“It might be a portrait but in any case it is for you”
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1 Based on special requirements regarding subject matter the literary portrait can be described as a genre situated in the outskirts of fiction. Because the reference to an actual person existing in the world is decisive for any text to be considered a portrait, it is difficult to investigate the portrait genre from a strictly formalistic point of view. For this reason the genre is often treated exclusively as a non-fictional or journalistic genre. Furthermore the portrait is somehow concerned with or displaying an interest in individual biography – something that has not exactly been comme il faut in literary studies as an academic field since the disciplinary independence of literary studies was very much grounded upon its severance with the fields of history and biography. This fact may also account to some extent for the literary portrait’s lasting position as an overlooked genre.

2 Gertrude Stein wrote portraits throughout her literary career. Her subjects count Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, Marcel Duchamp, Juan Gris, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Sitwell, Mabel Dodge, Sherwood Anderson, Kate Buss, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau and many others among the colourful personalities, especially visual artists, populating the avant-garde scene flourishing in the Paris of the 1910s and 1920s. Despite their prominent subjects, Stein’s portraits have never been mistaken for pieces of cultural journalism. On the contrary, many years had to pass before the Stein reception started taking her portraits seriously as honest attempts with the portrait as a literary genre. Stein herself was always very clear on the matter; her portraits are surely meant to be portraits of actual people, just as her plays are meant to be performed on stage. In the following I would like to illuminate some of the ways in which Stein took the portrait quite seriously – illustrated by readings of her portraits Matisse and Picasso’ written in 1911 – and show how she used this particular genre in the development of her dialogic concept of writing.
The very dedicated relationship between Stein and contemporary visual art is likely to have had an influence on her discovery of the verbal portrait. Obviously, the visual sister genre of the unfashionable literary genre of the portrait has had a hugely significant position in art history, at least since the Renaissance. And Stein was intimately familiar with, and inspired by, contemporary artists such as Cézanne and Picasso. Thus her writing has often – and often with great benefit – been treated as a literary counterpart to cubism in painting. The portrait genre, however, Stein addressed with her firm conviction that “after all the human being essentially is not paintable” and in this case I find that the painterly connection is very easily overstressed – resulting in a limited perception of Stein’s radical and impressively conscious work with her literary medium. In this context, I would rather stress the fact that Stein first took an interest in the portrait genre during her work with the depiction of character in her first major literary project, the monumental novel *The Making Of Americans* (1903-11). She picked it up, and made it the object of literary effort with varying intensity from the 1910s until her death in 1946. Therefore the more than 130 portraits of friends and acquaintances that Stein wrote, reflect the violent stylistic evolvements her writing underwent in this period of time, while the genre is at the same time a bound one. The portraits remain a uniquely interesting key to the oeuvre because they show many varying attempts from Stein to do one single thing. That is, finding a suitable verbal recreation of a living person.

**A good gossip**

Another important quality of Stein’s corpus of portraits as a whole is, that they are a cluster of texts, staging Gertrude Stein as an interesting personality among interesting personalities. Considering this aspect actualizes the dubious connection to biographical curiosity of the genre. Stein herself is cultivating this aspect most obviously in her first and only bestseller *The Autobiography Of Alice B. Toklas* (1932), a book filled with anecdotes and gossip about Gertrude Stein and her more or less famous friends in 1910s and 20s Paris and moreover including the writing and exchanging of many of the portraits from her earlier work in these anecdotes. It can be tempting to treat this aspect as a less serious by-product because easy going and anecdotal style comes close to the domain of gossip, and to take interest in it smells like plain ordinary nosiness. The biographical interest can reductively be fudged by pointing to the fact that Stein herself was “a good gossip” and had to know everything about everyone. Because the literary portrait texts are so open, it has generally been possible to read them without reference to the biographical interest, leaving the gossip part to more popular studies.

Another option however is to view this aspect of Stein’s portraits as an open door into a work that to some readers can seem unapproachable. Stein’s literary portraits Matisse and Picasso, that I am to discuss in further detail, are among the most well known and widely read works in her entire oeuvre and the most obvious explanation to this fact lies in the huge biographical interest in these two giants of modern painting. Instead of disregarding the biographical interest as somehow opposed to Stein’s radical experimental praxis, I would argue that the gossipy biographical aspect in relation to Stein’s portraits is crucial for an understanding of the performative functionality that the portrait genre obtains in Stein’s special version.
“Of course I am interested in anyone”

Concerning portrait genre, Stein repeatedly stressed her own intense interest for other people and for the unique reciprocity inherent in the genre. In the lecture *Portraits And Repetition* she describes portrait writing as almost an obsession:

Of course I am interested in any one. And in any one I must [...] find out what is moving inside them that makes them them, and I must find out how I can make a portrait of them.⁷

It is clearly not biography understood as a forth running narrative life story that the Steinian portrait departs from. Hence, the interest that she declares is in no way a desire to probe into the affairs of others. But never the less, she is declaring an open interest in what she finds exciting about other people, and this exciting thing does not necessarily need to be considered a completely abstract quality. To Stein the portrait is the opportunity to establish a meeting in writing between herself and the other.

From her very first attempts with the genre, Stein is working with a reduction of biography understood as life story and memory. In the portraits themselves the use of anecdote is minimized. Through her different stylistic periods, Stein seeks to establish the experience of a consecutive now. In the portraits her method to establish this “continuous present” is often a conscious disturbing of the temporal order in a way that, as I will demonstrate, makes a usually very simple aspect of narrative, namely chronology, almost impossible to determine, and recognizable forms of biographical matter almost completely absent. Instead the portraits can be viewed as attempts to create a type of writing as free, rhythmic movement, and the intense interest, the vivid connection between herself and her subject, becomes crucial for the way the portraits are creating a connection to their subjects. As Stein wrote in 1929 in her accompanying letter, when sending her portrait of the French poet Georges Hugnet to him as a gift of friendship: “peut etre c'est un portrait mais dans tout cas c'est a vous. [sic]”⁹

The literary portrait has, even in its more journalistic and informational variants, a strong historical connection to conversation and gossip. Historically the portrait has often been a genre of the salon springing from the body of gossip and rumours in a closed circle. This was also the case with Stein’s portraits, and I suspect, an important reason for the pleasure she took in the genre. Stein, who was very scarcely published at the time, drew the attention of a receptive audience with her early artists portraits. They were written, typed and read by their individual subjects and furthermore they were exchanged within the circle around Stein’s Saturday evenings in her studio at Rue de Fleurus. As Stein starts to name her subjects, the readers in the inner circle can take part and compare them, the texts as well as the artist’s work, and the texts become part of an on-going artistic and social conversation. All Stein’s portraits are expressions of considering and appreciating exactly the person they are depicting, and as such they all – after they were written – obtained a status as calling cards or presents delivered to their subjects. The illustrations and staging that Stein construed for these portraits, especially in *The Autobiography Of Alice B. Toklas*, are a way to sustain and intensify this dimension of the text and to make it available to all readers at all times. One could suggest that the descriptions in *The Autobiography* are a way to document them, as the time- and site-specific performative utterances they are. The portraits are moments in an actual social
exchange; it is a relationship between Stein and her model rather than straightforward representation of this model.

**Matisse and Picasso**

Stein’s portraits of Matisse and Picasso were written in immediate succession in 1911 and published vis-a-vis reproductions of the two artist’s work in Alfred Stieglitz’s magazine *Camera Work* in 1912. The two texts are part of a larger cluster of portraits that Stein wrote in 1911-12, all of them depicting male visual artists struggling to find a balance in their artistic expression. Stein was interested in the artists because their work posed fundamental aesthetic questions transgressing their medium of expression and actualized in her own work as a writer. The portraits of Matisse and Picasso are written while Stein was living in Paris and buying pictures of both painters, and the Parisian avant-garde of which they both were a part, was still a fluid open field where anything could happen. Stein’s personal friendship with both painters, and the close relationship she had to their work, is her immediate point of departure for writing their portraits. It has been argued that there is a great deal of abstraction in these two portraits – first because the reader, without previous knowledge, cannot tell that the two men were painters, it is never stated in the texts. But in fact both portraits are quite complex and humorous depictions of their subjects. The two texts have often been read together because of their publication history, and because they so clearly contrast the personalities and artistic practices of these two legendary artists.

**Continuous present**

Both portraits *Matisse* and *Picasso* are based on repetition with slight variations, sentence after sentence, and a reduced vocabulary almost completely cleared of concrete words, especially nouns and adjectives. A relatively limited selection of pronouns, prepositions and adverbs are combined and varied in interplay with a quite small amount of different verbs in each text that however appear in a wealth of possible and almost impossible tenses and inflections. In these portraits, Stein uses of a sophisticated overconsumption of grammatically complex, extended verbal tenses combined with open or inaccurate indications of time, i.e. “then”, to create her continuous present and to transgress the progressive, linear narration. Even if both texts seem to have a stable point of enunciation, a complex interweaving of past present and future tenses is at work. In her treatment of verbal tenses, Stein stretches the English language to its limit, and the complexity and level of detail is overwhelming. Especially the difference between perfective and imperfective forms are central to the dissolution of the finite time of narration and the expression of continued uninterrupted action that is so important for the creation of continuous present. This comes out clearly in the first paragraph of *Matisse* that will be quoted in its entirety below. Here, the construction “when he had completely convinced himself [...]” is a perfective, but shortly after the sentence is continued: “that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing” shifting to the imperfective mode and thus making the order of the events difficult to determine.
The rhythm of anybody’s personality

12 In *Portraits And Repetition* Stein develops a famous analogy in order to characterize the prose style she developed through the first ten years of her career. The style has been known as “insistence”. Stein compares the construction of her prose to the technical construction of a film sequence. In film each picture differs, if only slightly, from the preceding picture. Played together in a sequence, all these pictures do not create many things; they create only one thing, but something in motion. Stein imagines the effects of portraits like Matisse and Picasso in a similar way. Each sentence grows out of the preceding through minor changes. In effect what is created is not a series of different statements but rather the experience of one thing in motion or even a rhythm: “the rhythm of anybody’s personality”. Following from this, it is interesting to compare the two texts and note how disparate their rhythmical expressions are, although the texts seems closely connected by common dependency upon repetition and overlapping vocabulary.

13 *Matisse* opens with a long sentence drawn out to cover almost the entire first paragraph of the portrait:

One was quite certain that for a very long part of his being one being living he had been trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and then when he could not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing, when he had completely convinced himself that he would not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing he was really certain that he was a great one and he certainly was a great one. Certainly everyone could be certain of this thing that this one was a great one.

14 The paragraph is dominated by a quite narrow selection of words and collations of words, but the sentence seems less dependent upon actual repetition than upon a process of ramification by letting the same components gemmate in an introverted movement. The entire portrait of Matisse is dominated by complex sentences that develop slowly through a constant tortuous hesitation. The rhythm is troubled and elaborating slowly. In contrast Picasso’s sentences appear short, simple and melodic, and the rhythm moves quicker, almost nervously. The portrait of Picasso opens in a cheerful and repetitious vein:

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming.

15 Here the trope of repetition is utilised in a less complicated, almost chattering fashion. The paragraph is constructed from a chain of almost identical sentences, subjected to a minimal variation by the position of the adverbs “certainly” and “completely”. This cheery introduction establishing the charm and success of the subject (some are indeed following him), is forming a harsh contrast to the opening sentence of *Matisse* that, although invoking the greatness of the subject, is very preoccupied with the tormenting struggle in the mind of an artist about the justice of the artistic path he is in the course of breaking. The rhythmic expression of the text clearly intensifies the reader’s experience of this struggle.
An on-going conversation

A few keywords prove surprisingly expressive in the establishment of the contrast between the two portrayed artists and their artistic method. The attributes of Picasso's are scarce and simple. First of all he is “charming”, and we learn that “some were following” him. Throughout the portrait his artistic production is addressed partly through variations on passive constructions “something coming out of him”, and partly through direct active propositions “he was working”. These are opposed to Matisse’s characteristic refrain, i.e. the infinite variations on “greatly expressing something being struggling” and even “suffering”. A disagreement regarding the significance of Matisse’s work among the many people interested in it is also put on display. The “following” of Matisse is constantly divided into vague and blurry subgroups, like “some”, “very many”, “some of them”, “some of such of them”, but clearly described as disagreeing on substantial matters concerning the struggle and the clarity of the expression. Some of these leave his “following”. Once more in clear contrast to this, Picasso's following is a constant and a matter of course: “One whom some were certainly following”, “They were always following him”. In the final sentences of Picasso, on the other hand, a quite unsubtle reprimand of him occurs on the basis of his lack of work ethics, “He was not ever completely working”.

Both texts are talking into the artistic discussion that was flourishing on the Paris art scene in general and specifically in the circle around the Rue de Fleurus salon. As such they are contributions to the artistic debate they at the same time dramatize. Matisse and Picasso are about two ways of being an artist and are delicately verbalizing a split-up of the Parisian avant-garde that took place around the composition of the portraits. Picasso was in the midst of the artistic explosion of cubism completing paintings like the Portrait de Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Ma Jolie in 1910-11 and was soon to reach the breakthrough of cubist collages (such as Nature morte à la chaise cannée 1912). Working along with him were – among others – Georges Braque and André Derain who had previously been counted among “les fauves” and belonged to the circle around Matisse. The two portraits are composed in a time when Picasso was replacing Matisse as Stein’s most important protégé, and despite their apparent abstraction they are closely connected to the actual relationship between Stein and her two models. The conversation was continued when Stein decided to publish the texts together as a pair in Camera Work grouping them with reproductions of the painters’ work.

This continued conversation is an invitation to the reader to enter the texts. To Stein at the time it was a concrete opening up of a space for a possible reader. It has been certified how this space was initially created and filled out by Alice Toklas with whom Stein in 1910 commenced a life-long cohabitation. This explains why Stein in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is very careful to stage her first verbal portrait of Alice, Ada, as the very first portrait she ever wrote, even if this is not necessarily the case. But although Alice quickly became the primary reader in Stein’s mind, an extension of this new possibility of readership was simultaneously developing. The reader’s position was also taken in by a broader circle of friends and acquaintances with whom Stein was beginning to share her life and art. As the portraits started circulating, they became read and thus part of a broader dialogue. And the unique poetics that Stein developed throughout her oeuvre was conditioned by this opening, as her dialogic concept of writing initiates here. We are
however not told what Matisse and Picasso might have responded when confronted with their portraits. In The Autobiography, the narrator ‘Alice’ is cheerfully albeit reductively assuring that “Everybody was giving their portrait to read and they were all pleased, and it was all very amusing.”

The little aunts and the dialogic concept of writing

There is another fundamental poetical connection to the concept of gossip in Stein’s work in general and in the portraits in particular. Throughout her career Stein’s language has close connections to colloquial language, to plain everyday chitchat. The vocabulary is never complicated or pretentious, but simple and with the ability to develop the full potential of all words, even those seeming the most insignificant. And her consistent work with repetition as a linguistic figure also calls attention to orality. In Portraits And Repetition Stein is tracing her first experiences of the essential thing that she is later trying to capture in her portraits to experiences with gossip:

When I first realized the inevitable repetition in human expression that was not repetition but insistence when I first began to be really conscious of it was when at about seventeen years of age, I left the more or less internal and solitary life I led in California and came to Baltimore and lived with a lot of my relations and principally with a whole group of very lively little aunts who had to know anything. If they had to know anything and anybody does they naturally had to say and hear it often, anybody does, and as there were ten and eleven of them they did have to say and hear said whatever was said and any one not hearing what it was they said had to come in and to hear what had been said. That inevitably made everything said often. I began then to consciously listen to what anybody was saying and what they did say while they were saying what they were saying. This was not yet the beginning of writing but it was the beginning of knowing what there was that made there be no repetition. No matter how often what happened had happened any time anyone told anything there was no repetition. This is what William James calls the Will to live. If not nobody would live.

Life itself was thus revealing itself to young Stein in the apparently banal and gossipy repetitions of stories by her aunts ten and eleven times an afternoon. With the one reservation that the lively and intense interest in saying what was being said and, no less, in listening to it, had to be present. The instant the speaker (or the listener) started loosing interest in whatever was being said, repetition appeared and here lies the essential difference between repetition and insistence that was so important to Stein who used it to define her concept of genius and thus her artistic practice. In the same lecture she continues:

Nothing makes any difference as long as someone is listening while they are talking. If the same person is doing the talking and the listening why so much the better there is just by so much the greater concentration. One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening.

Stein’s central claim that one should be “talking and listening at the same time” is thus conceived via an experience of gossip. And for gossip as well as for literature it is a case of point: it is successful only if true reciprocity is present. If one listens while talking, and the intense interest remains present.
In Matisse the lack of this particular gift in the artistic expression of the famous painter is pointed out. We are told repeatedly about Matisse that he expresses himself, and that he struggles with this expression. His artistic praxis is described as something psychological. He pours out his interior much more than he seems attentive to the exterior world or to the audience receiving his work. This is reflected in the fact that he talks extensively, but the number of listeners seems to be decreasing through the course of the text. It implicitly states that listening to him bit by bit becomes less interesting because he delivers a monologue – he repeats but does not listen. In the portrait it is accounted how he tells his story again and again, yet no apparent release springs from this. The only immediate consequence of recounting his tale of woe is that he losess some followers (skipping to the cubists): “Some of such of them did not go on in being ones wanting to be doing what this one was doing that is being clearly expressing something.”

The artistic expression of Matisse that emerges from inner struggle and pain is opposed to Picasso’s almost exterior production: “something coming out of him”. It is significant to observe here the movement towards the surface and away from depth as a psychological trope. Picasso is staged on the one hand as the productive male genius, a classical figure in modernism, inspired and dedicated to creating great and complex works of art, simply because he needs to be immersed in this work to be able to breathe and feel alive. On the other hand, the conformity of this role is contested by effortlessness in his work and concrete exteriority in his making. In this aspect his way of working contrasts strongly to Matisse’s “struggling to be expressing something” which clearly brings out the romanticist aspects inherent in the modernist concept of the great genius. Picasso’s work pours from him in a steady stream with obvious scatological connotations. Or, as Stein reflects in her notebook around the time she wrote the two portraits “not express yourself like Matisse but be giving birth like Cezanne and Picasso and me.”

With Picasso, Stein has begun the remarkable transformation of the modernistic concept of genius that she later connects to the dialogical principle of writing, to the “listening and talking at the same time”. The concept that she finally breaks completely open in her second autobiography Everybody’s Autobiography (1936) where she stages herself as a unique genius and makes this quality a commonality by speaking on behalf of “everybody”.

The portraits of Gertrude Stein do not relapse to narrative conventionalities in any way. Instead she cleanses the portrait genre from all the burden of information that has been weighing it down, pulling it towards biography and historical narrative. Instead of anecdotes and descriptions, Stein keeps her focus on letting her subject stand out in a dialogical relation embedded in the text itself as well as in the exchange of this text with the subject of the portraits and with all readers. Before Stein commenced her experiments with the literary portrait, the genre appeared conservative and secondary and looked perhaps almost like a dead end in literary history. Through Stein’s thorough reinterpretation, the literary portrait becomes a new lively genre that she uses in an attempt to condensate her dialogical concept of writing. But she obviously encounters a fundamental problem regarding dialogicality in her portraits – a problem connected to the monological form of the literary medium per se. No matter how influenced Stein is by the words, movement and rhythm of the other person, it is only Stein’s voice in the portraits, and therefore she is bound to continue her dialogical efforts in other genres. This sheds light onto her plays, where she multiplies the talker and lets the steady concept of character dissolve in front of the audience. And this is also a reason why she
creates first “Alice” and later “Everybody” in order to tell some of the stories that might have constituted her own autobiography.

NOTES

1. I read both portraits in the critical version as printed in Gertrude Stein, *A Stein Reader* (ed. by Ulla E.Dydo), Evanston IL 1993, p. 139-141 and 142-143.

2. For an enlightening example see Laura Schultz’ analysis of the similar techniques in Picasso’s *Still life with chair caning* and Stein’s *Tender Buttons* both creating a tension between concretism and figuration. See Schultz: “Voksdu og virkelighed – konkreteme og performativet i avantgarden” In : Ørum, Engberg, Ping Huang: *En tradition af opbrud. Avantgards tradition og politik*, København, 2005[in danish].


4. See for instance Wendy Steiner *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein*, 1979. Steiner deserves great credit as the first scholar to treat Stein’s contribution to the genre seriously as portraits, but as she is concerned with the indexical function of the visual portrait she, in my view, misinterprets Stein’s ambition regarding the genre as an attempt to transfer this indexical function into the media of literature. On this ground she deems Stein’s portraits to failure, because of the verbal medium’s different semiotic functionality, thus missing Stein’s conscious and playful approach to the semiotics of both media (what Marjorie Perloff has called “her wholesale rejection of the mimetic contract”) and her preoccupation with the materiality of her verbal medium.

5. Not published in its entirety before 1925. Due to the very uneven history of publication that applies to Stein’s work in general, all dating of works in the following will apply to year of composition and not year of publication, unless otherwise stated. For the same reason italics are used not exclusively for titles of complete publications but also for titles of individual compositions, independent of later publication. In accordance with Stein philologist Ulla E. Dydo I also respect Stein’s consistent practice of capitalizing all the words in her titles including articles and prepositions.


8. Stein introduces the term in her first written lecture *Composition As Explanation* (1926) and develops it further in *Portraits And Repetition* (1934) and several other writings of the 1930s.

9. In English “It might be a portrait but in any case it is for you.” Quoted in : Ulla E. Dydo : *The Language that Rises*, 2003, p. 286. Just as Stein hardly ever used a comma when she wrote in English she consistently left out all accents when writing in French.

10. Sainte Beuve, the perhaps most prominent contributor to the portrait genre in the nineteenth century, wrote a large number of his influential portraits (published for instance in *Portraits contemporains*, Paris 1871) depicting personalities he encountered in the political and literary salon of Mme. Recamiérs in the early nineteenth century.
11. The publication of the two portraits so shortly after their composition is unique in Stein’s early career. In fact the two portraits in Camera Work were the first works of Stein published in the United States.

12. The other vein in her early portrait writing consists of female portraits and group portraits carrying fictive titles, Ada, Miss Furr And Miss Skeene, Orta Or One Dancing. These portraits describe women breaking loose from oppressive family relations creating their own livelier adult relations and obviously reflect another aspect of Stein’s personal evolvement. The last of the above Orta Or One Dancing is unique as it bridges between the two veins in Stein’s portrait writing, its subject being a female artist, the dancer Isadora Duncan.

13. This claim was initially asserted by one of the earliest scholars to do a full length study of Stein, Michael Hoffmann, (Hoffmann: The Development of Abstractionism in the Writings of Gertrude Stein, Philadelphia 1965, p. 165) and has been repeated numerous times. The obvious – yet weighty – objection to this complaint is that nobody is able to appreciate the specific portrait qualities of a portrait, be this a visual or a verbal one, without some familiarity with the subject. The more profound the familiarity the more profound the specific portrait aspects of the work can be appreciated.


20. It can seem surprising to those familiar with the extreme, manic productivity of Picasso, to bear witness to Stein’s accusing him of laziness. But Stein was a strict patron and apparently had her doubts concerning Picasso’s administration of this extremely fertile artistic talent. Was he in fact making a stable effort of serious concentration or did he sometimes loosen his grip, letting the pictures sprout from his brush as easy as pie?

21. This tendency was consolidated when Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo Stein, with whom she was living 1903-1914, started taking separate paths in their art collection, partly on the grounds of a disagreement regarding the artistic value of cubism. The separation was marked by Gertrude Stein’s first solitary purchase of a painting, Picasso’s elaborately cubist La Table d’architecte in 1912, into which he famously painted an image of Stein’s calling card.

22. See for instance Deborah Mix: A Vocabulary of Thinking, Iowa City 2007, p. 72-73.

23. It evidently is among the earliest, however, as it is dated 1910 by Ulla E. Dydo in her authoritative introduction to the portrait in A Stein Reader, Evanston IL 1993. Elsewhere (Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises 1923-1934, Evanston IL, 2003, p. 30), however, Dydo suggests that Picasso might have been composed even earlier i.e. 1909-10.


RÉSUMÉS

« C’est peut-être un portrait mais en tout cas c’est pour vous » porte sur les aspects dialogiques du genre du portrait littéraire tel que le pratique l’auteure d’avant-garde américaine Gertrude Stein. L’article présente une brève analyse comparative entre les deux portraits intitulés Matisse et Picasso, tous deux écrits en 1911. Il se concentre sur l’utilisation d’instruments aussi bien grammaticaux que rythmiques dans l’invocation des sujets. L’article analyse le contexte biographique du salon artistique de Stein, fréquenté par les deux sujets, aussi bien que les circonstances particulières de la distribution des premières œuvres de Stein dans ce contexte. Le genre se trouve alors rattaché au genre oral des ragots. Enfin, l’article soutient que les portraits occupent une position clé dans la poétique générale de Stein et que ses portraits littéraires sont un travail décisif dans le développement de son concept dialogique du génie.

“It might be a portrait but in any case it is for you” focuses on the dialogic aspects of the literary portrait genre practised by American avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein. The article presents a short comparative analysis of Stein’s portraits Matisse and Picasso both written in 1911. It focuses on the use of grammatical as well as rhythmic instruments in the invocation of their subjects. The article takes into consideration the biographical context of Stein’s artistic salon, which was frequented by both subjects, as well as the particular circumstances regarding the distribution of Stein’s early work in this context. We connect the genre to the oral genre of gossip. Finally it is argued that the portrait occupies a key position in Stein’s general poetics, as her work with the literary portrait is crucial for the development of her dialogical concept of genius.

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