

## **Ulla Haselstein: Gertrude Stein's Literary Portraiture**

### **Summary**

In my book I wish to analyze selected texts by Gertrude Stein as experiments aiming at the representation of individuality, and I hope to demonstrate the conceptual coherence of a work that varies in its compositional structure to an unusual degree. I will argue that Stein treated both the portrayal of living human beings and the characterization of narrative actors as variants of the problem of analytically conceptualizing individual Others, and that she used the genre conventions of the literary portrait and the novel to create mimetic models for various aspects of this problem of cognition. — On the one hand I will discuss Stein's modes of characterization in narrative prose texts (including her semi-fictional autobiographies) as a set of inquiries into the problem just outlined. Stein addressed the ineffability of the individual and the structure of intersubjective perception, but she also acknowledged the discursive conditions of individual identity. Her solution was the invention of "talking and listening" as a practice of analysis and literary composition. Based on the principles of seriality, simultaneity and recursivity, this practice encompasses both an assessment of observational data and the analytic presentation of a character in a narrative text. By a serialization of statements Stein performatively presents the cognitive process of integrating observations that vary in detail into a concept, but also modulates the concept in order to (statistically) integrate the details. Another effect of "talking and listening" is that the ontological boundaries between Self and Other or between narrator and character are blurred. — On the other hand I will examine how Stein made use of these insights in her contributions to the "small" genre of the literary portrait. She invented numerous new modes of portrayal. Emphasizing the subjective lens of portraiture, and creating a performative presentation by way of "talking and listening" are two of them, but Stein also uses the acoustic materiality and the grammatical structure of language as mimetic resources, and proffers a compositional cutting technique to create textual spaces which are not verbally defined as indices of individuality. I will argue that the closeness of Stein's portrait texts to cubist paintings results from the common aim of redoubling mimesis by a self-referential presentation of perceptual and cognitive processes, and by an inquiry into the (im)properties of the respective medium. Cézanne's work was recognized as a model by Stein and Picasso, but they both sought to outperform him.