THE EXTRA

“Ninety Percent Rotarian”:
Gertrude Stein’s Hemingway

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My title comes from The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas: the reference is to a conversation “Alice” overhears one afternoon when Hemingway has come to call on Gertrude Stein:

They sat and talked a long time. Finally I heard [Gertrude Stein] say, Hemingway, after all you are ninety percent Rotarian. Can’t you, he said, make it eighty percent. No, said she regretfully, I can’t. After all, as she always says, he did, and I may say, he does have moments of disinterestedness.¹

Stein’s acid comment—like her slurs on Hemingway’s manhood (“Recently a robust friend said to Gertrude Stein, Ernest is very fragile, whenever he does anything sporting something breaks, his arm, his leg, his head” [SW, p. 205]), and on Hemingway’s claim to modernity (“he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums” [SW, p. 204])—is usually understood as motivated by the inevitable rivalry between two strong and clashing egos. I shall not dwell here on the personal side of the Hemingway-Stein relationship, a relationship which has been talked about often enough;² suffice it to say that the strong initial attraction


between the twenty-three-year-old fledgling male writer and his forty-eight-year-old female mentor ("Isn't writing a hard job though?" Hemingway wrote Stein in 1924. "It used to be easy before I met you and certainly was bad, gosh, it's awfully bad now but it's a different kind of bad"), soon gave way to pique (Hemingway resenting Stein's criticisms of his work and her claims to having shaped his style, even as Stein resented Hemingway's false promise that Ford Madox Ford's Transatlantic Review would serialize The Making of Americans), and finally to total enmity. The young man who had said to Edmund Wilson in 1923, "[Gertrude Stein's] method is invaluable for analysing anything or making notes on a person or a place. She has a wonderful head," was declaring by 1928, in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, "If I could only take the slight plunge to going in for not making sense I could work ten or twelve hours a day every day . . . like Gertrude Stein who since she has taken up not making sense some eighteen years ago has never known a moment's unhappiness with her work" (SL, pp. 79, 287). By this time, of course, Hemingway had published In Our Time and The Sun Also Rises and had become a celebrity who no longer needed Stein's help. Indeed, the contemporary wisdom was that Hemingway, quite obviously Stein's superior, had found a way to turn her base metal into gold. No wonder then, so common sense would have it, that Stein, whose own experimental writings remained largely unpublished and unread, was prompted to disparage Hemingway's success. No wonder that she described the "extraordinarily good-looking young man" as having eyes that were "passionately jibes against Stein into his fiction; see Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribners, 1935), pp. 23–28; and A Moveable Feast (New York: Scribners, 1964), pp. 11–21, 117–18. The Selected Letters 1917–61, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Scribners, 1981), contains many important comments. See esp. the letters to Arnold Gingrich, 3 April 1933 (p. 384), to W. G. Rogers, 29 July 1948 (p. 649), and to Edmund Wilson, 8 November 1952 (p. 794): in these, Hemingway claims that he always loved Gertrude Stein but that when she became menopausal she "went haywire"; he also claims—correctly, no doubt—that Alice hated him and turned Gertrude against him. This text is subsequently cited as SL.


interested" rather than "interesting" (SW, p. 200, emphasis added), that she criticized his ability to compose a sentence (SW, p. 206), and that she dismissed him as "ninety percent Rotarian," which is to say, all but hopelessly middle-brow (see SW, pp. 205–07).

Indeed, after an initial phase when critics like Paul Rosenfeld and Edmund Wilson referred to Hemingway, Stein, and Sherwood Anderson as forming a school, a "distinctively American" movement, "whose characteristic," in Wilson's words, "is a naiveté of language often passing into the colloquialism of the character dealt with which serves actually to convey profound emotions and complex states of mind," the steining of Hemingway, as Wyndham Lewis was to call it, came to be regarded as a blot on an otherwise clean escutcheon. "[Hemingway]," writes Conrad Aiken in a review of The Sun Also Rises, "has learned something from Mr. Anderson, and something, perhaps, from Mr. Fitzgerald's 'Great Gatsby'; he may even have extracted a grain or two of ore from Miss Gertrude Stein—which is in itself no inconsiderable feat. But in the accomplished fact his work is not in the least like the work of any of these writers" (HCH, p. 90). In a review of A Farewell to Arms (1929), T. S. Matthews refers to a particular passage about Catherine Barkley as a "Gertrude Stein lapse" (HCH, p. 123), and Alfred Kazin, commenting on the relative weakness of To Have and Have Not (1937), expresses the hope that Hemingway won't go to pot like Gertrude Stein, that "immense priestess of nonsense expounding her text in nonsense syllables" (HCH, p. 229). "Even when Mr. Hemingway dabbles in the Steinian trick," W. H. Mellers assures the readers of Scrutiny in 1939, "as he does occasionally in order to express states of drunkenness, coition or hysteria, he does so strictly within the limits of his own convention" (HCH, p. 277). And, as recently as 1982, in the Critical Heritage volume on Hemingway, Jeffrey Meyers declares: "The stylistic influence of Ring Lardner, Anderson and Stein has been much discussed


and vastly over-rated. One need only compare Hemingway's early style—in 'In Our Time' and 'The Sun Also Rises'—with that of his supposed teachers to see immediately that he is very different and infinitely superior" (HCH, p. 5).

This, then, is the consensus—a consensus still reflected in course syllabi and reading lists, and certainly by the space given to Hemingway and Stein in the anthologies of our own purportedly enlightened feminist moment. Interestingly, the one early commentary that points us in a different direction appears in an essay that is as hostile to Hemingway as it is to Stein: namely, Wyndham Lewis' "The Dumb Ox" in his Men Without Art of 1934. For Lewis, Hemingway's is "an art of the surface" because he never comes to grips with the meanings behind phenomena; he is interested, say, "in war, but not in the things that cause war, or the people who profit by it, or in the human destinies involved in it. He lives, or affects to live, submerged" (HCH, pp. 187–88). Nor can we consider Hemingway a "folk-prose-poet," as he would like us to do, for

in the case of Hemingway the folk-business is very seriously complicated by a really surprising fact. He has suffered an overmastering influence, which cuts his work off from any other, except that of his mistress (for his master has been a mistress!). So much so is this the case, that their destinies (his and that of the person who so strangely hypnotized him with her repeating habits and her faux-naif prattle) are forever interlocked. . . . If you ask yourself how you would be able to tell a page of Hemingway, if it were unexpectedly placed before you, you would be compelled to answer, Because it would be like Miss Stein! And if you were asked how you would know it was not by Miss Stein, you would say, Because it would probably be about prize-fighting, war, or the bull-ring, and Miss Stein does not write about war, boxing or bull-fighting!

It is very uncomfortable in real life when people become so captivated with somebody else's tricks that they become a sort of caricature or echo of the other: and it is no less embarrassing in books. (HCH, pp. 192–93)

Indeed, this "unfortunate handicap" does "impose . . . the Stein ethos" on Hemingway; "with Stein's bag of tricks he also takes over a Weltanschauung, which may not at all be his. . . . This infantile, dull-witted dreamy stutter compels whoever uses it to conform to the infantile, dull-witted type. . . . One might even go so far as to say that this brilliant Jewish lady had made a
clown of him by teaching Ernest Hemingway her baby-talk. So it is a pity" (HCH, p. 195).

Hostile as this is, Lewis is on to something important here. "Hemingway's," he says, "is a poster-art. . . . The steining in the text of Hemingway is as it were the hand-made part" (HCH, p. 203). Which is to suggest that what Lewis calls Stein's "infantile, dull-witted dreamy stutter," the "half-wit simplicity" of her "repetitive biblical diction" (p. 199) is paradoxically the original element in Hemingway's work. But since Lewis never submits that "Stein-stutter" itself to any sort of analysis (misogynist and virulent anti-Semite, Lewis was hardly likely to give a sympathetic reading to the work of a Jewish woman!), his account of Hemingway's dirty little secret remains a half-truth.

What I propose to do here is to compare Hemingway's "baby talk" to Stein's by reading Hemingway's short story "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" (1924) against the equally short story (both are under 2,000 words) on which it seems to have been modelled, Stein's "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene." Written in 1908, this story was first published in Geography and Plays (1922); Hemingway, who had recently met Stein through a letter of introduction from Sherwood Anderson, evidently read the book, with Anderson's introduction, in typescript.7 His own "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" was first published in the Little Review in 1924 and then in In Our Time (1925).8 Among Stein's papers in the Beinecke Library is a typescript containing the first four paragraphs of Hemingway's story. Clearly, an exchange of texts had been going on.

Both stories are about the coming together and subsequent break-up of a particular couple, a triangle situation ensuing or at least implicit. In both stories, the characters are based on identifiable people: Stein's Miss Furr and Miss Skeene were really the Misses Ethel Mars and Maud Hunt Squires, two proper spinster ladies from the Midwest who had come to Paris, dabbled in watercolors, and gone in for heavy make-up and, in Miss Mars's case, flaming orange hair.9 In the Autobiography, "Alice" recalls

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8 See KL, pp. 244–45, 271; SL, p. 60. Hemingway's publisher Horace Liveright objected to some obscenities in the Little Review version, which Hemingway accordingly removed, but in the Scribner edition (1930), these were reinstated.
that on her first visit to 27, rue de Fleurus, "Miss Mars and I talked of a subject then entirely new, how to make up your face"; she also taught Alice the difference between the femme décorative, the femme d'intérieur, and the femme intrigante (SW, p. 13).

Hemingway's Mr. Elliot was, in real life, Chard Powers Smith, a sometime poet who attended Yale and Harvard Law School and had sat at the feet of E. A. Robinson at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. In his early twenties, Chard Smith married a lady from Alabama who was in her middle thirties; when they arrived in Paris, Olive Smith was in the early stages of a difficult pregnancy. When Hemingway met Smith on the café circuit, he immediately decided that the latter was effeminate, perhaps homosexual. But when the Smiths rented a splendid chateau in the south of France, the Hemingways accepted their invitation to stay with them. "It was," writes Kenneth Lynn, "while he was a guest under their roof that Hemingway became aware of a tension in the Smiths' relationship that also involved a woman friend of theirs who was clearly in love with Smith. Nevertheless, Hemingway was contemptuously sure that there was a lot less to this cultivated young man's manliness than met the eye, and out of this conviction there came a story entitled "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" (KL, p. 244). To heighten the absurdity of the marriage, Hemingway made his protagonist twenty-five as compared to his wife's forty years.

The change from Smith to Elliot was prompted by a second animosity on Hemingway's part—this time towards T. S. Eliot, whose editorial policies infuriated Hemingway, even as the rumors about his personal life coupled with the images of sexual impotence and sterility in The Waste Land convinced Hemingway that Eliot was not a real "man."10 Thus Chard and Olive Smith became Hubert and Cornelia Elliot, the double I designed to make closer identification with the poet impossible.

There are further similarities between "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" and "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot." Both stories are told in the third person by a detached narrator and both foreground

10 As Kenneth Lynn points out (p. 247), it was highly unusual, in the early twenties, to read Eliot's biography into his poetry but Hemingway did so, relating the vulnerability of Prufrock, Mr. Apollinax, and The Waste Land characters to people like Chard Powers Smith. Lynn writes, "In taking particular aim at sexual vulnerabilities he appeared to be proclaiming his own invulnerability" (p. 248).
the rhetorical device of repetition, whether verbal or phrasal, exact or incremental. Consider the first paragraph of “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot”:

Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard to have a baby. They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it. They tried in Boston after they were married and they tried coming over on the boat. They did not try very often on the boat because Mrs. Elliot was quite sick. She was sick and when she was sick she was sick as Southern women are sick. That is women from the Southern part of the United States. Like all Southern women Mrs. Elliot disintegrated very quickly under sea sickness, travelling at night, and getting up too early in the morning. Many of the people on the boat took her for Elliot’s mother. Other people who knew they were married believed she was going to have a baby. In reality she was forty years old. Her years had been precipitated suddenly when she started travelling.11

Here is the famous Stein-Hemingway signature—the “infantile, dreamy stutter” as Lewis called it—the ironic repetition of what seem to be facts like “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot tried very hard,” “They tried as often as Mrs. Elliot could stand it,” “They tried in Boston,” “they tried coming over on the boat,” “They did not try very often on the boat,” and so on. The repetition overload of a locution like “She was sick and when she was sick she was sick as Southern women are sick” is directly indebted to the kind of Stein locutions we find in the opening passage of “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene”:

Helen Furr had quite a pleasant home. Mrs. Furr was quite a pleasant woman. Mr. Furr was quite a pleasant man. Helen Furr had quite a pleasant voice a voice quite worth cultivating. She did not mind working. She worked to cultivate her voice. She did not find it gay living in the same place where she had always been living. She went to a place where some were cultivating something, voices and other things needing cultivating. She met Georgine Skeene there who was cultivating her voice which some thought was quite a pleasant one. Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene lived together then. Georgine Skeene liked travelling. Helen Furr did not care about travelling, she liked to stay in one place and be gay there. They were together then and travelled to another place and stayed there and were gay there. (SW, p. 563)

11 Ernest Hemingway, In Our Time (New York: Scribners, 1930), p. 109. All further references to “Mr. and Mrs. Elliot” are to this edition and are cited in the text as IOT.
Here Stein repeats and permutates key words—"quite," "pleasant," "voice," "cultivating," "living," "gay," together with the proper names "Helen Furr," "Georgine Skeene," "Mr. Furr," "Mrs. Furr"—words placed in short declarative sentences that resemble those found in a children's book (say, Dr. Seuss)—in ways that obviously resemble Hemingway's repetition of "tried," "sick," "very," and the names "Elliot" and "Mrs. Elliot" in equally short straightforward sentences. Indeed, the word "travelling" is a key item in both stories.

But the use to which the words in question are put is quite different. Stein once observed, in an interview with Robert Hass, that some of the prose pieces in her Tender Buttons didn't work as well as others because they were too assertive. Specifically, she refers to the sentence "Dirty is yellow" in "A Piece of Coffee," and remarks, "Dirty has an association and is a word I would not use now. I would not use words that have definite associations." The implication is that the words to be repeated should be open to interpretation, should make the reader work. And this is precisely what happens in "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene."

"Helen Furr had quite a pleasant home." The sentence can be construed in a variety of ways, especially given the added information that "Mrs. Furr was quite a pleasant woman" and that "Mr. Furr was quite a pleasant man." If the first "quite a pleasant" suggests comfort and ordinary pleasures, by the third repetition it begins to sound stifling, oppressive, boringly bourgeois. But that reading may also be excessive, given the mention, in the next sentence of "quite a pleasant voice, a voice quite worth cultivating." Evidently, Helen Furr has some quality of her own, or does she? And what does it mean to "cultivate" a voice? What makes a voice "worth cultivating"? The seventh sentence introduces the story's key word "gay" (quite possibly used for the very first time in Stein's story in its contemporary sense of homosexual, but here only as an undertone). It also

13 The use of "gay" here and in related Stein texts like A Long Gay Book (1912) naturally suggests Stein may have anticipated the contemporary meaning of "gay" as "homosexual." But there is no evidence that this was the case. In A Dictionary of Euphemisms & Other Doubletalk ([New York: Crown, 1981], pp. 119–20), Hugh Rawson provides a very full etymology of gay, from its early use (seventeenth century) as a euphemism for a "loose and immoral life," to its nineteenth-century designation of women of pleasure.
introduces the word “living.” We can now surmise that whatever the “living” is like in the “quite” pleasant Furr home, it is not sufficiently “gay” for Helen Furr. And now comes the complex sentence, “She went to a place where some were cultivating something, voices and other things needing cultivating.” The place is unspecified which makes it all the more tantalizing, as does the notion that “cultivating” applies to many things besides voices. The implication is that these “things” are sexual but their nature is never clarified. By the end of the paragraph we only know that Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene (with the play on “fur” and “skin” and the silly rhyme of “Georgine” / “Skeene”) are now “together” and “gay there,” and that Georgine Skeene liked “travelling” (whatever that entails) whereas Helen Furr likes to stay in one place.

So much for exposition. The rest of the story modulates key words—“regular,” “gay,” “together,” “there,” “cultivating,” “travelling”—even as being “regularly gay every day” begins to change. For one thing “cultivating” proceeds at a different pace, Georgine Skeene’s voice being “some said, a better one” and “a quite richly enough cultivated one,” whereas Helen Furr’s “quite pleasant” voice is no more than a “pleasant enough” one. In any case, Georgine Skeene “would have liked to do more travelling,” and does travel to “a place where her brother had quite some distinction.” She goes there alone—a prefiguring of things to come—whereas they visit Helen Furr’s “pleasant home” together. The first climax, if we can speak of climaxes in this verbal ballet, comes in Helen’s reaction to one of these visits, rhyme reenforcing its tone:

as gay women (“The gay women of this era were said to lead the gay life, to work in gay houses, to be gay in the arse . . . and to gay it [either sex might gay it, this simply meaning ‘to copulate’]”), to its underground meaning of “homosexual,” first used in the 1920s in the private discourse of male homosexuals.

Would Stein have known of this usage? Ronald Butters, the editor of the journal American Speech, who kindly alerted me to Rawson’s very helpful dictionary, thinks that in 1908 (the date of “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene”), she probably did not, and observes that her close writer-friend Sherwood Anderson used the word “gay” as more or less synonymous with “crazy.” Still, although Rawson, following Eric Partridge, points out that the current use of “gay” is relatively quite recent (Rawson notes that “as late as 1961, Billy Lee Brammer’s novel of Texas politics could be entitled The Gay Place, without anyone—non-gays, at least—giving the word a second thought”), I find it hard to believe that Stein, using the word “gay” as her leitmotif in a story about a homosexual love affair, didn’t have the underground meaning in mind.
Certainly Helen Furr would not find it gay to stay, she did not find it gay, she said she would not stay, she said she did not find it gay, she said she would not stay where she did not find it gay, she said she found it gay where she did stay and she did stay there where very many were cultivating something. She did stay there. She always did find it gay there. (SW, p. 565)

Notice that the mathematical precision of the permutative process—"she would not stay where she did not find it gay" versus "she found it gay where she did stay"—provides us with the skeleton narrative of any number of possible stories. Why did Helen Furr break with her "pleasant" parents? Because they disapproved of Georgine Skeene? Of her way of life? Of the "cultivation" of "voices"? Or none of the above?

This break, in any case, is now followed by the complicating factor of "men." "There were some dark and heavy men there then. There were some who were not so heavy and some who were not so dark. Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene sat regularly with them." What transpires between Helen Furr, Georgine Skeene, and the dark and heavy men with whom they are "regularly" sitting remains a mystery. "Dark and heavy" connotes masculinity—these are men who are really men—but then Helen Furr and Georgine Skeene also "went" (a wonderfully ambiguous word) with some men who "were not so dark and not so heavy." Is their "gay" relationship now compromised by heterosexual relationships? Or what? How are their "voices" affected? We only know that Miss Furr and Miss Skeene "went with them, went somewhere with them, went with some of them."

And now "living" and "cultivating" gives way to "learning." Learning "little things, gay little things," learning ways to be "gay every day," "using these little things they were learning to have to be gay." And "gay" becomes more and more obsessive an adjective, even as "regular" begins to give way to a particular moment in time: "Georgine Skeene went away to stay two months with her brother. Helen Furr did not go then to stay with her father and her mother." The affair is evidently over; Helen Furr is now able to be "gay longer every day than when the two of them had been being gay."

The final page defines what being "gay" without Georgine Skeene is like. Helen Furr's voice is now a "quite completely well enough cultivated one" and "she did not use it very often."
She no longer needs her "voice" in order to be gay. "Very many were telling about using other ways in being gay." More important: she is now telling others how to be gay. The final sentence reads: "She was living very well, she was gay then, she went on living then, she was regular in being gay, she always was living very well and was gay very well and was telling about little ways one could be learning to use in being gay, and later was telling them quite often, telling them again and again" (SW, p. 568).

Within its seeming baby-talk parameters, "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" thus tells a complex and subtle story. The move is from passivity ("Helen Furr had quite a pleasant home") to action "telling them again and again," from innocence ("a voice quite worth cultivating"), to knowledge ("she was not needing using her voice to be a gay one"), from a kind of prelapsarian sexuality to the experience that comes with living "regularly" with Miss Skeene and "sitting" with "dark and heavy" men. The story uses repetition and permutation of a highly selected group of ordinary words so as to imitate the actual process a love affair undergoes.

Hemingway's "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" uses language very differently. The assumed naivete on the narrator's part ("She was sick and when she was sick she was sick as Southern women are sick. That is women from the Southern part of the United States.") quickly gives way to manipulation: "Like all Southern women Mrs. Elliot disintegrated very quickly under seasickness. . . . In reality she was forty years old." Unlike "pleasant" or "gay" or "cultivating," "disintegrated" and "in reality she was forty years old" are loaded phrases: there is only one way to understand them. But of course Hemingway does not want to allow the characters in this story a life of their own because he has other aims in mind. Specifically, he is satirizing the wealthy young hyper-cultivated prim and proper American—a kind of J. Alfred Prufrock—who marries because he thinks he ought to even though women don't arouse him sexually. "He was twenty-five years old and had never gone to bed with a woman until he married Mrs. Elliot. He wanted to keep himself pure so that he could bring to his wife the same purity of mind and body that he expected of her" (IOT, p. 110).

Hemingway's narrative leaves no doubt as to the absurdity of such a marriage and its inevitable aftermath. Cornelia sizes
up Hubert as a man who will leave her alone and provide her with legitimacy; Hubert’s lack of “manhood” is evident in the reaction of Cornelia’s mother, who “cried when he brought Cornelia home after their marriage,” and in Cornelia’s satisfaction that “he had kept himself really straight for her.” Further, in case the reader misses the point, the narrator makes clear that “at first Hubert had no idea of marrying Cornelia. He had never thought of her that way. She had been such a good friend of his, and then one day in the little back room of the shop they had been dancing to the gramophone while her girl friend was in the front of the shop and she had looked up into his eyes and he had kissed her” (*IOT*, p. 111).

The unnamed “girl friend” becomes, of course, the third member of the triangle. After the Elliots’ wedding night—“They were both disappointed but finally Cornelia went to sleep”—and their further abortive attempts at sex while on shipboard to Europe (“they tried several times to have a baby”), they settle into the Paris café routine and rent a château in Touraine. “Elliot had a number of friends by now all of whom admired his poetry and Mrs. Elliot had prevailed upon him to send over to Boston for her girl friend who had been in the tea shop. Mrs. Elliot became much brighter after the girl friend came and they had many good cries together.” At the end of the story, Mrs. Elliot, who “was learning the touch system on the typewriter” (the obvious irony being that her “touch system” applies to a machine but not to her husband), is sleeping in “the big medieval bed” with her girl friend while Elliot “had taken to drinking white wine and lived apart in his own room.” And Hemingway concludes: “In the evening they all sat at dinner together in the garden under a plane tree and the hot evening wind blew and Elliot drank white wine and Mrs. Elliot and the girl friend made conversation and they were all quite happy.”

The object of Hemingway’s satire is quite plain. His malice is directed toward homosexuality—always a particular bugbear for Hemingway—and especially toward the closet homosexuality of rich and genteel Harvard types like Hubert Elliot (a.k.a. T. S. Eliot), who fancy themselves poets and intellectuals and want to have genteel marriages and babies. Cornelia is equally despicable, in Hemingway’s view, in that she uses Hubert to maintain appearances so that she can carry on her lesbian rela-
tionship with her "girlfriend." These, the story implies, are the dregs of a vacuous café society that irritate a real man like Hemingway. Indeed, when the real Mrs. Elliot, Olive Smith, died in giving birth to twins and the bereaved Chard Powers Smith wrote to Hemingway to complain about "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot," Hemingway wrote a particularly nasty reply, reiterating his "sincere and hearty contempt for you, your past, your present and your future" and declaring that "It will be a great pleasure to see you again in Paris and somewhat of a pleasure to knock you down a few times" (see KL, p. 245). The writing of the story did not, in other words, exorcise his malevolence toward what Chard Powers Smith represented.

Why, given its particular nastiness, have critics preferred a story like "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" to a story like "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene"? For one thing, I suppose, because Hemingway's prose is much more accessible than Stein's and because his story dramatizes such central Modernist themes as the self-deception of the Jamesian or Eliotic bachelor, or the clash between the values of Puritan New England and a more tolerant Europe, or again the cultural coding of the 1920s and the need to disguise "deviant" sexual behavior. But "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot" also contains—and here it reflects the larger strengths of In Our Time—the complex symbolic imagery that we associate with the foremost fiction of the High Modernist period. Consider the following example:

They spent the night of the day they were married in a Boston hotel. They were both disappointed but finally Cornelia went to sleep. Hubert could not sleep and several times went out and walked up and down the corridor of the hotel in his new Jaeger bathrobe that he had bought for the wedding trip. As he walked he saw all the pairs of shoes, small shoes, and big shoes, outside the doors of the hotel rooms. This set his heart to pounding and he hurried back to his own room but Cornelia was asleep. He did not like to waken her and soon everything was quite all right and he slept peacefully. (IOT, p. 111)

The symbolism of the shoes is of the kind one meets in Eliot's own poetry—in, say, Prufrock's reference to "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels / And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells," or to "arms that are bracelet ed and white and bare, / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)." It was, for that matter, another "repressed" New England writer, Henry
James, who, in his essay on D'Annunzio, observed that the "sexual passion from which [D'Annunzio] extracts such admirable detached pictures insists on remaining for him only the act of a moment. . . . Shut out from the rest of life . . . it has no more dignity . . . than the boots and shoes that we see, in the corridors of promiscuous hotels, standing, often in double pairs at the doors of rooms." Max Beerbohm, in a witty literary caricature called "A Rage of Wonderment" (Figure 1), depicts a

portly "HJ" kneeling with his ear to the keyhole of a hotel bedroom door, outside of which stand a pair of men's boots next to a dainty pair of lady's highheeled shoes.15

Hemingway, who may well have seen Beerbohm's cartoon, similarly presents Hubert as voyeur, his heart pounding as he surveys the "promiscuous" couples outside the bedroom doors and engages in masturbatory fantasies about the sexual life inside those hidden rooms.16 Then too, the shoes are all in pairs, as Hubert and Cornelia pretend to be, but Hubert now knows instinctively that he and his wife are a false pair. Accordingly, he would like to be in some other man's shoes, in the shoes of a real man. In the best "objective" style, Hemingway tells us none of this; he follows the Jamesian precept "Do not state, render." And indeed, the passage has a further complication in that, for a brief moment, the Hemingway narrator identifies with his character, seeing the situation from Hubert's point of view, as if to say that he himself knows what it is to experience impotence.

But Hemingway's mode, subtle as its ironies and double entendres may be, makes no allowances for the sort of irreducible difference we find in a text like "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene." In his finest stories—"The Killers," "In Another Country," "Big Two-Hearted River"—Hemingway uses a network of concrete images, more or less in the vein of the Eliot he professes to despise, as the objective correlative of his vision. Stein, on the other hand, uses almost no imagery at all. We never "see" Helen Furr or Georgine Skeene even to the degree that we see Hubert and Cornelia Elliot kissing in the teashop. We only know that they are "gay" together, that they "cultivate their voices and other things needing cultivating," and so on.

For a Modernist audience, such abstraction, such reliance on

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16 Robert Scholes, in "Interpretation and Criticism in the Classroom," Proceedings at the Northeastern University Center for Literary Studies, 3 (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 35-50, suggests that Hubert's "heart acts as a metonymic substitute for a more pertinent organ" (p. 48). Scholes also points out that the phrase "soon everything was quite all right and he slept peacefully" is a coded way of saying that Hubert, re-entering the room and aroused by the sight of the shoes, masturbates and is thus able to fall asleep.

For Scholes, such coding is a sign of the story's strength, but I would argue that, clever as the "soon . . ." passage may be, the narrator is pulling all the strings so that the reader's response is entirely controlled.
“colorless” words and deictics to do the work (“They stayed there and were gay there, not very gay there, just gay there”) rather than on rich, concrete imagery as “objective correlative” (“Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?”) must have been, to say the least, puzzling: Stein’s “faux-naif prattle,” as Wyndham Lewis called it, evidently seemed more congenial when its permutated phrases gave way, as they do in Hemingway, to reported action, to something happening: “They spent the night of the day they were married in a Boston hotel. They were both disappointed but finally Cornelia went to sleep.”

Disappointment is an emotion too clear-cut, too fully articulated for the world of “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene”; nothing, moreover, is ever “final” in this world, least of all going to sleep. “It is usually not events which interest Miss Stein,” John Ashbery has said of Stanzas in Meditation, “rather it is their ‘way of happening,’ and the story . . . is a general all-purpose model which each reader can adapt to fit his own set of particulars.”

It may well be that in our own “writerly” time, Stein’s mode of story telling—her elusive yet quite precise delineation of the gradual change one’s feelings undergo in the passage of time—is more congenial than the self-consciously “natural” narrative of In Our Time, a narrative that “prevails” on us even as Mrs. Elliot “prevailed upon [Mr. Elliot] to send over to Boston for her girl friend.”

Writing to Horace Liveright in May 1925, Hemingway remarked: “As you will see I have revised the Mr. and Mrs. E story. . . . As the whole story hung again and again on the repetition of the words ‘they tried very hard to have a baby,’ I have inserted some stuff about the boat and Paris to pick up the old rhythm and keep it funny. It has to have the repetitions to hold it together” (SL, p. 160). Holding it together—shoring one’s fragments against the ruins, making the symbols cohere—these are, of course, classic Modernist ideals, ideals that Stein’s “outsider” version of Modernism submitted to question. “Holding it together,” as Helen Furr learns and as Helen Furr’s creator was to insist, not only repeatedly but repeatably, is finally much less interesting than “telling it again and again and again.”