

GERTRUDE STEIN GRAMMATICUS

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preamble

1 In 1966, I had completed a book of poems whose title is the mathematical symbol for belonging to in set theory: \in . That book kept me busy the years required for me to detoxify from the "stupefying image" (Breton) and to remove myself from various trends teeming on the corpse of surrealism (*Lilies that fester smell much worse than death*).

2 On one of my first trips to the USA, I made a stupefying discovery: in the midst of the twentieth-century, within the language of this vast country, American-English, there was a poetry that wasn't a mere continuation of Whitman, of Pound, of the *Spoon River Anthology*, of Carl Sandburg or Hart Crane, nearly all the authors of whom I was aware at the time. *Howl*, Zukofsky, other Objectivists, and many others, landed somewhat randomly on my table, where "*with wild surmise*" I contemplated the new continent offered up for exploration.

3 Two or three years later, without paying it much attention, I must admit, I would happen upon the name of Gertrude Stein.

4 In 1970, called upon to lecture for one semester as a visiting professor on the Troubadours at Johns Hopkins University, I was given an office in the basement of Milton Eisenhower Library where I enjoyed undisputed access to the books bequeathed by the great medievalist Leo Spitzer who, in the thirties, had found refuge there. More than sixty years earlier, Stein had studied medicine in the same university. I hadn't a clue.

5 I'm no longer sure which allusion by which poet—undoubtedly David Antin—in which journal, led me to open *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Reading it enchanted me.

6 So I decided to begin reading Stein, impelled by one of her remarks: "yes Braque and Joyce," she says, "*they are incomprehensibles whom anybody can understand*." Braque aside—he interests me no more than Picasso—the judgment thrilled me.

7 In those years, Tel-Quel, the French pseudo-avant-garde, swore only by Joyce, crowing especially over *Finnegans Wake*. I found it difficult to share their enthusiasm. I had already spent several years studying and working on mathematical theories of syntax in natural languages, particularly Chomsky's version, and the pretense that Joyce had created a new, sublime language made me quietly giggle.

8 The conception of language realized in *Finnegans Wake* is purely lexical. That book is one fat *puncake*. What one finds "below the surface" is the good old English sentence in its most classical, most grammar school form, flavored with rhetoric.

9 Stein is the only one, among the modernist monsters, to have acted in and on all of language's elements, and foremost upon syntax.

10 Once I read *Stanzas in Meditation*, which I take to be a masterpiece, I set out to acquire and read as much of Stein's work as possible, taking cues from Richard Bridgman's chronological enumeration *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (1970).

11 What might be called Stein's *General Program of Composition* starts to take shape in the process of writing *The Making of Americans*.

12 In this program, Stein fashions a new, personal form for each possible genre—the novel, poetry, theatre, etc.—annexing each of them to her own body of work.

13 After twenty years of strenuous and uninterrupted work in this direction (I'm simplifying), she began reflecting on what she had done and was continuing to do. She pursued this contemplation for about eight years, from 1926-1932. Several of her conclusions, the simplest one, appeared in 1934 in *Lectures in America*, after her first trip back to the USA, a trip triggered by the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

14 I made every effort, in the 1970s, to understand Stein's works in thinking-writing on syntax, which she calls "grammar." It is in this spirit that I studied most of the texts that Bridgman lists from those years.

15 Primary List, in chronological order, more or less

1926
i br 339 – Composition as Explanation
ii br 342 – An Acquaintance with Description

1927
iii br 345 – Patriarchal Poetry
iv br 346 – Regular Regularly in Narrative
iva br 362 – Lucy Church Amiably

1928
v br 364 – Finally George A Vocabulary Of Thinking
vi br 368 – Arthur a Grammar
vii br 376 – Sentences

1929
viii br 384 – More Grammar Genia Berman
ix br 385 – Saving the Sentence

1930
x br 390 – Sentences and Paragraphs
xi br 399 – More Grammar For A Sentence
xii br 400 – A Grammarian
xiii br 418 – Narrative

1931
xiv br 429 – Forensics
xv br 434 – Winning His Way. A Narrative Poem of Poetry

1932

xvi br 447 – Short Sentences
xvii br 451 – Stanzas In Meditation

1934

xviii br 469 – Lectures In America : Poetry and Grammar

16 GERTRUDE STEIN GRAMMATICUS (I) : *THE STEIN-SENTENCE* (or, *s-sentence*) (1981) : résumé

@ 1 **Axiom 1**: Prose is made up of sentences

@ 2 **Axiom 2**: Sentences are the atoms of expression of a logical language : prose.

@ 3 Very well: what are sentences?

@ 4 (Letter to Sherwood Anderson 1929) "*I am writing fairly steadily on the sentence. I am making a desperate effort to find out what is and what isn't a sentence, having been brought up in a good old public school grammar and sentences are a fascinating subject to me. I struggled all last year with grammar, vocabulary is easier, and now I think before more grammar I must find out what is the essence of a sentence. Sometimes I almost know but not yet quite.*"

@ 5 *What is the essence of a sentence? what is the essence of a sentence? what is the essence of a sentence?*

@ 6 Excursion on repetition: *The third Rose*

@ 6 1 Repetition and insistence: there needs to be a distinction. Should you ask someone who doesn't know, or barely knows Stein's work, they'll generally respond by saying:

A rose is a rose is a rose.

@ 6 2 Skipping the third rose is typical.

@ 6 3 Recalling Lewis Carroll (*The Hunting of the Snark*): "I've said it thrice. What I tell you three times is true," and further: and what I do not say three times is to be questioned.

@ 7 What makes up a sentence?

@ 8 This we know, for the Bard has spoken: "words, words, words"

@ 8 1 Constance Bennett said to Misha Auer what Shakespeare said and he, Misha, answered « oh money, money, money »

@ 8 1 1 Who is your favorite impressionist? Oh Monet, Monet, Monet

@ 9 **Axiom 3**: A sentence is made of words between two full stops

@ 10 between two periods. Sentences are periodic.

@ 11 Nothing but words inside a sentence.

@ 11 1 **Axiom 3.1** Nothing but words and the typographical spaces between the words. Nothing else. No punctuation

@ 11 2 **Axiom 3.2** A sentence begins with a capital and ends with a period.

@ 11 2 1 Perhaps one day capitals will be deemed useless "*Slowly and inevitably just as with horses capitals will disappear*"

@ 12 Sentences that are the atoms of prose are made of words. In elementary grammar you study word parts of speech. Which ones play a role in the sentence?

@ 13 All of them? No. The sentence according to Stein, the Stein-sentence, or S-sentence is no school sentence.

@ 14 **Theorem 1**: Nouns, common nouns, are of no importance to the sentence.

@ 15 **First reason.**

@ 15 1 *A sentence need not have a noun. A noun must much sooner not be named.*

@ 16 "Saving the sentence" implies understanding why nouns are of no importance to the sentence

@ 17 The reason is clear: "Nouns are Names." "October is a name. A Noun is the name of anything." "A noun is the name of everything." Common nouns are proper nouns.

- @ 17 1 *What is a noun a noun is a name (...)*
- @ 18 And "names," proper nouns, are what make poetry.
- @ 19 And yet Axiom 4: Prose is made with sentences.
- @ 20 Corollary 1 : Poetry is not prose.
- @ 21 Corollary 2: It follows that "names," thus "nouns" do not count in sentences, prose being made up of sentences.
- @ 22 Nouns should not interfere with sentences.
- @ 23 There are sentences without nouns.
- @ 24 Let's return to Theorem 1: Nouns, common nouns, are of no importance to the sentence. Second reason.
- @ 25 "*What is a noun. A noun is made by stretches. From then to then is a noun.*" Stretching; period.
- @ 26 "Nouns" being "names" are spaces, plains, fields, folds in time; they lead from one "then" to another.
- @ 27 Corollary 3: "Nouns" stop sentences. It's their crime.
- @ 28 Possibly to exist in the sentence the noun must repent, be inoffensive, be invisible
- @ 28 1 like children; worse, nouns should neither be seen nor heard
- @ 28 2 "*A noun should never be introduced in a sentence*"
- @ 29 Let's quickly review the other parts of speech; they're addressed in *Lecture in America*
- @ 30 Adjectives: "After all adjectives affect nouns and as nouns are not really interesting, the thing that affects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting"
- @ 31 Ok, so what is interesting?
- @ 32 Verbs and adverbs: "*verbs can change to look like themselves or to look like something else ; they, are, so to speak, on the move, and adverbs move with them* "
- @ 32 1 Remark: nouns are not verbs and, being names, proper names of things, do not change. They are rigid designators (Kripke)
- @ 33 Furthermore, verbs make mistakes: "*it is wonderful the number of mistakes a verb can make*"
- @ 34 Axiom 5: S-sentences move. The s-sentence is moving.
- @ 35 Movement implies errors; a sentence is in motion; errors are what give sentences life. This is one condition of the putting into motion of the logical atoms of prose that sentences are. It's the Steinian "clinamen."
- @ 36 The true heroes of the Steinian sentence are "little words," also prone to err
- @ 37 Prepositions, for example "*can live a long life being really nothing and absolutely nothing but mistaken* "
- @ 38 prepositions conjunctions, relative pronouns, etc. articles
- @ 38 1 "*if a is an article an is a temporal wedding*"
- @ 38 2 very important: "*yes is an article.*"
- @ 39 In fact any word can be called an article.
- @ 40 Theorem 2: The s-sentence is made of articles and of verbs.
- @ 41 Scholium: The s-sentence moves and advances and the force that puts it into motion is error. Sentences advance by making mistakes.
- @ 42 But what of poetry, seeing that it is not prose?
- @ 43 "*Poetry is concerned with using with loving with wanting with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun* "
- @ 44 "*Poetry is doing nothing but using loving refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing the noun*"
- @ 44 Keyword: "betraying."
- @ 45 Axiom 6: The s-sentence advances by mistake, poetry does so by betrayal
- @ 46 Theorem 3: Poetry is discontinuous (see *Winning His Way*).
- @ 46 1 Why? Because nouns are names and no two names are continuing, overlapping or concealing each other.

@ 47 Axiom 7 : Sentences are continuous

@ 47 1 they don't stop prior to being finished: "*It is very difficult to think twice. This is very well done because it does not stop.*"

@ 47 2 "*A sentence is extraordinarily deprived of intervals one at a time.*"

@ 48 Proposition: an s-sentence is not constituted of concatenated nouns

@ 48 1 see Aristotle on time

@ 49 Axiom 8: an s-sentence is a moment not a sequence of moments.

@ 50 Axiom 9: an s-sentence is made up of time

@ 51 counter-axiom: Poetry is now.

@ 52 What is now in an s-sentence? that which will have been. "*A sentence is an interval in which there is a finally forward and back*"

@ 52 1 "*a sentence is an interval during which if there is a difficulty they will do away with it*"

@ 52 2 "*a sentence is an allowance of a confusion*" (an authorization)

@ 53 Trivial remark: The fundamental, the "*bottom nature*" of the sentence being such, it is not a plurality of words. "*What is the difference between a sentence and words. A sentence has been ample.*"

@ 54 Let's once again return to Theorem 1: Common nouns are of no importance to the sentence. Third reason.

@ 55 Axiom 10: The sentence is made for two

@ 55 1 Two: Gertrude and Alice. Alice and Gertrude. Alice-Gertrude& Gertrude-Alice. *Pink Melon Joy*.

@ 55 2 "Near near near nearly pink near nearly pink nearly near near nearly pink. Wet inside and pink outside. Pink outside and wet inside and pink outside latterly nearly near near pink near nearly nearly three three pink two gentle one strong there pink as medium as medium as medium sized as sized. One as one not mistaken but interrupted. One regularly better adapted if readily readily to-day. This is this readily. Thursday."

@ 55 3 But beware of the biographical fallacy: these are S-Gertrude et S-Alice. Written persona

@ 55 4 Which is why we also read Two: You and me. You and you. Whatever. As You Like It.

@ 55 5 Not to mention the Gerdaldy aspect: You and me. The cutesy lesbian aspect.

example : *Patriarchal Poetry*.

A SONNET

To the wife of my bosom

All happiness from everything

And her husband.

.....

How wonderfully cutesy

@ 56 This particular form of the number two has its own special logic; I call it *biipsism*.

56 1 each *one* of these *two* is the other of each *one*

@ 57 *Two* is an island

@ 58 In a Stein-sentence there are two voices.

@ 59 one voice is explicit. one voice is implicit.

@ 60 The second voice can be quoted.

@ 60 1 "In looking up from her embroidery she looks at me"

@ 61 The second voice can disapprove. approve. correct. suggest.

@ 61 1 Both voices are subsumed in *they*

@ 61 2 he and she, he-she, she-he

@ 62 dialogue. questions. explanations. Confirmations. approbations.

@ 63 consequence of axiom 10: the sentence must not be disturbed: "*a sentence is a mention of their seeing silk in paper. Anyone can see that a noun means disturbance. A noun should not*"

be in an undisturbed sentence. There can not be a noun in a sentence without there having been a disturbance in the meantime."

@ 64 "A noun provokes questions "

@ 65 "Remember a sentence should not have a name. A name is familiar. A sentence should not be familiar."

@ 66 "If there is name in a sentence a name which is familiar makes a data and therefore there is no equilibrium ."

@ 67 Disturbance of balance. unsettling.

@ 68 An s-sentence has two voices: oral, aural.

@ 69 The second voice accompanies, reacts, replies.

@ 70 Underneath a Stein-sentence is a Toklas-sentence, a t-sentence; and a Versailles high school. Here's what's important. The two voices can but artificially be separated. Words cannot be attributed to one or the other voice without the risk of error.

@ 71 The second voice is the savior of the sentence. It saves the sentence by stitching. A stitch in time saves the sentence, saves nine sentences.

@ 72 **Axiom 11:** a sentence should never think

@ 73 **Axiom 12:** a sentence is its own twin. The remembering of a sentence said. The sentence said has said all that was necessary for a sentence to say.

17 GERTRUDE STEIN GRAMMATICUS (II) : *THE STEIN-PARAGRAPH*

@ 1 The charm of sentences is that they are numerous. They form a plurality. Through repetition with insistence.

@ 1 1 *sentences are made wonderfully one at a time*

@ 2 Sentences, S-sentences are composed one by one.

@ 2 1 Numbers, too, are composed one at a time

@ 2 1 1 or so it is in Peano arithmetic at least, according to the successor function. This way of seeing corresponds to the childhood experience of numbers such as it is preserved in Stein's memory.

@ 2 2 The fabrication of numbers one by one allies the fabrication of sentences to arithmetic.

@ 2 3 But sentences are not numbers

@ 2 4 an axiom is required. **Axiom 13:** a sentence is not natural.

@ 2 5 However, *Natural sentences do exist in arithmetic.*

@ 2 6 Another worry: could arithmetic be made of nouns?

2 6 1 *Forget forget forget the difference between arithmetic and a noun. A noun is the name of anything. Arithmetic is added it has no need of a noun. Then there is a difference between arithmetic and a noun.*

@ 2 7 An example puts the problem to rest

@ 3 From this diversion into numbers, let's retain that sentences are repeatable, repeatable in a particular way.

3 1 *what is a sentence. a sentence is a duplicate. an exact duplicate is depreciated. why is a duplicated sentence not depreciated. because it is a witness. no witnesses are without value.*

3 2 here is yet another distinction, distinct from that between repetition and instance

3 2 1 *Think well of this. you cannot repeat a duplicate you can duplicate. you can duplicate a duplicate. now think of the difference of repeat and duplicate.*

3 3 Discovering this property is a source of satisfaction

3 3 1 *i am a grammarian. i think of the differences there are. the difference is that they do duplicate. the whole thing arouses no contention.*

3 3 3 1 that's how it is, like it or not

3 4 *oh grammar is so fine. think of duplicate as mine.*

3 4 1 this last sentence anchors the reasoning in the world of *two*.

@ 4 Is it possible to stop there? Sentences, the composition of sentences one by one, repetition, insistence, duplication. Stated otherwise, the sentence being the 1 of Steinian arithmetic, can one make prose using only 1, with *one* and *one* and *one* solely? The answer is no, or more exactly, became no after the experience of The Making of Americans, for which the theoretical summation follows: this book explores and tries out everything that can be done with sentences by shattering all the formal duality of prose.

@ 5 A second formal unit is required, one of a higher order, the way ten is to the unit, even if at first glance 10 is nothing more than "1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1."

@ 6 Discovery made, I believe, at the end of *Sentences and Paragraphs* (1930)

@ 6 1 taking into account the experience of contemporary novelistic prose in its elaboration of the S-sentence: *Lucy Church amiably*.

@ 7 Axiom 14: *a sentence is not emotional a paragraph is.*

@ 8 The modalities of this distinction must be set

@ 9 « *Paragraphs are emotional not because they express an emotion but because they register or limit an emotion* »

@ 10 which is to say that sentences are not paragraphs

@ 11 they are self-contained, evident: *sentences are indubitable*

@ 12 2 they are repeatable, like a scientific experiment

@ 12 2 1 (see the vacuum pump) –

@ 12 3 they do not end anywhere: *a sentence can not exist if it does not come back no not if it does not come back. a paragraph finishes.*

@ 12 4 They can serve as metrical-rhythmic templates: *she liked then to set a sentence for herself as a sort of tuning fork and metronome and then write to that time and tune.*

@ 13 The realm of the sentence and that of the paragraph need to be carefully separated: *think carefully how a sentence is not a paragraph should not be. what is a sentence a sentence is not a paragraph and should not be.*

@ 14 there are language objects that are neither sentence nor paragraph: *shell fish are what they eat. this is neither a paragraph nor a sentence.*

@ 15 a sentence can exist without being put into a paragraph

@ 16 a paragraph is made up of sentences. But how? *how can a paragraph be made of sentences.*

@ 17 Axiom 15: *a paragraph is made of sentences that are reliable.*

@ 18 Axiom 16: *a sentence is the hope of a paragraph.*

@ 19 a paragraph is more important than a sentence. it is a superior level of unity.

@ 20 Axiom 17: *a paragraph can do what a sentence can do.*

@ 21 Axiom 18: *a paragraph is not a division it does not separate.*

@ 21 1 *a paragraph is not pressed for time. ever.*

@ 22 What is a paragraph: a unit of evidence. a paragraph is. because it says it is.

@ 23 *this is a paragraph because it says so. do you see. it says so. if do you see and it says so. yes we do see and it says so. a paragraph says so. a sentence if it is round would it says so. would a sentence say so. if it said so would it have it as if it had it as said so no. a sentence has not said so. a paragraph has said so.*

@ 23 *a paragraph is a liberty and a liberty is in between.*

@ 24 What then is prose? Prose is made of paragraphs which are made of sentences.

@ 25 Prose serves for example in the making of novels

@ 26 the example of *Lucy Church amiably* –

Amiably: with kindness

A Novel of Romantic beauty and nature which Looks Like an Engraving

Advertisement

Lucy Church amiably. There is a church and it is in Lucey and it has a steeple and the steeple is a pagoda and there is not reason for it and it looks like something else. Besides this there is amiably and this comes from the paragraph.

And with a nod she turned her head toward the falling water. Amiably.

Amiably is the adverb that turns it into a *paragraph* and lends it emotion; emotion of all books.

p.69 *Very pale blue in the distance very pale blue in the distance very pale blue in the distance and she says she agrees to it to that.*

There is a very great happiness in not doing it twice. Twice is once.

@ 27 What is the emotion circumscribed by paragraphs of prose?

@ 28 L'amour. Love.

@ 29 Love, the engine of sentences, of prose. As in the *Comédia*.

@ 30 Such as stein-prose. s-prose is the language of the stein island, the stein-tolkas island, the model in the logical sense, the possible language world of biipsism.

@ 31 @ 12 On stein-island two voices are heard making sentences, playing sentences. They build a world of and in language.

@ 34 This is a language-game. Wittgenstein-stein. The moves in the language game are the sentences. Paragraphs are games

@ 35 sentences, that is s-sentences look alike. They show family-resemblance.

@ 36 sentences are the bricks of the house that Stein and Toklas built. Bricks the house of prose is made of.

@ 37 Prose is a form of life. Life on their island.

a. how do you recognize the s-sentence? the s-paragraph? nearly impossible. S-sentences and s-paragraphs form a finite corpus: what has been written.

I think Stein is coherent and that one can get an idea of the "style" of the sentence and the paragraph by way of examples and what I've called her axioms.

b. one task that I did not undertake and that would have been extremely time-consuming is to chronologically retrace the model throughout the years beginning with *Composition as Explanation* through *Stanzas in Meditation*.

c. At the end of 1931 Stein comes more or less to the end of her contemplation and devotes herself to an entirely passionate endeavor: the making of narrative poetry. In this pursuit she employs what characterizes for her, on the one hand, narration, the s-sentence, and, on the other hand, poetry, verse; and, the result is the extraordinary *Winning His Way, A Narrative Poem Of Poetry*.

i - lines cut by periods. lines cut into numerous segments. each segment potentially a line beginning with a capital and ending with a sentence.

ii - number of segments: from 1 to 13. each measure present?

iii - number of syllables in a segment: from 1 to (?); number of syllables of a line: from 1 (?) to (?)

iv - category of words present: all, excepting adjectives (?)

v - notice for ABT (?)

vi - ending with *Stanzas In Meditation* from the great theoretical period inaugurated in 1926 with *Composition As Explanation* and *An Acquaintance With Description*

vii - poem foretelling the glory of Stein

i - But why will they be away when they are at an advantage. To stay, and be welcome.

(segment de 15 syll. une virgule dans le deuxième segment du vers.)

ii - He knew That. Roses. Are. Red. And. Roses. Are. White. And Roses. Are Rose. Colored.

(mesure 11 ; vers de 19 syllables)

iii - Or her way.

(vers d'un seul segment)

iv - It is in this way. ...

(mesure 13)

v - They will call louder. ...

(mesure 10)

vi - Be careful of borrowing. ...

mes.12

vii - Secondly no success. ...

m.16

d in 1932, having completed the theoretical work to their satisfaction, Stein writes her masterpiece of pure poetry, *Stanzas in Meditation*