



Gertrude Stein

(1874-1946)

Picasso (1909)

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

Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something. Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one bringing out of himself then something that was coming to be a heavy thing, a solid thing and a complete thing.

One whom some were certainly following was one working and certainly was one bringing something out of himself then and was one who had been all his living had been one having something coming out of him.

Something had been coming out of him, certainly it had been coming out of him, certainly it was something, certainly it had been coming out of him and it had meaning, a charming meaning, a solid meaning, a struggling meaning, a clear meaning.

One whom some were certainly following and some were certainly following him, one whom some were certainly following was one certainly working.

One whom some were certainly following was one having something coming out of him something having meaning and this one was certainly working then.

This one was working and something was coming then, something was coming out of this one then. This one was one and always there was something coming out of this one and always there had been something coming out of this one. This one had never been one not having something coming out of this one. This one was one having something coming out of this one. This one had been one whom some were following. This one was one whom some were following. This one was being one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one was one who was working. This one was one being one having something being coming out of him. This one was one going on having something come out of him. This one was one going on working. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one always had something being coming out of this one. This one was working. This one always had been working. This one was always having something that was coming out of this one that was a solid thing, a charming thing, a lovely thing, a perplexing thing, a disconcerting thing, a simple thing, a clear thing, a complicated thing, an interesting thing, a disturbing thing, a repellant thing, a very pretty thing. This one was one certainly being one having something coming out of him. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working.

This one was one who was working and certainly this one was needing to be working so as to be one being working. This one was one having something coming out of him. This one would be one all his living having something coming out of him. This one was working and then this one was working and this one was needing to be working, not to be one having something coming out of him something having meaning, but was needing to be working so as to be one working.

This one was certainly working and working was something this one was certain this one would be doing and this one was doing that thing, this one was working. This one was not one completely working. This one was not ever completely working. This one certainly was not completely working.

This one was one having always something being coming out of him, something having completely a real meaning. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was working and he was one needing this thing needing to be working so as to be one having some way of being one having some way of working. This one was one who was working. This one was one having something come out of him something having meaning. This one was one always having something come out of him and this thing the thing coming out of him always had real meaning. This one was one who was working. This one was one who was almost always working. This one was not one completely working. This one was one not ever completely working. This one was not one working to have anything come out of him. This one did have something having meaning that did come out of him. He always did have something come out of him. He was working, he was not ever completely working. He did have some following. They were always following him. Some were certainly following him. He was one who was working. He was one having something coming out of him something having meaning. He was not ever completely working.

ANALYSIS

This one is certainly a portrait by one whom some were certainly following who was always charming. One whom some were following was certainly not always completely charming. This one whom some were following was certainly working and working and some were certainly following this one whose working was bringing something out completely charming for everyone following this one struggling for meaning that was certainly not working for everyone.

This is a prose poem that encapsulates Modernism with abstract Expressionism in words. Stein restricts her palate to a very limited number of words and phrases, repeating and arranging them as the equivalent of colors and brush strokes that culminate in a total portrait. Using only a few abstract words over and over, at first glance like the demented scribbles of a psychotic, calls attention to variations in tone, rhythm and implication—to a poetry of consciousness. Literally there are no colors and no representational picture, the poem is wholly abstract, yet it has a vitality, immediacy and momentum often lacking in the abstract later style of Henry James. One of her techniques for heightening a sense of immediacy and living in the present moment is repetition of the present participles *working*, *something*, *meaning*, *coming*, *charming* and *following*. Another technique is to repeat the modifiers *completely* and *certainly*, withdrawing and then reinstating them, which creates some complexity, uncertainty and a little tension.

The poem is a prototype of the stream-of-consciousness technique soon to be developed further by Richardson, Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner. This technique of immersion in the mind expresses her main interest in psychology. She retains as punctuation only periods and a few commas, having a personal dislike of what she considered impediments to dramatizing the “continuous present.” Her stream of consciousness is at speech-level, in contrast to examples of pre-speech and subconscious levels in the later Modernists, notably the famous soliloquy of Molly Bloom at the end of *Ulysses* (1922) and most of those in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1932). Stein’s meticulously precise sentences with their many repetitions and varied intonations and rhythms are calculated form that gives

aesthetic meaning to apparent nonsense. In all stream-of-consciousness writing, spontaneity is an illusion of rhetoric. The calculated form of “Picasso” is an expression of intellect, a Neoclassical value, and of her theory of effective writing. On the other hand, her subjective expressive style centered in the Self is Romantic. Modernists synthesize Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

“Picasso” consists of 12 paragraphs, 4 beginning “One whom” and the last 6 beginning “This one”—a phrase that occurs 55 times. Repetition is a dominant technique here, taking several forms. For example, the sentence “This one was one who was working” occurs 7 times and is further repeated in longer sentences over and over throughout the second half of the poem. All this repetition insists upon the simple fact that working hard and almost all the time—but “not completely working”—is the only way to gain a following as a great artist. The word “working” occurs 36 times, dramatizing creative vitality, productivity and the hard work required for both serious art and commercial success. Most of the poem emphasizes working and working--*insisting* repeatedly upon what differentiates the true artist from the many pretenders who hung out in cafes most of the time, a common sight on the Left Bank. The repetitions of words and phrases express the major themes: (1) working a lot; (2) producing art with “meaning”; (3) art that is “heavy,” “solid,” “complete,” “charming,” “struggling,” “clear,” “lovely,” “perplexing,” “disconcerting,” “simple,” “complicated,” “interesting,” “disturbing,” “repellant,” “very pretty”; and (4) attaining a “following.” In 1909 some were certainly following Picasso--Gertrude Stein in particular.

The word “one” occurs 116 times, as if at any opportunity to include “the one” in her work, just as Stein did Picasso in social compositions at her salon. Lack of specificity in the poem and the extreme generality of the abstractions make the themes applicable to Gertrude Stein as well as to Picasso, an allegory of her own emergence parallel to Picasso. Just as *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is actually about Gertrude Stein, “Picasso” is not really a portrait of Picasso after all, but a portrait of Gertrude Stein thinking about Picasso. Gendered pronouns are ambiguous in the case of Stein. She is honest enough to recognize something in herself as well as in Picasso that is “repellant.” Her lack of subordination evokes an overbearing personality and a driving ambition that stops at nothing. Also, after appearing 9 times in the first 6 paragraphs, the phrase “certainly following” does not appear in the next 6 until once more near the end, where it seems to confirm her own early judgment of Picasso and to indicate that to both of them, despite their unconventionality, what people think of them is supremely important, as if to be fulfilled one must be a success in social terms, which is more characteristic of Postmodernism than Modernism.

Picasso devolved in his career from the (1) traditional drawings and paintings done in his youth on view in the Picasso gallery in Barcelona—displaying obvious genius--through (2) representational Modernist Expressionism into (3) pure abstract Expressionism. He ended by exploiting his commercial status, dashing off (4) slapdash abstractions for huge sums of money that are nothing but a few quick strokes of the brush--merely style and a signature. By Modernist standards, he sold out. Showings of these works look like a room full of the same image with imperceptible differences mass produced like soup cans by Andy Warhol. The elevation of style above substance is a defining characteristic of Postmodernism.

Michael Hollister (2015)