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Word's inhalation and exhalation breathing poetry in Gertrude Stein's Tender buttons

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and Exhalation
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Stein's Tender
Buttons"

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“Words’ Inhalation and Exhalation

Breathing Poetry in Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*”

by

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the trope of breath in *Tender Buttons*. Breath is present both thematically—in individual poems—and structurally when it appears in different poems and thus connects them. Critics interpreting Gertrude Stein’s work debate the way her language produces meaning. One of the most contorted techniques in Stein is her use of repetition. Some critics consider Stein’s poetry as pure abstract language. Some other critics look for hidden messages that express taboo topics. I argue that words do not lose meaning when being repeated and connected at a phonological level. It becomes clear, when diagramming the poems that breath appears in Stein’s language at different levels of interpretation (phonologically, semantically and structurally). I apply here William Gass’s theory on the spatialization of words. I therefore use diagrams as interpretative tools in my demonstration.

I show first how doublings in *Tender Buttons* are expressions of breaths. My argument is influenced by Marianne DeKoven’s analysis of Stein’s language and its “pulse” as well as her attention to syntax and rhythm. The two part movement of repetition and the double structure of the poems represent inhalation and exhalation. *Tender Buttons* focuses on the breathing rhythm that penetrates both the semantic doublings and the structure of the poems.

Secondly, I provide an analysis of repetition that shows how breath is a pattern that connects the poems of the collection. Repetition represents respiration at another level of interpretation: it penetrates the structure of the book. It enables variation on the theme of opening and closing that mirrors the process of respiration.

Eventually I examine the response of readers to *Tender Buttons*. I consider the collection of poems as a body breathing in and out to the reader. The reader is both an outsider needed for the system of breath to appear but s/he is also part of the system.

“Grammar. In a breath” (69), Stein writes in *How to Write*. To the author the breath vibrates in the “grammar,” the composition of the sentences and the organization of the poems themselves. Any pronounced word is part of an exhalation process. Then, when linking her grammar to breath, Stein links the fixity of her written words to the movement of a respiration that accompanies speech. That is why we can understand Stein’s poetry as a metaphor of a breathing body. My concern is then to map out the way the text can be seen as a body itself, the movement of which can be connected to the pattern of the breathing process. The poems are organized in a dualistic system driven by inhalation and exhalation that balances the text. Here I interpret the poems’ words both literally and symbolically with a special interest in the different levels of the breathing that develop throughout the book. The double movement mirrors the sentences’ architecture. Respiration appears both at the level of individual poems and of the collection of poems. *Tender Buttons* invites us to focus more precisely on the reader’s participation, as the book is a body in connection to the reader through the act of breathing.

Marianne DeKoven deals with a trope that can be compared to breathing when she defines the “pulse” of Stein’s fiction. She explains that “Stein establishes an equivalence between abstract qualities of consciousness and formal qualities of language: a particular pulse (“density, continuity, speed, quantity”) of consciousness becomes a particular kind of syntax, phrasing rhythm, diction, tone” (38). DeKoven sees “pulse” related to consciousness in Stein’s fiction. In her poetry, this pulse can be analyzed as the intensity of a breathing body. When

DeKoven refers to pulse, she defines it as “a particular kind of syntax, phrasing, rhythm, diction, tone” (38). Breathing is also related to the particular use Stein makes of syntax and rhythm.

Breath implies both a repetitive beat and a movement of coming in and going out. Because of this two fold movement, *impulsion* seems more appropriate than Dekoven’s pulse to our analysis. *Impulsion* is a French word that refers both to a physical pushing movement and simultaneously a spontaneous action (impulse). The movement that animates the text and pushes breath (i.e., in language) towards the reader is represented by the *impulsion*. The physical pressure of impulsion is produced from within a body. To be more precise, the push from within of the *impulsion* corresponds to the play of inside and outside in the text that resembles an inhalation and exhalation.

Second, the spontaneous aspect of the *impulsion* represents the impulse of breath that is a mechanical animation of our bodies. This theme is recurrent in the book and it makes the reader experience a rhythm similar to the one s/he experiences in breathing. Moreover, the repetitive mode of creation that alters the syntax makes us understand the way breath repeats through variation. The image of breath is congruent with the construction of the poems. Eventually, breath brings the reader back to a body and changes his/her approach to poetry.

Many Stein readers get frustrated when reading *Tender Buttons* because of the opacity of Stein’s language. The question of meaning when interpreting Gertrude Stein’s work is crucial because it determines the bases for the critics’ approaches.

Does Stein's poetry mean something? Does she convey a message or does she only enjoy playing with words and invites us to do so? Stein's words should be understood both in their literal and symbolic way. The best contribution that has been made on Stein's work has focused on the relationship of the reader to the text. As Harriett Chessman shows, *Tender Buttons* can be read and "re-created" by its reader. Poetry is defined as a "composition in verse or metrical language, or in some equivalent patterned arrangement of language; usually also with choice of elevated words and *figurative uses, and option of a syntactical order, differing more or less from those of ordinary speech or prose writing.*"(OED my emphasis). Only if we take into account these two dimensions can we understand Steins' poetry as an expression that is not reduced to mere allusions to the author's life or to an abstraction or a pure linguistic game.

The response of the reader to the text is central to my analysis of *Tender Buttons*. I consider diagrams of *Tender Buttons* as forms of reader response. William Gass, diagrams Stein's poems to show how their spatial re-structuring unpacks the internal patterns in Stein's language, thereby exposing what he calls the "space inside them" (83). Diagramming is one of the tools I will use when interpreting the poems. Although I do not wish to follow Gass's biographical interpretation of *Tender Buttons*, his reading of spatiality in language is helpful to the reading of Stein I am proposing. We have to focus on the atypical meaning Stein's words convey: "Stein's words are full of presence" (Gray 46). Presence comes from the appearing of breath in poetry. Stein refers to breathing in "Rooms": "no breath is shadowed, no breath is painstaking . . ." and in "Objects": "there is that hope and that interpretation and

sometimes, surely any is unwelcome, sometimes there is breath.” Breathing is connected to Stein’s writing; she refers to it both in her poetry in *Tender Buttons* or *Lifting Belly* and theoretical writings such as in “On Pronunciation” and *How to Write*. Why can breathing be interpreted as a theme that guides our understanding in the text?

It would be unfair to Stein’s poetry to interpret her words as we would do in our everyday life: “the sentences do not ‘mean’ in a conventional way” (Dubnick 103). The author invites us to change our relationship to language: one would not be able to paraphrase *Tender Buttons* for that matter. But there is no such thing as a purely abstract language so Stein also wants us to think about her words and the meanings and implications of the words she chooses:

Stein is not an alchemist transforming words into things and things into words. Neither is she the inventor of a private language or a rebel against language altogether. She accepts language for what it is When she uses words, she rejects nothing. Words are physical and auditory realities. Together they make community (Gray 55).

Stein approaches meaning in a different way and plays with the associations of the words. However her choice of words is not arbitrary or random. Consequently, what organizes those words, and how do we get to meaning when reading such experimental writing?

It has been stated that “the elementary fact to understand about Gertrude Stein is that she is incomprehensible because there is nothing there to comprehend” (Russel 88). Most critics do not have such an extreme perspective when dealing with Stein’s work but many do decide to concentrate more on Stein’s play of language rather than its referentiality. Marianne DeKoven thinks of Stein’s language as “generally

arbitrary and often meaningless” (xv). As she claims that the reading of Stein challenges our traditional reading, she shows how words are not used in a coherent way leading to a general and unitary message. It has been thought that Stein’s experimental writing should be read in relation to cubism. ¹Her original treatment of reality is linked to cubism because Stein refuses to describe the world, and she uses collage tools to deconstruct objects as the cubist painters did. These readings are interesting because they see the poems as constructions where the words are used in the space Stein created for them. Words’ meaning should be considered as multiple; the poems are composed of fragmentary pieces directing the reader towards different interpretations.

To some critics like Sara Ford, the system of images and symbols has to be understood at the level of language only: Stein’s rich language opens multiple interpretations. Jane Bowers claims it is important to concentrate on the playfulness of language rather than trying to seek a hidden message in Stein’s poems. Instead of leading toward frustration at the multiplicity of options available, this approach empowers the reader to participate in choice. Therefore, my reading of Stein is based on a reader-response perspective of the text; I try to understand how its power lies in the reader’s connection to its original arrangement of the words.

Some other critics read Stein’s work in connection to her lesbianism. They explain that her work has never been a canon compared to other male writers of the modernist era with a strongly biographical approach. Stein’s lesbianism frames the

¹ Picasso and Stein were friends, and Stein’s interest in cubism explains her connection to visual arts. Critics such as Randa Brinnin, Marjorie Perloff, Jayne Walker or Stephen Scobie emphasize Stein’s particular use of language: signs become autonomous, a technique also used by painters like Cezanne or Picasso.

reception of the reader.² This reading of Stein is illuminating; it helps Stein readers understand her unusual treatment of language and justifies her choices as a writer. But on the other hand, the power of words is not emphasized by those readings and they tend to be more factual than interpretative. According to these critics, Stein's meaning must be understood in the context of sexual desire.³ Although I do not use the breath trope to demonstrate how Stein is concerned by lesbian desires, breath is very much linked to a sensual approach of words. These readings claim that the text is obscure because Stein hides some of the messages she conveys.⁴

However, these readings tend to give less attention to the artistic inventions in Stein's sentences than to her biography. When trying to understand the hidden meaning of Stein's words, we try to understand what the poems are about but we fail to acknowledge what the poems are doing, how they are composed and in what way they challenge us as readers. The biographical decoding readings of Gertrude Stein give different interpretations of the same texts, and because they all try to connect the

² The fact that Stein does not fit neatly into the modernist category reveals Stein's originality and her distinction from patriarchal writings. These readings interpret Stein's writing as feminist statements against patriarchal models. Catherine Stimpson, Cythia Secor and Lisa Ruddick consider Stein's work as a feminist declaration against a patriarchal organization of language. To these critics, the key to understanding Stein's work is to realize that the lesbian eroticism present in the text asks you to read language in a different way, a non-patriarchal way.

³ Pamela Hadas claims that *Tender Buttons* is closely linked to Stein's relationship with Leo and Alice. She sees a direct link between the words of the poems and "an imminent change in their (Leo and Gertrude) living arrangements" (61).

⁴ Critics approaching Gertrude Stein's work generally focus on the complexity of her prose. Elisabeth Fifer, Edmund Wilson, Pamela Hadas, Doris Wright or Neil Schmitz link Stein's writing to some details of her biography in order to understand the how lesbian eroticism is the key to understand the complex realities presented in Stein's books. As a result, critics focusing on the decoding of Stein's books believe that the reader's role is to uncover the masked meaning of the poems, novels or plays. For instance, Fifer understands Stein's poems as expressions about the author lesbian's eroticism. The system of metaphors and images are interpreted as riddles that the reader must solve to understand Stein's writing. Such readings rely on Stein's biography since the author's life provides explanations for the canceling of some important matters. Stein could not openly deal with her sexual life. Thus, her lesbian relationship is hinted at but never explicitly described in her work.

right part of Gertrude Stein's life to her writing, they end up competing with one another rather than illuminating one another. This phenomenon shows how this approach is contrary to the spirit of the text.

Though nearly all Stein critics dwell on "meaning," meaning means something different to each. DeKoven, Frod and Bowers do not think that Stein's work is non-sense but they understand Stein's resistance to traditional writing as an invitation to interpret the words freely without trying to achieve a harmonious reading of each poem. When Fifer, Wilson, Hadas, Wright and Shmitz deal with meaning, they do not refer to the usual definition of meaning ("That which is intended to be or actually is expressed or indicated" OED). To them, meaning is equal to biographical interpretation or a research of the persona in literary writing. These opposed views are confronted because of the disturbing characteristic of Stein's use of language. But it is not a solution for the critic to look for biographical and personal information to understand the message of Stein's work. It is, on the other hand, too extreme and probably limiting to read Stein's words as autonomous signifiers only.

Christine Brooke-Rose studies the rhetoric of the unreal in narrative and structure. She claims that Chomsky's theory on sentences such as "Clourless green ideas sleep furiously," which is said to be nonsensical but grammatical and "Furiously sleep ideas green colourless," which is said to be meaningless and ungrammatical cannot be applied to poetry: "both sentences would be 'grammatical' and 'meaningful' in poetry (which is ultimately, about grammar, or all the things one can do to language, extending its possibilities beyond grammar) . . . For what is colour but a reflection in the human eye? An idea. A word" (273).

That is why poetry can use words in an unusual way and still be meaningful, and we should concentrate on that aspect in *Tender Buttons*. To understand how our reading is altered by the breath of *Tender Buttons*, we need to examine the double movements of the poems and the repeated *impulsion* of language.

The author connects her words to breathing. But what exactly do we refer to when we deal with breathing in poetry? First, a breath can be decomposed into the movement of receiving air into one's lungs and its expulsion. The double movement of breathing—inhalation/exhalation—is nonetheless part of a unity that is the act of respiration. One might think of independent concepts when referring to inhalation and exhalation but one has to keep in mind that they are also fundamentally a two part process. The doubling organization of Stein's poems expresses the binary articulation of breathing which is used as a structural tool in *Tender Buttons*. The two axes at stake in their development emphasize the poem's unity. "It does make any difference if a sentence is not in two" (*How to Write* 34). The presence of a paired movement is a representation of the breathing beat of the text. On the other hand, breath is present in the rhythm of the poems that I shall examine when focusing on the repetitive pattern of Stein's work.

The theme of doublings is referred to in Stein's *Tender Buttons*. A button is a double sided object that can both close or open a space. A button can be pressed to open a door or folded to invite the penetration of the button, on a cloth for instance, and this closes it. The button holds things together and opens them. The breathing pattern makes us consider *Tender Buttons* as a space where words are assembled in a movement of both closure and opening. Therefore, the title maps

out the dynamics of the inhalation and exhalation vibrations of the text. "Tender" adds a delicate connotation to the words' respiration and gives a sensitive touch to the opening and closing movements referred to by the "buttons." The etymology of "tender" from the Latin "tenere" also implies something touchable. The title leads the reader towards an understanding of the two axes present in the book. The title introduces the doubling device via Stein's choice of words. She focuses on the relationship between the inside and the outside. This binary construction creates a system of reference that makes us read the poems as metaphors of breaths.

Stein explains that "a sentence is made by coupling," and the "coupling" structural tool that appears in the poems leads us to interpret the coupling as a representation of breath. We can see the double pattern exemplified in the relationship between the outside and the inside. Both spaces are closely linked to air inhalation and exhalation. The inside and the outside are two poles mapped out in the first line of the poem "Roastbeef": "In the inside," "In the outside." The first sentence branches in two directions so that the inside and outside poles become connected to a number of words. The sentences are organized around the excess of repetition of "-ing" ending the words used in the first paragraph. The "-ing" ending is not used to refer to gerunds only. Thus the use of repetition also enables variation syntactically.

In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside, there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence and entirely mistaken there is pinching. All the standards have steamers and all the curtains have

bed linen and all the yellow has discrimination and all the circle has circling (327).

The poles expand in different directions following a pattern of contamination that make them asymmetric. The spatialization of language makes it possible for the reader to map out the breath-stream of the text and becomes part of the opening and closing of substance. One way to do it might be to map out diagrams since, as Gass mentions, it is a way to see how the words “space themselves, for their space is inside them, not openly disposed upon the page as poetry normally is” (83). The reader lets the text branch and go out in a new spatial organization enabled by the outer movement of language. “I like the feeling the everlasting feeling of sentences as they diagram themselves” (*Lectures in America* 21), explains Stein. Then, any reading of Stein is connected to the inherent qualities of things and the way she constructs their images through opening and closing in a respiration-like movement. When we read “in the inside there is sleeping” (327), the sound produced by –ing is close to [in]. Therefore, the doubling of sounds generates a semantic doubling. It sounds as though Stein were repeating the word “in” mirroring the beginning and the end of each sentence. Stein wrote, “Why is grammar not dull. Because it is a diagram” (*How to Write*, 75). Her poetry is an invitation for the reader to be creative. My reading of Stein here uses space as an interpretative tool, to spatialize her language into grids outside of the page. A diagram of the first part of “Roastbeef” shows how the developing of sentences is structured by the double direction:

In the inside

there is sleeping

in the evening

there is feeling

In feeling anything is resting

in feeling anything is mounting

in feeling there is resignation

in feeling there is recognition

in feeling there is recurrence

and entirely mistaken there is pinching

in the outside

there is reddening

in the morning

there is meaning

All the standards have steamers and
all the curtains have bed linen and
all the yellow has discrimination and
all the circle has circling.

Figure 1

The image of breathing is then further used in the rest of the poem with the images of “surface” and “vapor” and “inside” and “eruption.” The *impulsion* of breathing projects the inside of things towards the outside. The words represent the act of receiving and expulsing air and the couple “surface”/“inside” and “vapor”/“eruption” bring us back to the inside and the outside movement. William

Gass stresses the “contrast between surface and depth” (89) that appears in the inside/outside movements of breathing materialized in the poems. Parallel to the binary movement, are images of unity such as: “central,” “surrounded,” “singular,” “circle,” and “altogether.” Unity contains the dichotomy of the inhalation and exhalation. It is a larger system that absorbs the doublings appearing in the poems. The inhalation/exhalation movement is subordinate to a unifying movement.

In “Roastbeef,” unification takes place in the third paragraph. The internal organization of the sentences needs to be visualized spatially. It produces a branching of clauses that is rooted in repletion. The movement towards the inside and outside is enclosed by “the center” that holds things “all together:”

All the time that there is use there is use and any time there is a surface
there is a surface and any time there is an exception there is an
exception and every time there is a division there is a dividing. Any
time there is a surface there is a surface
and every time there is a suggestion there is a suggestion and every
time there is a silence there is a silence and every time there is a
languid there is that there then and not oftener not always not
particular, tender and changing and external and central and
surrounded and singular and simple and the same and the surface and
the circle and the shine and the succor and the white and the same and
the better and the red and the same and the center and the yellow and
the tender and the better and all together (328).

All the time that there is use
 there is use
 and any time there is a surface
 there is a surface
 and any time there is an exception
 there is an exception
 and every time there is a division
 there is a dividing.
 Any time there is a surface
 there is a surface
 and every time there is suggestion
 there is a suggestion
 and every time there is a silence
 there is a silence
 and every time there is a languid
 there is that
 there then and not oftener not always
 not particular, tender and changing
 and external
 and central
 and surrounded
 and singular
 and simple
 and the same
 and the surface
 and the circle
 and the shine
 and the succor
 and the white
 and the same
 and the better
 and the red
 and the same
 and the center
 and the yellow
 and the tender
 and the better
 and all
 together.

Figure 2

The diagramming of the poem stresses the two part motion of the breath organizing Stein's language. The doubling process is complicated in the poem because in the first part, phrase such as "there is use" and "there is a surface" are repeated. The other kind of repetition Stein uses the phrase "there is" and then the word "and" that give a beat to the poem that lets the reader feel the pulsation of respiration. In Stein, the movement in and out is always compensated by a unification that embraces the inhalation and the exhalation. DeKoven points out the importance of the inside and outside theme: "the words emerged from [Stein's] concentration, in what she calls a fusion of 'outside and inside'" (78). The two aspects of the inhalation and exhalation come into "fusion" in respiration. The relationship between inside and outside becomes a balancing pattern in the book.

In "Roastbeef," the "eruption" is opposed to a rectangular frame:

"Rectangular ribbon does not mean that there is no eruption it means that if there is no place to hold there is no place to spread" (328). We note again a double direction in the poem. "Ribbon" is close to "hold" semantically and "eruption" to "spread." The image of "eruption" also expressed by "spread" is balanced by the word "hold." The "ribbon" which ties things together and tears them apart at the same time unifies the two images. This double action of the ribbon echoes the double action of a tender button. The repetition of "there is" also links the words at another level. Eventually, phonologically, "ribbon" can be associated with "eruption" and "hold" with "spread," hence another level of connection.

The poem "In between" particularly stresses the unification of the inside and outside movements. A similar pattern of receiving and releasing of tensions

appears in “Roastbeef” for example. “In between” connects two poles: “a place and candy,” “curves and butlines:”

In between a place and candy is a narrow foot-path that shows more mounting than anything, so much really that a calling meaning a bloster measured a whole thing with that. A virgin a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and butlines and real seasons and more out glasses and a perfectly unprecedented arrangement between old ladies and mild colds there is no satin wood shining (323).

In between
a place **and** candy
is a narrow foot-path that shows more mounting than anything,
so much really that a calling meaning a bloster measured a whole thing with
that.

A virgin
a whole virgin
is judged made and so

between
curves **and** butlines
 and real seasons
 and more out glasses
 and a perfectly unprecedented arrangement

between
old ladies **and** mild colds
there is no satin wood shining.

Figure 3

Putting the words into a spatial organization helps us understand how repetition emphasizes the symmetric structure of the text. “In between” materializes the idea of the two poles being used as variation of the theme of breathing that eventually holds things together. The breath-stream also allows a movement “out,” an “explosion,” a “vapor” (“Roastbeef”). The double movement eventually creates an energy comparable to the breathing movement.

The repetitive pattern of inhaled and exhaled air in breathing is a pattern that can be compared to the repetition tool Stein uses. Repetition implies recurrence, duplication and reiteration. In our mind those terms are usually connected to something repetitious, even monotonous. Bruce Kavin reminds us that repetitious and repetitive do not have the same meaning since repetitious refers to a repetition “with no particular end, out of a failure of invention” and repetitive, describes a word that is repeated “with equal or greater force at each occurrence” (4). In *Tender Buttons*, the iteration of words, ideas and/or themes does not result in a redundant effect. On the contrary, repetition is what gives unusual dynamics to the poems. The repetitive movement enables variation:

We have insistence insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything. In the same way because emphasis can never be the same not even when it is most the same that is when it has never been taught (*Lectures in America* 171).

Repetition does not repeat the same. This device is to be understood as a structural tool: “another way of saying that repetition emphasizes is to say that it makes intense and solid through persistence” (Kavin 49). Indeed, through repetition, breathing emerges. The insistence created by repetition lets us understand how breath emerges from Stein's words. Repetition represents the spontaneous part of the *impulsion* of breath. It alludes to the uncontrolled characteristics of respiration. The breath-stream creates “double doubling[s]” (*How to Write* 57). The double movement of repetition makes it possible for the poems create variation: “It is so, it is so, it is so, it is so is it so is it so is it so . . .” (“Eating” 349). In this passage, the

double axis of the development of the poem is doubled. "Is it so" is used as a beat accentuating the sentence, and when settled down in breath-groups, the phrase can be opened to variation that is to say to the reversal of the phrase into "is it so" which answers the first part of the sentence. The phrase is explored in every possible way and the inhalation "It is so, it is so, it is so, it is so" is exhaled into the "is it so is it so is it so." In "Orange In," "A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since, a no since when a no since when since, a no since, a no since when since, a no since, a no since, a no since no since, a no since, a no since" (344) appears as a vocalization controlling the breathing of the text. The arrangement of the "a no since" explores the different possible matching of the phrase and enables an oral creation through repetition "innocence, in no sense, in no sin, a no sin, a nose in," The repetition of the same sounds enable us to refer to breathing in Stein's language. The same sounds are used with different clustering and produce a different meaning for each use of sound. Each iteration of a word can be seen as a breath which is always the same and different. The rhythm and the sounds reach an abstract elevation of phrasing and variation makes it possible for the phrase to repeat itself while avoiding stark monotony.

Repetition enables the inhalation and exhalation movement to take place and links the different poems. The apparent contradiction between "disunion" (*How to Write* 57) and "grammar in continuity" (*How to Write* 59) is not paradoxical if we think of the complexity of breathing that implies both continuity and disunion. Repetition and the changes it allows represent the regularity of breathing as well as but a difference in the receiving and expelling of the air from moment to moment.

nouns fixation. When shifting from verbs to nouns, Stein settles the poem down. Hence, the repetitive movement is congruent to the topic of the poem. The circuitry of words in the poems and their relation to other words are images of breaths. In other words, the medium is the message. Repetition is a tool that animates the text since its movement becomes part of the strength of the language. Stein creates repetitions, echoes, pauses and connections between the words in each poem but also between different poems or different parts of the book. Let us analyze the way several poems are linked by the breathing process throughout *Tender Buttons*.

The inside and the outside are used as a repetitive pattern appearing in different poems. The inside/outside dynamic is the *impulsion* of breath opening the poems to an exterior world. The collection of poems is organized around the repetition of inhalation and exhalation movements: the binary movement of breath unifies the poems. The phrase “Within, with the cut and slender . . .” (“Objects” 321) shows how the act of cutting and circling things is connected to their inner characteristics. The poet, when circling the objects, describes a surface that cuts the contours of things and opens a view of the inside of life. In Stein’s poems, “the separation is not tightly” (“Sugar” 335) because the inside and outside are not independent; they work in communion, as the two parts of the breathing movements. One cannot exist without the other and the tension created appears at different levels of the text. Gertrude Stein repeats words that echo in different poems of the collection. The breathing movement is not only explored in the poems, but also in the connections that one can make between the different poems.

In other words, breath is used as a compositional tool organizing the poems of the collection. The intertextuality in her poems is linked to the repetition device that “repeats something now to make you remember something then and set you up for something that is coming later” (Kawin 34). When reading the poems, we build a system of reference. Words mentioned before become part of a context that the reader constructs when reading. When words are repeated in different poems, we connect them and stretch our lungs in the repeated breathing movement that contaminates all the poems.

Stein writes in “Breakfast,” “An imitation, more imitation, imitation succeed imitation” (333). The “imitation” can be considered as the device applied to language in the book. Two consecutive poems are entitled “Milk,” which almost ironically connects the two poems as if the author did not say what she wanted in the first one so she has to start it all over again or was so happy with the device that she repeated herself. The repetitive pattern can be connected to the act of breathing when the air stream released is always different and similar. This movement can be applied to the difference and resemblance of the two poems. If we go deeper in the poem's architecture, we realize that, “white egg” mentioned in “Milk” is responded to by “Eggs” that appears after the second “milk.” The first line of “Eggs” is also networking with “milk” as its last word is “mill,” which graphically and phonetically refers to “milk” and sets up a new kind of variation in repetition. The “Chicken” series also plays with the repetitive tool since its title is repeated four times. There is a micro-structure in the poems that uses repetition as an image of breath. This structure is echoed by the macro-structure of the book

where repetition is used to create intertextuality. The structure of the poems and of the book are related to the breathing pattern so that it is now possible to consider the text itself as a body breathing, exhaling language to the reader thanks to an in and out movement giving us the “description of inner and outer reality” (*Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* 226, 227).

When considering the book as a breathing place, we can see the act of breathing is linked the movement out coming from the text as an exhalation directed to the reader. Chessman mentions the “dialogic embrace” (80) of Stein’s poem when focusing on the way the reader is physically connected to poetry. Similarly, the breathing pattern of *Tender Buttons* connects to the reader in a physical fusion.

“Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle” (“A box” 314).

The repetition of “out of” spreads out a progression of the *impulsion*: “The difference is spreading” (A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass” 313). Each coming out is the beat of the impulsion that pushes the air out of a body. The text is composed as a moving body that exhales language to the reader. The author deals with contours, closed materials – the box for instance - to deal with what is inside and expresses it, making the inside come out. As Gass explains, “I am pulling a poem out of this BOX,” (97) when deciding to diagram Stein’s poems. The reader enters the inhalation and exhalation movement when reading the book. The author wanted to “find it out by the intensity of movement that there was inside in any

one of them” (*Lectures in America* 183). The poem is then an invitation for the reader to penetrate the movement in and out of the text. “These poems are opaque containers” (Gass 84), and the reader penetrates the words and coordinates his/her reading to the inhalation and exhalation of words: “the book will pour them out on us” (Gass 84).

The movement in and out is to be understood as a movement towards and from the reader. “Grammar in out loud,” (*How to Write* 77) explains Gertrude Stein combining the in and out in writing. The alternation of long and short sentences is another expression of the breathing of the text moving as a body. The alternation of long sentences and shorter ones makes us feel the expiration and exhalation movement of the text: “Egg ear nuts, look a bout. Shoulder. Let it strange, sold in bell next herds” (“Dinner” 342). Sentences in *Tender Buttons* can be small and even reduced to one word when we read “shoulder.” The fragmented rhythm of the poem “Dinner” is followed by a very long sentence that opens the text in another way and almost puts the reader out of breath after such pauses or breath-holding. The author underlines the “independent stretches” (10) of her sentences.

Poetry is connected to “a transfer, a large transfer, a little transfer, some transfer” (“Roastbeef” 313). The relationship to the reader is present in the tension of the “giving it away, not giving it away, is there any difference. Giving it away. Not giving it away” (“Rooms” 349). In that regard, the reader’s relation to the text must be understood in terms of interactivity. The reader is needed as an exterior element permitting the system to work. The reader’s simultaneous

interiority/exteriority makes the role of the reader as important as content of Stein's the book because of the respiration movement inherent in the text. "A bridge a very small bridge" ("Rooms" 353) can be considered as a bridge of meaning connecting the reader to the text. Stein's language enables the reader to enter it through inhalation and exhalation. The reader's simultaneous interiority and exteriority in the text is an echo of the breathing pattern in the structure of *Tender Buttons*. The act of reading gets a new dimension because the collaboration of the reader and the text is to be turned into new terms: the waves of air entering the body of the text enable the penetration of the reader's breathing and the exhalation lets him/her know the substance of the text in communion with it. In Stein's poetry, there is a sense of "ongoing dialogue" (Chessman 2) that emphasizes the reader's activity. Breathing is a human function shared by any reader. The text is thus connected by a basic human activity and to the reader in an original way. "Just as life is being constantly altered by each breath one draws" (Ashbery paragraph 5), the reading of *Tender Buttons* is the experience of the variation of words' networking images and meaning.

Language is given new dimensions in Stein's *Tender Buttons* since it is put into motion both taking away our breath and the text's breath to eventually release the tensions. There is an unconscious connection to the body in the breathing movement of the text through combination of words into sentences and through the composition of the poems. This structural device makes it possible for the reader to be connected to the text when being both inside and outside of it. The body of the text enters into communion with the reader through respiration.

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Vita

Flore Chevaillier is the daughter of Bruno Chevaillier and Arlette Chevaillier. She was born in 1979 in Blois (France) and grew up in France. She attended High School Lycée Jean-Zay in Orléans (France) and graduated in 1997 (Baccalauréat Mention Assez Bien). She studied in a Preparatory School in Lycée Pothier for two years; transferred to Université d'Orléans, and attended Missouri Southern State College in 1999 as an exchange student. She obtained her licence (Mention Bien) in 2000 (MA) in English. Flore Chevaillier finished her Maitrise (M.A.) in English 2001 at the Université d'Orléans and wrote her thesis on Joseph McElroy: "Reading Lookout Cartridge: Mapping out a Verbal Network." In May 2001, Flore Chevaillier met with Joseph McElroy and her interview "Some bridge of Meaning: A Conversational Interview with Joseph McElroy" by Marc Chénétier, Antoine Cazé and Flore Chevaillier was published in *Sources* (Paradigme, Orléans, 2001). In 2002, she completed her Maitrise (M.A.) in French as a Second Language at the Université d'Orléans. She has been studying for two years at Lehigh University as a student in the Masters program and will graduate in June 2003. She taught French to intermediate and elementary students at Lehigh University from 2001 to 2003.

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