

ECLECTIC REVOLUTION: ILLUSORY FEMININITY AND TWO-FOLD MIMICRY IN GERTRUDE STEIN'S *THREE LIVES*

Gerardo Rodríguez Salas. Universidad de Granada

ABSTRACT

In the present paper we discuss Gertrude Stein's in-between position in the literary canon by alluding to her eclectic literary revolution. On the one hand, she is excluded from the patriarchal canon due to her disruptive style. On the other, she postulates a milder kind of revolution, in line with Luce Irigaray's tenets, which implies a conscious reproduction of a constructed "femininity" in women (as opposed to the non-strategic and unconscious imitation of traditional gender roles) that finally unmasks the illusive character of a distinctive feminine identity. In her opinion, everything is a construct of the pervasive patriarchal model, where women reproduce an individuality tailored for them rather than their essential identity that is also ultimately questioned.

ECLECTIC REVOLUTION: STEIN'S IN-BETWEEN POSITION IN LITERATURE

Within the panorama of what is considered as canonical Modernist Literature, the name of Gertrude Stein is inevitably associated with an indeterminate position, somewhere in, somewhere out of this realm. While such critics as Fifer radically exclude Stein from canonical Modernism by stating that "Stein should not be read like Eliot or Pound or Joyce" (1992: 19), our opinion, together with that of several other critics such as Stimpson, supports our initial statement that Stein occupies an indeterminate position within the literary canon. Thus, Stimpson asserts that "[Stein] is simultaneously disobedient and obedient, a reformer and a counterreformer" (1986: 2). DeKoven, in turn, agrees with this critic when she considers that "Stein's actual relation to canons" is "simultaneously inside and outside, at the center and in the margin" (1988a: 16), ultimately considering that "Stein's literary and critical work constitutes an unsynthesized dialectic of canonical and repressed, center and margin, speech and silence, authority and subversion" (1988b: 76).

In our analysis, we shall restrict ourselves to this discussion; namely, to the consideration of Stein as occupying an in-between position within the patriarchal canon.

Our argument is that this author's indeterminate position can be observed in her resort to what we shall label an *eclectic* kind of literary revolution. When a writer intends to react against certain established patterns (in our case, patriarchal models), he or she has two alternatives: either adhering to and criticising those fixed patterns precisely by holding to and ridiculing them, or radically subverting them by offering a completely different proposal. Stein, however, in her desire to challenge patriarchal tenets, causes these two possible alternatives to blend, therefore displaying this peculiar type of revolution we have suggested.

On the one hand, Stein manifests her radical alternative in the disruptive style that is going to characterise her work almost from the very beginning (with the exception of such early work as *Q.E.D.*). It is this unconventional style based on repetition that will lead to her exclusion from the canonical and patriarchal mainstream. However, on the other hand, and in direct contrast with this radical reaction, Stein makes use of a milder, subtler, even ironic type of revolution, in line with the one that Irigaray, years later, proposes as the adequate one for women who struggle against the powerful symbolic order. Irigaray, in this sense, does not propose a utopian, radical new realm for women, but a procedure by which the arbitrariness of the existing patriarchal model will be exposed. This more self-restrained kind of revolution can be clearly inferred from Irigaray's words when she states that:

In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. Which presupposes that women do not aspire simply to be men's equals in knowledge. (1985: 78)

Irigaray's proposal to achieve such an aim is highly original and ironic: it calls for women's conscious reproduction (what she calls "mimicry", *Ibid.*: 101) of the traditional role that patriarchal models have repeatedly imposed on them, which she labels "femininity". In playfully mimicking this patriarchal construct, women will finally expose the artificiality of it. Irigaray's strategy of "mimicry" is clearly explained by her English publisher:

An interim strategy for dealing with the realm of discourse (where the speaking subject is posited as masculine), in which the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her. (*Ibid.*: 220)

Irigaray reveals this artificial character of the notion of "femininity" when she declares that "in fact that 'femininity' is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation. In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity" (*Ibid.*: 84).

Irigaray's notion of mimicry should be further elaborated since it will occupy a central position in our analysis. Her concept of mimicry is her particular version of the psychoanalytic "masquerade", coined by Rivière, disciple of Melanie Klein, in her 1929 article "Womanliness as a masquerade". As the title of her article suggests, this critic establishes a connection between "womanliness" and "masquerade", and thus explains that the former "could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" (1991: 94).

For her, there is no distinction between masquerade and the real essence of women, so that her strategy turns out to be perfect to expose the construction of artificial femininity by patriarchal models: “The reader may now ask how I define womanliness and where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing” (Ibid.). Rivière’s concept of “masquerade” was subsequently implemented by M. A. Doane. Following Rivière’s approach, Doane considers masquerade as a strategy that women can deploy to distance themselves from the construct of femininity, and hence express the lack of such an identity. In this sense, she specifies that masquerade “constitutes an acknowledgement that it is femininity itself which is constructed as a mask – as the decorative layer which conceals a non-identity” (1991: 25). Furthermore, in line with this concept, postcolonial authors like Bhabha have also made use of the term (in his case “mimicry”), but applied to colonial discourse instead of feminist issues. In any case, the ultimate effect of Bhabha’s mimicry is the same as that of Rivière and Doane: to expose the lack of identity in those who imitate the positions of power and the disruption of authority. It is what Bhabha calls “metonymies of presence” (1994: 90). This lack of identity is expressed by Bhabha as follows:

the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’. (Ibid.: 86)

He then concludes that “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” (Ibid.: 88).

Once clarified the different nuances of the term “mimicry”, we consider that Stein, in anticipating Irigaray’s revolutionary model, will employ two types of mimicry: on the one hand, the ironic, playful one that Irigaray suggests. This is the sort of mimicry that Stein attributes to the narrator in the novellas we have selected for our analysis. This narrator (and Stein herself in her presentation of female figures in her stories) reproduces the typical feminine roles assigned to women by patriarchal society, something which results in the exposition of their artificiality before the reader. On the other hand, Stein also portrays the traditional and poisonous concept of mimicry by which women simply reproduce male ideals, thus being deprived of an identity of their own. Irigaray’s, and obviously Stein’s, final conclusion is that “femininity”, even when she tries to depict a distinctive female individuality, is a fallacy and therefore a separate, distinctive woman’s world is not possible, since it would simply be a reproduction of patriarchal values.

In order to validate our hypothesis, we focus on two of the three novellas that constitute Stein’s work *Three Lives* (first published in 1909); namely, “The Gentle Lena” and “The Good Anna”. We have chosen this book because it is considered to be Stein’s first narrative experiment and, therefore, Stein’s first “revolutionary” contribution to Modernism (as opposed to her previous realistic work, *Q.E.D.*). Charters, in her introduction to the 1990 Penguin edition of *Three Lives*, quoting a publisher, states that this book was “the revolutionary explosion that started the reverse trend [against conventional realism] which produced the lean, hard, accurate styles of Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, William Carlos Williams and their countless followers” (1990: xix). Bowers, in turn, regards *Three Lives* as “the earliest modernist, experimental fiction (predating James Joyce’s *Dubliners* by five years and Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* by thirteen)” (1993: 6).

RADICAL SIDE: STEIN'S STYLE OF REPETITION OR "INSISTENCE"

The first resource that Stein employs in carrying out what we have considered an *eclectic* literary revolution is her style. In this first section our focus resides in locating the two main reasons why this form of writing has been labelled "subversive", and how it thus represents a radical reaction against the pervasive style of the canonical tradition of patriarchal literature. According to DeKoven, "Stein's rebellion was channelled from content to linguistic structure itself" (1983: 36). Her most original contribution has undoubtedly been her subtle use of repetition, what Hoffman refers to as "incantatory repetition" (1976: 30). Stein's particular and intensive use of repetition fulfils two main functions, both of them linked to her revolutionary aim: first, her attempt to break with the dominant/patriarchal literary tradition in narrative style by abstracting language to the maximum; second, her desire to build up a definite and distinctive identity through this experimental technique, which in the novellas of our analysis is "feminine" only because of the pervasive presence of female characters. However, our intention is precisely to expose how, even when Stein uses this repetitive style as a technique of feminine individuation, her ultimate goal is to expose the lack of such feminine identity, presenting the latter rather as an artificial construct of patriarchy.

As regards Stein's reaction against the pervasive narrative canon, it is evident that this author was influenced by Cubist painting, and particularly by Cezánne and Picasso. She was searching for a different approach that allowed her to express her new vision of literature, and she encountered it in Cubist tenets. Rose, in connection with this idea, admits that Stein "was prepared to detect basic shapes, recurring facets, and colliding planes in her simple lay hagiography *Three Lives*" (1976-7: 545). Stein, by adapting Cubist paradigms of painting to her narrative, executes a process of abstraction. This technique is extremely innovative in her simplification of the language and her constant use of repetition, a revolutionary technique which explains why she has been excluded from the dominant literary panorama for such a long time. The value of this experimental narrative, or as Gygax qualifies it, this "antilanguage" (1998: 4), has been recognised by many critics, such as DeKoven, who, speaking about Stein's *Three Lives*, states that "It is crucial to her experimental career, both as the source of her subsequent stylistic techniques and as a clue to the source of her rebellion against patriarchal linguistic structures" (1983: 27). According to Jacobus, Stein's revolutionary use of language explains why she has been excluded from canonical literature: "Women's access to discourse involves submission to phallogentricity, to the masculine and the symbolic: refusal, on the other hand, risks reinscribing the feminine as a yet more marginal madness or nonsense" (1986: 29). This is precisely Stein's case. She refuses to follow the traditional style imposed by patriarchal models, so that her repetitive use of words is considered boring and illiterate by male-centred standards, particularly if they are unable to discover, as Fifer indicates, deep, covert meanings behind that repetition (1992: 85).

Besides this anti-canonical value of Stein's innovative style, we suggest a second function of repetition, intrinsically connected to the previous one; namely, this author's technique of "feminine" individuation. In this sense, Stein introduces this apparently distinctive female subjectivity by portraying women's separate and independent consciousness. As Parke points out: "The possibility for genuine repetition and its uses are implied in the condition of our minds' independence, the fact of their radical separateness one from another which must ... be respected and protected" (1988: 559). In conceiving

Stein's female figures as having their own separate consciousness, we may consider that each character displays her own impressions of life, so that linguistic repetition becomes a device employed by the author to emphasise that each female figure has her own obsessions. Moreover, in highlighting this idea, Stein equally enhances the possibility of a definite female identity in a male-centred world. This position is shared by several critics, including DeKoven, who claims that "Stein controls prose style very carefully to render the pulse of each personality" (1983: 39) and specifies Stein's value of repetition in *Three Lives* by stating that "Stein repeats key phrases throughout 'The Good Anna' and 'The Gentle Lena' which, like operatic motifs, both identify and represent her characters" (Ibid.: 40). This idea is qualified by Miller, who declares that "The reiteration of simple ideas over and over again makes the character of the good Anna or the gentle Lena more vivid - more alive. This repetition is just as much a part of these individuals as any of their daily functions" (1949: 33). In resorting to this narrative technique, Stein desires to break with naturalistic and realistic traditions, favouring the presentation of her characters' impressions rather than a truthful catalogue of objective phenomena. As Parke puts it: "Stein was interested in drafting an ethics that would help to reinstate 'the vague and inarticulate to its proper place in our mental life, one that could also withstand the wear and tear of real desire'" (1988: 558).

This pseudo-creation of "feminine" identity through repetition arises an ambiguous approach to this issue. Many critics have argued that Stein depicts simple and uneducated characters who are deprived of inner complexity, something which, according to them, explains this author's use of simple, repetitive language. This is Hoffman's opinion, who qualifies Anna and Lena as "primitively simple personalities", therefore "fixed in their modes of life" (1976: 30). Walker, in turn, speaks of "the narrowly restricted linguistic universe that confines the speech and thoughts of simple uneducated people" (1984: 24), an idea which Charters equally admits when she declares that Stein uses "'very simple and very vulgar' characters to illustrate elementary psychological types" (1990: xv). Therefore, the initial impression that we as readers gain after reading "The Good Anna" and "The Gentle Lena" is that the protagonists in both stories are submissive characters who do not question the patriarchal order that oppresses them, but simply accept it mildly.

While DeKoven claims that Melanctha (the protagonist of the third novella in *Three Lives*) "is a much more complicated heroine/victim than Anna or Lena" (1983: 31), we would argue that the latter two characters are equally complex. Both of them are confronted with a conflict between their desire and the norm imposed on them by patriarchy, but this confrontation occurs at a covert or deep-surface level, which is why we think it is missing in the text. However, our hypothesis connects with that of Docker, who considers that:

Existence itself is heteroglossia, is a force field created in the general ceaseless Manichean struggle between centripetal forces, which strive to keep things together, unified, the same; and centrifugal forces, which strive to keep things various, separate, apart, different. (1995: 171)

The notion of "heteroglossia" was developed by Bakhtin, and it can be defined as the conflict between "'official' and 'unofficial' discourses", "the discursive site in which the conflict between different voices is at its most concentrated" (Roberts, 1994: 248-9). This is why we consider that in the two female protagonists of these novellas there is no direct resistance to the oppressive ties of their environment, but the Manichean struggle which takes place inside them (their heteroglossic stand) can be inferred from a series of clues.

As regards Lena, we come across a very significant remark that reflects the protagonist's internal struggle in a very illustrative way: "Poor Lena cried very hard all alone in the street car. She almost spoiled her new hat with the hitting it against the window in her crying. Then she remembered that she must not do so" (Stein, 1990: 184). The first outstanding aspect that these lines reveal is Lena's frustrated life and her self-realisation of this, as her desperate crying points out. The fact that she hits her new hat is meaningful in that this object (delicate and beautiful) may symbolise her constructed femininity in its conception of women as delicate and submissive beings, only valuable in terms of their acquiescent nature. In this sense, this act could stand for Lena's feeble rebellion. Nevertheless, the dialectical situation emerges when, at the end of the sentence, she is dominated by the superior power of patriarchal values, which overwhelms her subtle desire to follow her instinct and brings her back to the male-dominated realm.

Lena's dissatisfaction with social values is equally portrayed in her evolution over the course of the story. Initially, this figure is presented as emotive and eager for life despite her passive nature: "Lena's heart beat quick for she was very nervous now with all this that had happened to her" (Stein, 1990: 187). However, from the moment she is forced to marry Herman, she becomes insensitive, cold, and "lifeless", the latter being an adjective widely repeated at the end of the story to emphasise Lena's new nature: "She did not seem to notice very much when they hurt her, and she never seemed to feel very much now about anything that happened to her" (Ibid.: 199). At this point, Lena has not confronted her real desire, but her frustration and dissatisfaction are already reactions against the established system in which she no longer fits. In addition, Lena, quite surprisingly given her passive nature, strongly reacts by disconnecting from social conventions. Although externally she continues fulfilling her social role ("Lena did what she had to do the way she always had been taught it" – Ibid.: 198), internally she feels so empty that she disconnects, dies in life, and is no longer integrated in the patriarchal system of which she was previously a member ("Lena never seemed to hear now what everyone was saying to her" – Ibid.: 199). Of course, Lena does not rebel against the powerful structure of patriarchy: although she does not seek her own happiness and freedom and becomes completely frustrated, at least she seems to have realised the negative character of the oppressive burden of her society's values and therefore the Manichean struggle invades her at a deep level.

The same can be said of Anna. Although she appears to be an authoritarian figure who has apparently found a place in society by subjugating others, she does not feel fulfilled by carrying out the patriarchal ideals that she overtly defends. Indeed, as is the case with Lena, Anna feels frustrated by her superficial happiness. While Lena feels thwarted when she is forced to marry, Anna experiences a similar feeling by being a spinster in a male-dominated society. In order to remove this sense of lack of fulfilment, she acts in an ironic way: she attempts to reassure her position by symbolically performing the role of a married woman, which she does by following the structure of a society that undermines her real identity. In this case, she creates her own family (a symbolic one, made up of her dogs and cats and Sally), where she plays the maternal role, and in addition, also symbolically, she creates her male partner (her dog), as we may infer from the following words: "The good Anna liked him very much, but never with the strength as she loved her good looking, coward, foolish *young man*, Peter [her dog]" (Ibid.: 45-6; the italics are ours).

Another way she combats her frustration is by retreating into the domestic realm, the only one allowed her as a woman in order to feel an active being. Her excess of activity is thus a mask that hides her frustration as a passive being in a world where only men can be

active. In this sense, she fully devotes herself to housework as a way of feeling useful, and this devotion is such that there are some cases in which she almost becomes possessed of an obsessive mania, as when she reprimands Sally by saying “Sally, this ain’t the same banana that I brought home yesterday” (Ibid.: 10). This desire to feel herself useful is the one which leads her to think that all the world has “careless and bad ways”, so that all the people need her help. This complex nature of Anna has been recognised by J. L. Doane, when, speaking of both Anna and Miss Thornton (another Stein heroine), she considers that “their ideal is in contradiction to their instinct” (1986: 63).

“FEMININITY”: PATRIARCHAL INTERNALISATION AND STEREOTYPICAL FIGURES

In connection with the notion of femininity as an illusion, in spite of Stein’s use of repetition for the presentation of individuated feminine identities, Walker describes *Three Lives* as a “powerful story of victimization by language and the social conventions it enforces” (1984: 27). This final realisation of the feminine as a fallacy despite Stein’s stylistically radical revolution is intrinsically connected with Irigaray’s idea. The latter leaves no room for a distinctive feminine identity simply because the concept of “femininity” is a masculine invention:

Women’s social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except to recourse to ‘masculine’ systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women. The ‘feminine’ is never to be identified except by and for the masculine, the reciprocal proposition not being ‘true’. (1985: 85)

Even Stein’s radical linguistic experiment proves to reflect the structure of patriarchy from which she ultimately does not escape. This author focuses on her characters’ emotions rather than on their strict rationality and thus, at the end of the novellas, the reader remembers a series of defining traits which have been frequently repeated throughout the tale. Stein, through her repetitions, offers her characters’ viewpoints but she highlights those traits that make the reader understand that her female figures are a product of a male-centred society. These women’s obsessions are limited to patriarchal values as they have internalised them after a long period of subjugation.

In “The Gentle Lena” the protagonist is constantly alluded to as being “patient, gentle, sweet and german” (Stein, 1990: 171) and as “still docile...never want[ing] to do things her own way”, as “a person who did not really know” (Ibid.: 176). All these expressions are frequently repeated so that, once the reader has finished reading the story, he/she remembers these traits quite distinctively and gains the impression that Lena is a subjugated figure in a masculinized milieu. The same happens with Anna. The repetition of the adjectival phrase “really bad” (Ibid.: 42) when Anna has challenged traditional values by visiting a medium is significant. The constant repetition of this adjectival phrase reflects her remorse and, therefore, her deep assimilation of patriarchal values. On the same page we are told that “Taking care of Miss Mathilda were the happiest days of all the good Anna’s strong hard working life” (Ibid.: 42). This emphasis on “the happiest days” shows how empty Anna’s life is since her most self-fulfilling days are restricted to her role as a domestic woman.

Linked with this delusive depiction of femininity, Stein employs repetition in order to create a particular and original perception of time. For her, time is not linear - a chronological development of events - but instead consists of discrete moments which will vary according to our own experience and will differ from one person to another, therefore emphasising the distinctive character of each individual. However, in her attempt to depict a “continuous present”, what Weinstein defines as an “illusion of eternal presentness” (1970: 19), she equally portrays the idea of a monotonous life, like that of the female protagonists who are anchored in traditional tasks. This idea of monotony and blockage transmitted by Stein’s overuse of repetition has been described by such critics as DeKoven, who states that “Stein’s repetitive rigmarole manner is admirably suited to render the monotony and insipidity of the female lives which are being narrated” (1996: 471). Miller, in turn, asserts that “[the female protagonists’] repetitious, monotonous life is like a tread wheel. Therefore Miss Stein’s use of verbal repetition is all the more remarkable, for what other mechanical device could better express this concept?” (1949: 91).

Illusory femininity can be finally located in the final impression that we as readers gain from her protagonists not as distinctive individuals, but more as types. In this sense, Stein’s presentation of her female characters as type figures helps emphasise the idea that the all-deceiving concept of femininity only generates tailored figures who mechanically follow the impositions of a phallogentric model. Ruddick describes Stein’s feminist intention behind this stereotypical presentation of her female characters and, thus, asserts that: “The stories of *Three Lives* are feminist to the extent that the portrait of three overlooked and self-defeating women form a generalization about women’s damaged self-image in a world of male privilege” (1990: 50). Charters, in turn, claims that the reason for Stein’s presentation of stereotypes is her desire to depict “the way society trapped underclass women at the beginning of the century in stereotypical roles so that they failed to have control over their own lives” (1990: xvi), to which she adds:

The truth is that all of the portraits in *Three Lives* are based on ethnic and racial stereotypes resulting in part from Stein’s simplistic theories of human character and in part ... from the conventional social prejudices she shared with most of the people of her time. (Ibid.: xvii)

Hoffman is even more radical in his conception of stereotypes and leaves no room for individual consciousness in Stein’s female characters when he declares: “If the characters happen to live in our memories, they are more rock-like examples of qualities in the human consciousness of various types than flesh-and-blood people who suffer, yearn, and love” (1965: 71). This essentialist position as regards Stein’s characterisation is equally defended by Welch (1996: 19) and by Weinstein, who concludes that:

[Stein] follows James [as opposed to Freud and the modern psychoanalytic trend] in seeing the personality in terms of a fixed nature, a central ‘core’, subject to alteration by experience, but only subject to change within the limitation imposed by the entire character structure. (1979: 14)

This author also believes that “Gertrude Stein accepts the idea of characterology. A characterology implies that all persons can be classified into categories of psychological types”, thus speaking of a “personality theory” (Ibid.: 14-15).

In connection with these critics' opinion, we consider that Stein massively resorts to stereotypes in her stories, but we also share Wagner-Martin's opinion that Stein's are "ironic stereotypes" (1995: 80) through which the author of *Three Lives* adopts a "mimetic alienation" and thus "the essentialist categories of race, gender, and ethnicity must be reconsidered" (Weiss, 1998: 98).

For this reason, we consider that all of Stein's females figures in "The Good Anna" and "The Gentle Lena" fall within either Lena's or Anna's characterisation, always bearing in mind Stein's ultimate ironic and critical goal. In Lena's stereotypical role as an oppressed, passive figure, we can locate characters such as Lizzy, Sally, Miss Mathilda, Mrs. Drehten, and Julia. Similarly, in Anna's role as an oppressive, subjugating figure, we find such characters as the cook, Mrs. Haydon, Mrs. Kreder, Jane, and Molly. By developing these two stereotypes of women, Stein is generalising them, denouncing women's subjugated role to men whatever their personality may be. The implication seems to be that, according to Stein's ideas (anticipating Irigaray's), there is no possible alternative for women to construct their own identity within the patriarchal realm.

MIMICRY: "A WOMAN'S WORLD"

Stein's focus on women is not limited to the presentation of apparently distinctive individualities; to a wider extent, she depicts what Charters calls "a woman's world". However, even when, once again, we may gain the impression that such a world is a radically different alternative for women, it proves to be an exact copy of its patriarchal counterpart. It is at this point that we need to speak about the two types of "mimicry" we have distinguished. One of them is epitomised by all of the female characters in Stein's novellas. They perform the traditional kind of mimicry attributed to women, whereby they simply copy masculine models, the only acceptable ones within a phallogocentric culture. In this sense, even when these characters build up "a woman's world", this is merely a reproduction of patriarchal ideals. A second kind of mimicry is the one Irigaray proposes as a revolutionary path against patriarchy:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one 'path', the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of *mimicry*. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) 'subject', that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference. (1985: 76)

Stein partakes of this revolutionary aim when she, as an author, by means of a narrative figure, "mimics" women's mimicry of the masculine (here the two-fold mimicry), thereby converting their subordination into an affirmation and exposing the asphyxiating effect of patriarchy over women.

Thus, Gertrude Stein plays with a series of distortions of patriarchal models in which women will apparently occupy relevant positions. But the real aim behind this game is to expose the ubiquitous presence of patriarchal values, even when we may be speaking about a feminine milieu. After qualifying *Three Lives* as "a woman's world", Charters states that: "In a larger sense Stein was depicting a world of women where men played very subservient roles. Each of her heroines was more emotionally involved in a relationship with a woman

friend than with a husband or a masculine lover” (1990: xvi). We can thus distinguish the following distortions of traditional patriarchal patterns. The first of them can be observed in the figures of the two protagonists: Lena seems to be portrayed according to the prototypical, patriarchal pattern of the woman in a subordinated role so that, in this case, Stein appears to have adopted the traditional point of view. However, in “The Good Anna” the protagonist is presented as just the opposite type, that is, as a woman performing a subjugating role, not only over other female figures (such as Lizzy, Sallie, Julia, and even her own mistress Miss Mathilda), but also over men (the doctor, for example). In connection with the prototype of the female figure epitomised by Anna, there is a startling aspect worth commenting: in both novellas the oppressive role is assumed by women, not by men, something which shall be elucidated through a series of instances.

In “The Gentle Lena”, Lena is exclusively oppressed by female figures - the cook, Mrs. Haydon, Mrs. Kreder: “Then too these days Mrs. Haydon could not scold Lena, Mrs. Kreder was always there with her, and it would not be right to scold Lena when Mrs. Kreder was there, who had now the real right to do it” (Stein, 1990: 194). It is women who oppress Lena and undermine her self-fulfilment as a human being. Sure enough, men are presented as weak figures, as in the case of Mr. Haydon (“The father of this family was a decent, quiet, heavy, and uninterfering german man” – Ibid.: 174) and particularly of Herman who, being supposed to control and dominate Lena as a husband should, according to patriarchal values (as her sister reveals, “It do you good really Herman to get married and then you got somebody you can boss around when you want” – Ibid.: 190), behaves just the opposite way, not paying any attention whatsoever to Lena.

In Anna, in turn, we encounter the antagonistic version to Lena’s figure: she is not the oppressed character, but the oppressing one, her role being similar to that of Mrs. Haydon or Mrs. Kreder in “The Gentle Lena”. Therefore, even when Stein apparently moves from a patriarchal vision of society to a feminine conception of it, there is no real change, as Anna and all the quasi-dominant female characters in both stories simply reproduce (“mimic”) the domination pattern so characteristic of patriarchy. Even when doing so, however, they remain anchored in the role that society has imposed on them (that of servants or housekeepers). Their domineering role is restricted to the domestic realm, but outside this realm, they are nobody. It is only inside it that they can control men. According to J. L. Doane, this empowerment of women is fake, or, as she calls it, “the illusion of control” that Anna creates for herself “by deliberately seeking out the weakest, most easily guided women and men to work for” (1986: 64). Doane continues to assert that: “Given the means to direct her energies into a larger public realm, Anna would have made a fine general, but as a servant and a woman, she brings the level of political struggle down to domesticity” (Ibid.: 61-2). Indeed, this empowerment of women proves to be false and illusory, even harmful, as in Anna’s case it seems to be the cause of her tragic death. This is Doane’s opinion when she considers that “More importantly, the price Anna pays for having a great deal of will but no legitimate way of exerting it, is to release it upon herself and to become, finally, a self-destructive whirlwind of activity”. (Ibid.: 53)

A similar distortion of patriarchal society, in line with Stein’s portrayal of a woman’s world, is the awkward romance between Anna and Mrs. Lehnman, as when the narrator says that “Mrs. Lehnman was the romance in Anna’s life” (Stein, 1990: 18). In this case, we are confronted with two women, one of them performing the traditional male role (apparently Anna), and the other playing the female one (Mrs. Lehnman, as she is dominated by Anna). However, these roles are inverted, as Anna is presented as vulnerable despite her strong

domineering personality: “Mrs. Lehman was the only one who had any power over Anna” (Ibid.: 19). In any case, the woman’s society that Stein attempts to portray is sterile and fake, merely a mimicry of masculine models of behaviour.

CONCLUSION

In the present paper we have offered our own interpretation of the widely accepted consideration of Gertrude Stein as occupying an in-between position within patriarchal literature. She effectuates a *peculiar* or *eclectic* revolution: extremely radical in her adoption of a highly experimental style; milder, but no less effective and ironic, in her criticism of the notion of “femininity” imposed on women by patriarchy. Thus, she exposes femininity as a construct in two major ways: on the one hand, she adopts a technique of individuation, whereby she shows how feminine individuality is a fallacy, simply an internalisation of patriarchal values; on the other hand, she depicts “a woman’s world” which turns out to be a mere reproduction of phallogocentrism. Finally, we have distinguished two types of mimicry that Stein employs: traditional mimicry, whereby women reproduce masculine models, and revolutionary mimicry, whereby Stein makes the reader aware of the artificiality of the concept of femininity. We can therefore affirm that Stein’s approach is highly original and effective. She does not restrict herself to a utopian model, such as her radical writing, which would lead her to the presentation of an illusory and alternative world for women. Instead, she ultimately concurs with Irigaray’s proposal that patriarchy is extremely powerful, but not unchallengeable. Thus, her eclectic revolution, her revelation of “femininity” as a construct, and her use of a two-fold conception of mimicry are powerful feminist weapons which, at least, contribute to undermine the traditionally unquestionable authority of patriarchy.

REFERENCES

- Bhabha, H. K. 1994. “Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse”. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 85-92.
- Bowers, J. P. 1993. *Women Writers: Gertrude Stein*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press.
- Charters, A. 1990. Introduction. *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein. London: Penguin. vii-xx.
- DeKoven, M. 1983. *Three Lives. A Different Language. Gertrude Stein’s Experimental Writing*. London: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- _____. 1988a. “Gertrude Stein and the Modernist canon”. *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*. Eds. S. Neuman and I. B. Nadel. London: The MacMillan Press. 8-20.
- _____. 1988b. “Half in and half out of doors: Gertrude Stein and literary tradition”. *A Gertrude Stein Companion. Content with the Example*. Ed. B. Kellner. London: Greenwood Press. 75-83.
- _____. 1996. “Introduction: transformations of Gertrude Stein”. *Modern Fiction Studies*. 42-3: 469-83.

- Doane, J. L. 1986. "Three Lives - three deaths". *Silence and Narrative. The Early Novels of Gertrude Stein*. Connecticut-London: Greenwood Press. 52-81.
- Doane, M. A. 1991. *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Docker, J. 1995. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fifer, E. 1992. *Rescued Readings: A Reconstruction of Gertrude Stein's Difficult Texts*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Gygax, F. 1998. "Gendered genre". *Gender and Genre in Gertrude Stein*. London: Greenwood Press. 1-12.
- Hoffman, M. J. 1965. *The Development of Abstractionism in the Writings of Gertrude Stein*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- _____. 1976. "The beginnings". *Gertrude Stein*. Boston, Massachusetts: Twayne Publishers. 24-37.
- Irigaray, L. 1985. *This Sex Which is not One*. Trans. C. Porter and C. Burke. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Jacobus, M. 1986. *Reading Woman. Essays in Feminist Criticism*. London: Methuen.
- Miller, R. S. 1949. *Gertrude Stein: Form and Intelligibility*. New York: The Exposition Press.
- Parke, C. N. 1988. "Simple through complication: Gertrude Stein thinking". *American Literature* 60: 554-74.
- Rivière, J. 1991. "Womanliness as a masquerade". *The Inner World and Joan Rivière. Collected Papers: 1920-1958*. Ed. A. Hughes. London and New York: Karnac Books. 90-101.
- Roberts, G. 1994. "A glossary of key terms". *The Bakhtin Reader. Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*. Ed. P. Morris. London and New York: Edward Arnold. 245-52.
- Rose, M. G. 1976-7. "Gertrude Stein and cubist narrative". *Modern Fiction Studies* 22: 543-55.
- Ruddick, L. 1990. *Reading Gertrude Stein. Body, Text, Gnosis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Stein, G. 1990 (1909). "The Good Anna", "The Gentle Lena". *Three Lives*. London: Penguin. 1-56, 169-200.
- Stimpson, C. R. 1986. "Gertrude Stein and the transposition of gender". *The Poetics of Gender*. Ed. N. K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press. 1-18.
- Wagner-Martin, L. 1995. *'Favored Strategies': Gertrude Stein and Her Family*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Walker, J. L. 1984. "Three Lives: the realism of the composition". *The Making of a Modernist: Gertrude Stein. From Three Lives to Tender Buttons*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press. 19-42.

- Weinstein, N. 1970. *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.
- Weiss, M. L. 1998. *Gertrude Stein and Richard Wright: The Poetics and Politics of Modernism*, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi.
- Welch, L. 1996. *How I Read Gertrude Stein*. Ed. E. P. Shaffer. San Francisco: Grey Fox Press.