’s lexical choices apply equally well to the study of the syntactic structure of the poem. The title begins with the naming of what we are to assume is an object: “A Carafe” (461). “A Carafe” is qualified, however, by “That Is A Blind Glass.” It is from the qualification of the object that the poem derives its syntactic interest. The “object” at hand is not simply the physical “A Carafe” which we are told “Is A Blind Glass,” but rather the undefined blank space existing in the space between “carafe” and “blind glass.” Stein essentially makes a comparison of categories, as indicated by the indefinite article “a,” in that both “carafe” and “blind glass” become representative samples. The idea of comparison stems from the explicit suggestion of similarity between the two categories. Logically, it is certain that the category “carafe” overlaps the sub-category “blind glass.” Thus, the known qualities of the category “carafe” limit the possible implications of the unknown quantities of the less concrete “blind glass,” as it must exist within the boundaries of that which is a carafe. In so categorizing them, Stein reverses the assumed primary object, “a carafe,” so that it becomes a descriptor. “Blind glass,” having no definitive meaning, is in fact defined by the very object it seeks to describe. In order to make sense of “blind glass” we must first know something of the carafe.

The lack of punctuation further destabilizes the actual relationship between the two terms.

As the descriptor becomes the described, the motion of the phrase changes. Stein overturns the initial assumption that the phrase “a blind glass” serves as a lens through which the general category of “carafe” is focused, dispelling the assumption that “a carafe” is the primary object described by the phrase. Both “carafe” and “blind glass” then become equal syntactic entities both paradoxically performing the same function. By encouraging words to interact in such a way through the reversal of the descriptor and the described, Stein places the focus of her work on the relationships of individual words to one another, thus overcoming the limiting factor of lexical certainty.

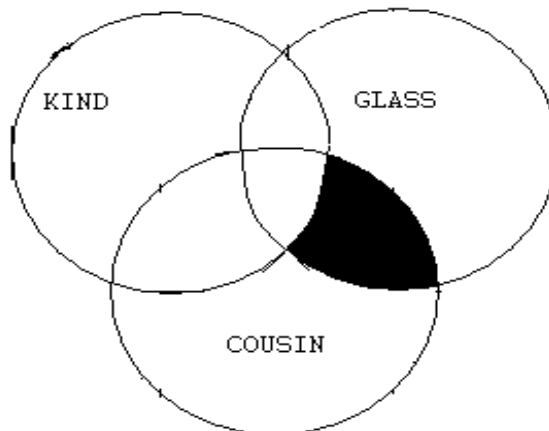
Continuing in “A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass,” one finds further examples of Stein’s method. In looking at the phrase “A kind in glass and a cousin,” a process similar to that at work in the title appears. In this case, one might imagine a Venn diagram comprising the categories “kind,” “glass,” and “cousin,” in order to explore the relationships between the words. There are a number of possibilities in constructing the diagram. In the first possibility, the shaded portion of the diagram contains the entire area jointly occupied by all three categories (Fig. 1). Thus, the “kind” of the phrase is indistinguishable from the other two units, while “glass” and “cousin,” maintain the possibility of separateness.

Fig. 1



In the second possible diagram, the phrase “glass and a cousin” narrows rather than expands “kind” by referring only to the area of the diagram occupied by both “glass” and “cousin” (Fig. 2).

FIG. 2



In this reading, all three terms become indistinguishable as they all occupy the same portion of the diagram. The effect of the phrase may then be seen to create both a reduction and expansion of certainty. Stein destabilizes the lexical meanings of the individual words by focusing on the many ways in which they interact. As Lisa Ruddick says, based on a somewhat similar reading of the poem:

. . . Stein simultaneously destabilizes or multiplies the meanings of each of these words, so that their apparent unity or connectedness seems simply the effect of one (limiting) perspective on them, whereas another perspective—equally limiting, were one to use it exclusively—points to the spiraling of each word into the free play of language. (194)

It is worth returning to the title and examining its relationship to the text of the poem, as the two parts are strongly linked. Considering “kind,” in “a kind in glass and a cousin” and “A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass” as sharing in the poem a common identity, a number of interesting observations may be made. First, and perhaps most important, forming an identity between “kind” and the title opens further interpretive possibilities in that one’s understanding of “kind” reverts to a choice among several possible meanings. “Kind” is no longer an undefined term in a diagram, but a word whose meaning is weighted by common usage. The two choices of meaning for “kind” that are easiest to compare are “exactly alike,” as in “two of a kind,” or, “a member of group within a group” as in “it is a certain kind of apple.”

Applying the first definition, the first phrase of the poem might be read “(A carafe, that is a blind glass is exactly like) glass, and a cousin” In this reading,

“kind” becomes de-centered in that its meaning is at odds with “cousin,” which suggests a more distant relationship. Naturally, this problematizes my earlier diagram by suggesting a syntactic motion. The words no longer sit still, but move and readjust as their relationship changes. Applying the second definition of “kind,” there is a similar effect on the diagram. If “a carafe, that is a blind glass” is a “kind in glass” in the sense of a subset of a larger category, the diagram fails insofar as the “kind” portion of the diagram must exist entirely in the “glass” circle.

Stein’s demonstration of multiple syntactic possibilities results in a sense of movement within the poems that comprise *Tender Buttons*. Each new link formed between words invites one to search for meaning in a new direction; thus the poems are often without a specific meaning. The motion of the poems seems away from, rather than toward, whatever one chooses as the subject.

The clearest similarity between *Tender Buttons* and *Composition as Explanation* is in terms of the musical reading. As with *Composition as Explanation*, *Tender Buttons* suggests a rhythm over which a melodic figure plays. In both works, the rhythmic foundation allows melodic free-play while at the same time firmly rooting it in the text of the poem itself. As I have already described the process in relation to *Composition as Explanation*, a truncated version will suffice here. “A Carafe, That Is A Blind Glass” for example, might be chosen as the rhythmic idea. “Carafe” demonstrates rhythm not through literal repetition, but through its recurrence in its various descriptions, for example “a spectacle,” “a single hurt color,” and “not unordered.” The melodic idea manifests itself in the aspects that describe the rhythmic idea. In effect, the melodic idea is the collection of reassertions of the rhythmic idea.

However, the melodic components must be considered as things that also have meanings in themselves. Thus, the melodic “hurt,” is free to mean anything that “hurt” can mean in any given context. However, the connotations of “hurt” must be linked back to the rhythmic idea. The concept of “carafe” one perceives in creating the rhythmic idea directly influences the melodic idea without in any sense suppressing it.

Harmonic structure deals with the way in which some passages evoke meanings that do not directly influence any particular melodic idea, but suggest a parallel representation of possibility. Examples of harmonic constructions include the mathematical understanding of “The difference is spreading” (4), in which the components of an arithmetic problem grow farther apart, and understanding “a spectacle” to be an optical device. Harmonically, these interpretations remain valid even though they may seem to be logically at odds with the chosen melodic idea but they provide a context of suggestion in which the (elusive) plain sense of the poem might operate. If, for example, one chooses to maintain that “carafe” refers to the physical object that is similar to a pitcher, it is unlikely for it to be a literal optical instrument. However, optical instruments, too, may be considered a “kind in glass.” Along the same lines, if one looks through colored glass and sees, let us say, “a single hurt color,” has not the colored glass become an optical instrument in much the same way that a pitcher containing flowers might be considered a vase? Harmonic structure changes not what is, but changes the context in which it is seen. To stop looking through colored glass or to remove flowers from a pitcher has no effect on what is

possible, it only changes what one perceives as being primary. Such a change is harmonic in that it is a change in context that brings upon a change in perception.

IV. Loy

Lunar Baedeker: Seeing The Music

In her *Lunar Baedeker* poems, Mina Loy explores the connection between chaos and the imagination. In her poetry, through her use of images and ideas with dual identities—at once both concrete and abstract, she implicitly describes the imagination as the ability to contain chaos rather than to tame it. Her method, much like Stein's, consists of hinging the understanding of a poem upon various words or ideas that may be understood in more than one distinct, if overlapping, sense.

Loy explores the ways in which these individual units derive energy from one another by alluding to lexical and syntactic possibilities nestled within each that would otherwise remain inert. While her method is quite similar to Stein's, it differs mainly in that, as we shall see, Loy's use of connotation often creates a "plain-sense" meaning of its own. Loy, it seems, wastes no possible connotation of a word. The contradictions found between various definitions and connotations are, for Loy, an intricate harmony that rises out of seeming cacophony. In allowing these various contradictions to open meaningful interpretive possibilities within other seeming contradictions, Loy creates within her poems a system of self-contained referentiality that works to contain the chaos of possibility present in language much as musical structure gives direction and meaning to sound.

It is useful at this point to briefly examine Loy's use of sound, as it provides clear model of the convoluted relationships she creates in her poetry. Loy mirrors the

inter-referential process within the sound patterns of her poems. While her approach to sound is at face value a poetic commonplace, its prefiguring of the lexical relationships within her poetry makes it interesting. She creates sound-connections such as alliteration, assonance, and imbedded rhyme that suggest complex relationships much like those that connect the procession of ideas present in her poems. For example, the passage in “The Widow’s Jazz”

Cravan
colossal absentee
the substitute dark
rolls to the incandescent memory (29-32)

demonstrates a number of such connections. “Cravan,” literally the name of Loy’s dead husband, suggests that “colossal absentee” refers most directly to both his importance to the speaker, and to his conspicuous absence. “Cravan,” however, interacts with “colossal” in some interesting ways. “Craven,” which is aurally almost identical to “Cravan,” means, in obsolete usage “defeated,” which combines aurally, via consonance, and syntactically with “colossal” to form “the great defeated,” an ironic statement. At the same time, “colossal” refers to “Cravan” as but a representation of a man as it can be used to denote a statue of the human form.

“Lunar Baedeker” provides a clear example of Loy’s method. At root, “Lunar Baedeker” is a “tourists guidebook to the moon.” The poem consists of a series of dense abstractions tied together by the concrete images with which it begins and ends: “A silver Lucifer” and “fossil virgin of the sky.” Between these concrete images, however, exists a body of text that must be deciphered. Unlike a Frost poem, for example, “Lunar

Baedeker” lacks the verbal transparency beneath which lurks a parallel meaning.

“Baedeker” does contain a discoverable description of sorts, but the motion described therein is so abstract as to be void of any agreed upon “plain sense” understanding. For example, the first and second stanza

A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies (1-7)

is allusive to the point of precluding an entirely accurate summary. Do the “somnambulists” have “adolescent thighs” or sleepwalk on them? All that can be logically ascertained of the passage’s surface-sense is that it is directly related to the concrete image of the first stanza via the verb “serves.” The alliteration that carries over from the first to second stanza further strengthens the connection, though it does little to dispel the ambiguous abstraction. Loy uses this absence of surface meaning as a means of providing an interpretive key to the poem, however. The destabilization of surface meaning focuses attention on the breadth of meanings possible in words, as the failure of the surface structure to create meaning logically sends one deeper within. The focus of the poem thus depends on the minutiae of meaning within individual words. This is an example of Loy’s frequent use of arcane language, for example “Baedeker,”

“infusoria,” and “somnambulist,” in that it forces a broader consideration of the connotations present in words by making language less familiar.

“Lunar Baedeker” begins by describing the moon with the ambiguous image, “A silver Lucifer/ serves/ cocaine in cornucopia” (Loy 1-3). The ambiguity of the image stems primarily from the uncertainty of the words “Lucifer” and “cornucopia.” The most likely, and most concrete, understanding of “Lucifer” is “light bringer,” with “silver Lucifer” referring to the quality of light. However, if the action of “serving” is read literally, “Lucifer” may be understood as “Satan,” as the image points toward a humanoid quality. This reading of “Satan” is further validated by the reference to “Lethe” and “Necropolis,” both of which are related to death and, by extension, the underworld. “Lethe,” however, also serves in another way. As it alludes to Hades, it suggests that “Lucifer” might also be a classical reference. The definition of “Lucifer” as “Venus,” or “the morning star” is thus hinted at, reaffirming the initial idea of “light bringer.” A definite shift, however, has taken place in regard to Lucifer. The very symbol of evil becomes synonymous with the symbol of love, the goddess Venus.

Even without considering the devil/love goddess dichotomy, reading “Lucifer” as Venus furthers the system of oppositions on which the poem is built. The binary opposition of “Lunar Baedeker” exists in the myths surrounding Venus’ Greek counterpart, Aphrodite. Aphrodite is strongly linked with death as well as love. Aphrodite’s relationship with the war god Ares, with whom she bore children, is one example strongly indicating a sense of duality insofar as passion exists in both extremes of human interaction. Most interesting, however, is the dispute she had with Persephone, queen of the dead, over Adonis. In connecting “Lucifer” in the sense of

“Venus” to death by showing them to have a common goal, the opposition between the ideas represented by each serves to define the central idea of the poem: the ability of the moon to precipitate passionate action. The Venus-Aphrodite reading seems all the more likely when one considers the appearance of “Eros” in the poem, as Eros is Aphrodite’s companion. Eros is also the son of Ares, thus forming a connection between him and Aphrodite. Further strengthening the connection is Eros’ uncertain parentage, which is sometimes said to be of Erebus, the personified darkness of the underworld, and the Night, thus further thematically connecting the allusion with the poem as a whole.

As Lethe contained the water of forgetfulness, a reasonably strong connection exists between it and “cocaine.” “Cocaine” provides another interesting case, as it too, is marked by a duality, but of effect rather than meaning. Cocaine is used both as a stimulant and a local anesthetic, capable of enlivening or dulling the senses—again, a seeming binary opposition. Loy presents the uncertainty of “cocaine” as being furthered by “cornucopia.” The most likely reading of “cornucopia” seems to be “in abundance.” However, Loy suggests two quite different things depending on whether it is the stimulative or anesthetic properties that are referred to. The text supports both readings. Sleep and dream imagery are abundant in the poem, suggesting the anesthetic qualities: “somnambulists,” “lunar lusts,” “A flock of dreams.” A sense of hypersensitivity also suggests the stimulative qualities of cocaine, such as in the capitalized interjections “WING SHOWS ON STARWAY/ ZODIAC CAROUSEL” and “NOCTURNAL CYCLOPS/ CRYSTAL CONCUBINE.”

The two meanings hinge on the phrase “Lunar lusts.” While it is indicative of sleep in that it suggests dreaming, it suggests a rather intense dreaming. The intensity of the dream-like passage increases further with

Cyclones
Of ecstatic dust
And ashes whirl
Crusaders
From hallucinatory citadels
Of shattered glass
Into evacuate craters. (27-33)

Though the language of the poem is primarily that of chaos and death, the connection between Venus-Lucifer and Satan-Lucifer offers another possibility. The connection between the satanic Lucifer and the goddess Venus is indirect. “Lucifer” refers appropriately only to the planet Venus rather than to the goddess directly. Within the concrete image of the morning star, “silver Lucifer,” the otherwise concrete idea of a goddess becomes more abstract. However, the abstraction, or idea, is maintained by the image. Abstraction then, tabernacled as it is within the image, functions literally within the poem. This method is, perhaps, what Loy means by “stelletric signs” (25), a charged stellar body combining stellar and electric and hinting at “zodiac” signs (26).

Loy’s technique of lexical interrelationship is mirrored in the sound schemes she uses. Primarily, this scheme consists of alliteration on two basic types. First, Loy uses alliteration to demonstrate a non-verbal overlapping of ideas within a passage,

with one word existing entirely or in part within another. “Some somnambulists” (4), “draped . . . draperies” (6-7), and “parvenus . . . avenues” are examples of this method.

Second, Loy uses alliteration to create a rhythm that forges internal connection between words. “silver Lucifer/ serves” is an example (1-2). “Silver” and “serves” aurally connect with “Lucifer” inside the word, while “silver” connects alliteratively “serves” at both the beginning and end. Lines 27-32 provide a similar example:

Cyclones
of ecstatic dust
and ashes whirl
crusaders from hallucinatory citadels
of shattered glass.

Such alliteration suggests a non-linear connection between the words, whose sound similarities do not follow an identifiable, predetermined pattern. Thus, the sound of Loy’s poetry mirrors its lexical construction to show the harmony of words, both in sense and sound, to exist anywhere that a connection can be made. Loy complicates her alliterative method by connecting a single word to other words by more than one sound. “Somnambulists,” “adolescent,” and “satirical” is a prime example. Both the “s” and “t” sounds aurally connect these three words, thus suggesting a duality of relationship. However, the effect of this technique is not to suggest a specific relationship between the meanings and connotations of words, but instead to highlight the convoluted structure of the poem in general.

Loy’s embedded rhyme bursts open language to synthesize ideas through which she partitions the chaos of multiplicity. In “Parturition,” for example, the line “I am the

false quantity/ In the harmony of physiological potentiality” Loy creates a literal “false harmony” by inserting “harmony” between the end-rhymed “quantity” and “potentiality.” Furthermore, “Harmony” shares only the final vowel sound, while “quantity” and “potentiality” share a consonant and vowel sound. Loy’s poetry constantly turns back on itself in both sound and sense, pointing to a system that exists in connotation. Through this system, Loy is able to make her abstractions concrete. Loy thus creates meaning by demonstrating the referential possibilities of language. Like music, the actual, specific meaning is ever elusive, though the structure from which it springs is quite accessible.

The Music of Imagery in Loy’s “Lunar Baedeker”

The first thing to note about Loy’s imagery is that it is the product of what Weiner terms “. . . a collage-like method of arranging fragmented groups of phrases” (3). Like Stein, Loy was influenced by cubism, and explored its application in literature (Burke 318). The image structure of “Lunar Baedeker” is difficult to describe because it contains many constructions that at times seem to be images and at other times do not. For example, while it is possible to picture “Peris in livery” (8) as fairies or sprites wearing some manner of uniform, it is difficult to imagine how one might “prepare/ Lethe” (9-10), as there is no indication of what is involved in such a preparation. It is likewise quite difficult to separate these constructions into separate entities, as often it is unclear where one leaves off and another begins. While there is a definite sense of connectedness among these images, the relationships resist isolation. Much of this sense of connection depends on the emotional

evocativeness that stems from the poem's musical nature. The power of the poem is drawn in large part from the ambiguity of relationship common to Loy's poetry and music: it is impossible to say exactly why the connection of two ideas evokes emotions not common to either idea examined individually. Thus, Loy's imagism is closely linked to her lexical play; each often contradicts the other, creating between the two devices a quite deliberate disjunction.

Turning to the poem, we are presented with the concrete image "A silver Lucifer" (1). Perhaps concrete *images* would be a more appropriate description, as discussed previously, but either way Loy has presented us with something that we can see, fitting in nicely with the poem's title. The remainder of the first stanza, "serves/ cocaine in cornucopia" (2-3) however, problematizes the initial image. One must decide whether these two lines modify the concrete image directly, combining with line 1 to form a single image, or if they are a separate but related idea that informs one's assessment of the image without becoming a visual part of it.

If the lines combine to form a single image, "cocaine" becomes a physical substance, served in the literal sense by "A silver Lucifer." Such an image is not difficult to conjure up, as the common interpretation of "silver Lucifer" as the moon is easily adjusted to a human-like Satan, as mentioned before, to accommodate the act of serving while staying within the lexical bounds of the word "Lucifer." This image is, after all, nothing more than the resulting image formed by a personification of the controlling lunar image. If, on the other hand, "serves/ cocaine in cornucopia" only describes the already existing image of the moon without becoming part of the image itself, the image remains unchanged except that it is

given a more specific significance. In essence, the effect of the moon is in some sense comparable to that of cocaine.

While it is worthwhile to examine the flexibility of meaning found so often in Loy's vocabulary as a means in itself, of primary interest here is the effect it has upon the poem's imagism. Loy uses this flexibility to create two separate images from a single set of words—the moon and the humanoid server of cocaine. As is revealed in the remainder of the poem, however, neither image may be seen as entirely definitive, for both images influence one's interpretation of the lines that follow.

For example, the relationship between “somnambulists” and “silver Lucifer” implied in the second stanza changes according to one's interpretation of the “silver Lucifer” image. Thus,

To some somnambulists
Of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies (4-7)

may suggest a passive, metaphorical sense for “serves” if “silver Lucifer” is understood to be the concrete image with “serves/ cocaine in cornucopia” providing something of a metaphysical conceit if “cocaine” represents the moon's light, suggesting a connection between the moon and consciousness, perhaps. The generally active nature of the verb “serves” is made passive in the sense that it depends upon a reaction from the somnambulists in that if nothing is taken, then nothing was “served.” If the moon as an object is, in fact, the controlling image of “Lunar Baedeker,” then “cocaine,” or rather the effect of cocaine, is a quality belonging to the moon only through outside interaction with the moon. Like the

server, the moon has no light of its own but reflects the light of the sun. Thus “cocaine” modifies the idea of the moon only insofar as its effect can be determined in those served. The actual action, then, resides in the *reaction* of the somnambulists, not in the initial action of serving. Otherwise, the literal concept of the moon is destroyed. A figurative image is likewise not possible because the description given of “somnambulists” is elusive to the point of precluding the manufacture of a stable image, and leaves no concrete recipient for “serves.”

If, on the other hand, “silver Lucifer” is personified, “serves” retains its active nature, relegating whatever images might be created in the process to secondary importance. “Action” exists as the act of “serving,” rather than a physical description hints at personification. The image formed through the personification of the moon, while not entirely concrete, allows the reader to picture, even if only blurred and shadow-like, the interaction between “Lucifer” and “somnambulists.” The reader is persuaded to look for something that cannot be experienced in any direct, specific sense, as it does not exist entirely in the realm of either the concrete or the abstract. Like a musical composition, the structure, the concrete component—the part that can be accurately talked about, does not carry the full weight of meaning. In “Lunar Baedeker,” this musical quality of images seems to stem from second stanza’s lack of a visual center. While one may imagine “some somnambulists” without undue difficulty, the idea of “of adolescent thighs” complicates an attempt at visualization. While the logical problem of determining whether the “adolescent thighs” belong to, or are inhabited by “somnambulists” has already been mentioned, this uncertainty also raises a formal question. The difficulty of directly relating the idea of “adolescent thighs” with anything else in the poem suggests that it might be synecdochic or

metonymic. What these tropes might refer to, however, is at best elusive. Connecting the “livery” of “Peris in livery” with the “satirical draperies” that drape the “adolescent thighs” seems likely in that it suggests being clothed in light, perhaps. This line of thought logically requires a connection between “somnambulists” and “peris,” which is also reasonable as they “prepare Lethe,” which, is in the realm of the god Somnus. Whatever the case, “adolescent thighs” leaves the reader guessing at exactly what “serves” may act upon, with “draped/ in satirical draperies” serving to increase the level of uncertainty, thus hampering one’s ability see the image.

The image created through personification, of course, leads one back to the original point of departure, the concrete image of the moon, as it is the moon that the personification seeks to describe. Rather than creating a purely linear progression, the poem implies simultaneity of ideas that functions like the three primary musical components: rhythm, melody, and harmony. The idea of the moon influences the idea of the satanic Lucifer while itself being influenced by that which it describes. The effect of this relationship is that of a collage. The collection of images may be seen as related primarily because they are, in fact, a single collection. However, the effect the images have on the idea produced by the collage places great emphasis on the relationships between the disparate objects from which it is created. While it would be of limited value to discuss precisely what a particular collage *means*, one might quite profitably go on at great length about *how* it means.

V. The Connection between Loy and Stein

While Stein is quite deliberate in her linguistic experimentation, Loy is, in a sense, far more traditional in her approach to poetry. It is possible to use the principles of syntactic relationships set forth in *Tender Buttons* and *Composition as Explanation* as a means of sifting through Loy's dense imagistic rhetoric in "Lunar Baedeker." As is the case with Stein's syntactic experimentation, the hierarchical organization of Loy's images becomes uncertain. With each new image, Loy presents the possibility of a fresh beginning, with her images surrounding rather than leading directly to the central idea of the poem.

Loy's collage of images is quite similar to Stein's syntactic structures. In both Stein and Loy there is a strong sense of simultaneity and, likewise, both tend to point in various and seemingly irreconcilable directions. As with Stein's poetry, however, a workable order may be imposed on "Lunar Baedeker" through comparison with music. While verbal repetition may be seen as the rhythmic basis of Stein's work, it is the cyclic depiction of the moon that accomplishes this task in Loy's "Lunar Baedeker."

Using the progression of images as a rhythmic foundation, the plain-sense action of the poem may be seen as melodic. Thus, the horizontal movement of the melodic element must consist of a subdivision of the poem's rhythmic idea. The horizontal melodic movement is then the interaction between the cohesive, individual images that combine to say something on the order of "this is what the moon is." Examples of such units include "A silver Lucifer," "adolescent thighs," "the eye-white sky-light" (21), etc. However, these units also include "A silver Lucifer/ serves/ cocaine in cornucopia," "some somnambulists/ of

adolescent thighs,” and “the eye-white sky-light/ white light district” (21-22). Anything that can be considered a single image may thus define a horizontal melodic element.

The justification for this methodology is that these images, added together, represent the rhythmic idea of the cyclically changing moon, each being a separate, isolatable piece of the process. As “A silver Lucifer/ serves/ cocaine in cornucopia (1-3) may be separated into two images, “A silver Lucifer” and “A silver Lucifer” serving “cocaine,” suggests, one such element may be present in another, larger element, but such occurrences merely show melodic variation, much as two quarter notes might combine to produce a half note. This is not to say, as we shall see, that such a combination asserts the same thing as the two separate, smaller images that are present within it, but only to demonstrate that both inhabit the same amount of rhythmic space. The melodic material may be arranged in any number of ways, the only limiting factor being the critic’s ability to justify the chosen components as separate entities that in themselves exhibit some manner of image.

While one may follow different images or image groups throughout “Lunar Baedeker” with equal success, the subject of the poem, in the most general sense, seems a likely place to begin. Loy depicts the supposed subject of the poem, the moon, as an active agent that becomes, eventually, an inactive agent. The moon is at first “A silver Lucifer” that “serves/ cocaine in cornucopia” (1-3). In this reading, the moon is an active agent that brings about change through its own action, in that it “serves,” acting upon “. . . some somnambulists of adolescent thighs” (4-5). Later, the moon takes on the less active role of “museums” (45), in which Loy places “immortality.” While less active than the “serves” of line 2, “museums” suggests that the moon does actually contain the contents of the “museum.” In this sense, the moon is much like a mirror, a reflection of that which its “Nocturnal cyclops” eye sees (46).

Much as a mirror reflects the form before it, a museum reflects something of its compiler. The cyclops “eye” and the “museum” work together to create an interpretive uncertainty so that the acts of seeing and of being seen overlap, therefore making it impossible to know which influences the other.

Finally, the moon becomes “the fossil virgin of the skies,” a passive record of the past. “Virgin” suggests that, unlike the contents of a museum, the “fossil” is untouched and unchanged by perception. The description of the fossil-moon as “pocked with personification” expands upon the obvious passivity of fossilization in that the act of personification is performed upon the moon rather than extending from within the moon itself. The previous activity of the moon is, then, in a sense reassigned to the observer. The final image of “Lunar Baedeker,” however, is the cyclical change of the moon—it “waxes and wanes” (Loy 50). Loy’s use of a cyclical image as a conclusion suggests that there is a circular relationship uniting the images. Namely, when considered in context of being “pocked with personification” the image of the moon has been visibly changed by the processes set forth in the poem. Likewise, Loy’s return to the transparent language of “waxes and wanes,” indicates that the verbal convolution, too, has come full circle. The moon continues its eternal orbit.

Using the musical method of reading applied to Stein, the circular relationship of Loy’s images may be seen as a rhythmic idea. Thus, as observed in *Composition as Explanation*, there is likewise an attendant melodic structure. While Stein demonstrates the existence of this melodic structure in the relationships between individual words, Loy shows it in the relationships between images. The melody of Loy’s images exists in their logical horizontal progression of complementary vertical elements in context of the foundational

rhythmic images. If one takes the cyclical images demonstrating the changes in the moon as the rhythmic idea of *Lunar Baedeker*, the remaining images become melodic statements, and thus exist within the parameters of the rhythmic framework.

Another example of a rhythmic idea is the cycle of rebirth through art found in Loy's poem "Marble." The poem begins "Greece has thrown white shadows" (1). "Shadows" refers indirectly to the thing that cast it (in this case, figures from Greek mythology). Hence, the shadow is a direct descendent of the object. However, a "shadow" is also a featureless, two-dimensional representation. In the next stanza, these shadows become "A flock of stone/ Gods/ perched upon pedestals" (4-6). The figures are now three-dimensional, motionless objects placed on "pedestals" to be examined. They then become "A populace/ of athlete lilies/ of the galleries (7-9). Instead of stone, the figures are now "lilies" and are no longer static, but growing. The poem ends with "A colonnade/ Apollo haunts Apollo/ with the shade/ of a lost hand" (14-17). The idea and the artifice are thus united, and the crumbled, or "lost hand," is replaced by the real one, which in turn creates another shadow, or "shade," of itself.

This musical method of reading provides a basis of understanding enabling one to focus on specific relationships among melodic images. With this focus the relationships between images can be reduced to only those that do not begin a new rhythmic structure. As a result, the reader may approach the images systematically.

Naturally, vertical melodic movement is chained to horizontal melodic movement. Any change or repetition of a vertical element requires movement in the horizontal element as well. The primary difference between the two is that vertical movement allows the melody to mean something not directly suggested by the rhythmic idea of the poem. The meaning

thus evidenced, however, may easily be explored within the context of the underlying rhythmic idea, as a direct connection exists between the two via the horizontal aspect of melody. For example, the first stanza of “Lunar Baedeker” contains at least three melodic ideas: “A silver Lucifer,” “cocaine in cornucopia,” and “A silver Lucifer/ serves/ cocaine in cornucopia.” As we are using the image of the moon’s physical cyclic change as the rhythmic idea, we assume each of these melodic ideas to be a piece of this whole. We may thus suggest that “A silver Lucifer,” taken as an individual melodic idea, is a representation of the moon—not exactly a surprise. Likewise, “cocaine in cornucopia,” can logically be seen as a generous quantity of (metaphorical) light. Finally, if the entire stanza is chosen as the melodic idea the image is the moon in the act of serving much light, perhaps representing a full moon.

While each of these melodic ideas is contained within the same rhythmic idea, each has its own peculiar thrust, locating the center of understanding in a different place. For example, separating the stanza into the two smaller images gives rise to the perception that the moon and the moon’s light are separate entities, while reading it as a single image focuses attention on the active nature of the moon and suggests a process. We are thus able to explore the rhythmic idea of the poem from a variety of angles.

Harmonic movement manifests itself in the rich lexical texture of “Lunar Baedeker.” Of the three musical components discussed, it is the most open to interpretation. As discussed earlier, Loy’s language supplies “Lunar Baedeker” with a seemingly endless assortment of tangential references that alter the poem’s suggestive power without altering its plain-sense meaning. The harmonic structure provides a parallel meaning that exists only in relation to the melodic idea. The prior examples of Loy’s reference-loaded words are equally pertinent

here, as they provide the harmonic thrust of the poem. Harmonic ideas combine to give the poem a secondary context. Understanding “Lucifer” as the mythological light-bringer opens the possibility that “Cocaine,” for example, may be linked with “somnambulists” in that both are evocative of Somnus, the god of sleep, and the narcotic plants the grow outside his cave. “Lethe” may similarly be tied in to this harmonic structure as it flows through the realm of Somnus. Likewise, Somnus refers back to Lucifer in that Somnus is the half brother of death. Similarly, the harmonic idea could be examined from the angle that “Lucifer,” in suggesting “light-bringer,” produces an ironic situation: Lucifer ushers in the day and the sun, not the night and the moon. Perhaps, then, a new possibility for “satirical draperies” is that the moon replaces the sun as the source of illumination.

As is the case when this musical theory is applied to Stein, the object is not to suggest a definitive interpretation of the work, but instead to provide a workable means of examining the artistry with which the work is constructed. While it is clearly still possible to remove oneself quite a distance from the text through this method, one must examine the consequences of such action on the text as a whole, thus preserving the music.

VI. Conclusion

While breaking down Stein and Loy's poetry into rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic units does reveal an underlying structure that can be rewardingly studied, the structure thus revealed is far more compelling in Stein. The most likely explanation for the unbalanced utility of this reading is that Stein's work creates meaning that exists almost entirely in the tensions created between the lexical and syntactic values of the words alone. This aspect of Stein's writing, oddly enough, stems from the very air of incomprehensibility that often shrouds her work. For example, "A Sound" from the "Objects" section of *Tender Buttons*: "Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chews all bolts and reckless reckless rats, this is this" (474) provides no real starting point for explication. Without a point of reference that exists outside the poem, the thrust of Stein's poetry is necessarily inward. Thus, we look primarily for form, and not for meaning.

Loy's poetry, on the other hand, depends for meaning to a great extent on ideas outside the poems themselves. For example, the last two stanzas of "O Hell"

Our person is a covered entrance into infinity

Chocked with the taters of tradition

Goddesses and Young Gods

Caress the sanctity of Adolescence

In the shaft of the sun (6-10)

seem to beg for interpretation, precisely because they participate, like much poetry, in identifiable systems of thought that are only hinted at within the poem. The uninhibited

nature of youth, and the divinity of the human mind are examples of these ideas. We are then, naturally curious what the poet has to say about such ideas. While pursuing this curiosity will eventually lead back to a question of form, the connections between form and the external ideas suggested by the poem are perhaps too vulnerable to over-interpretation to be considered primarily in musical terms. As with the example given in the introduction, in which Ruddick seeks to show that *Tender Buttons* can be “unlocked,” one runs the very real risk of directing, rather than interpreting, Loy’s meaning as the possible connotations of her images have no discoverable end.

Though not my primary concern, I had hoped to discover in this study a strong connection between Stein’s verbal syntax and Loy’s imagistic syntax, and thereby identify a fundamental aspect of similarity between them. However, there is, it seems, too strong a narrative thrust in Loy for her images to have the freedom enjoyed by Stein’s more or less unattached words. However, approaching Loy’s poetry through the language of music is a valuable, if somewhat problematic, means of making a path through her collages of imagery, so long as the path is not made too permanent. While I did not find the connection between Stein and Loy that I expected, looking at the two poets through comparison with music succeeded in demonstrating the application of rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic principles on the work of two poets that, despite some similarities, are otherwise quite different.

VII. Notes

1. Introduction

¹For convenience, I will refer to all of Stein's works dealt with in this paper as poems. While treating all of her works as such is admittedly problematic, as certain Stein pieces, most notably "Composition as Explanation," look more like prose than poetry, my contention is that each of these works possesses to a great extent poetic elements that at the very least problematize any definitive categorization. As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "poetry" describes a work:

II. In existing use.

3. The art or work of the poet: **a.** With special reference to its form: Composition in verse or metrical language, or in some equivalent patterned arrangement of language; usually also with choice of elevated words and figurative uses, and option of a syntactical order, differing more or less from those of ordinary speech or prose writing.

In this sense, poetry in its simplest or lowest form has been identified with versification or verse: cf. quotes. 1658, 1755.

b. The product of this art as a form of literature; the writings of a poet or poets; poems collectively or generally; metrical work or composition; verse. (Opp. to *prose*.)

c. With special reference to its function: The expression or embodiment of beautiful or elevated thought, imagination, or feeling, in language adapted to stir the imagination and emotions, both immediately and also through the harmonic suggestions latent in or implied by the words and connexions of words actually used, such language containing a rhythmical element and having usually a metrical form (as

in sense 3a); though the term is sometimes extended to include expression in non-metrical language having similar harmonic and emotional qualities (*prose-poetry*).

As my argument deals most directly with what I perceive as the poetic elements of these pieces, it seems only appropriate to refer to them as such.

² While more has been written on Stein's musical leanings than Loy's, this is no doubt in part because many more words have been penned on Stein in general. Much of this critical bias is the result of Stein's wider academic acceptance. While Stein texts have always been reasonably easy to come by, a complete collection of Loy's work has not always been generally available. Likewise, Stein's propensity to write opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, for example, suggests an intentional link between language and music. As Richard Bridgman says, Virgil Thompson commissioned Stein to write the piece after having put some of her shorter works to music (176). While the musical score is entirely Thomson's, Stein collaborated with him on the opera's subject, though the degree of collaboration is uncertain (Bridgman 176). Regardless, it indicates that Stein is familiar at least with the basics of musical structure.

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