

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“Gertrude Stein Without Tears”

October 2013

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This final report addresses the results of a professional enhancement project funded by an ATU Professional Development Grant. This report follows the instructions provided in the Guidelines for Professional Development Grants.

A. Title Page (see above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of conference paper presented:

“Gertrude Stein Without Tears,” by Deborah Wilson, Professor of English

For several years, I have taught Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and, after I reveal that Toklas and Stein are a lesbian couple (something students don’t recognize from the text alone), a persistent question has been why Stein never overtly acknowledges her lesbianism. They are not alone in missing whatever evidence is in the text, since even the premier feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun acknowledged that, when her husband suggested that Stein and Toklas were lesbians, she “snorted: obviously, they didn’t do ‘that,’ whatever ‘that’ was” (*Writing a Woman’s Life* 79). Although students typically assume that Stein was simply afraid to “come out of the closet,” and although even Stein scholars have worked to defend, if not champion, the “closeted” nature of the text (Catherine Stimpson calls the autobiography a packaged “lesbian lie” that codes its sexuality), I want to argue that Stein’s paradoxical relation to the feminine in general, whether lesbian or straight, may at least point toward another

reading of the autobiography. To acknowledge lesbianism is to acknowledge the feminine, a concept she, to some degree, is working through in this text.

Janet Malcolm's descriptions of *The Making of Americans* seem to echo Kristevan images of abjection, and I want to offer a brief tracing of the abject feminine in the autobiography, although in that text Stein works to reject that link, particularly in her rejection of sentimentality—or, in the language of abjection, tears. In light of male modernists' denigration of sentimentality as feminine, a category always already devalued if not despised, Stein's removal of that dimension from her text is predictable. Pathos is absent in this text, which offers a disembodied feminine in a reconfigured space where women do not suffer, but rather enact a successful narrative outside abjection.

#### C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the South Central Modern Language Association conference in New Orleans, LA, and presented my paper there. I drove from Russellville, AR, to New Orleans, LA, on October 2, and returned on October 6, 2013 .

#### D. Summary of Experiences

My primary teaching area within literature is modern American. I am the primary teacher of Modern American Literature, a required course for all our majors. Not only did I manage to receive positive feedback on my paper, I was also able to attend numerous other panels relevant to my teaching and scholarship.

## E. Conclusions and Recommendations

I am working on a publishable-length essay of which this paper is a part. Without the funds I received from the ATU Professional Grant, I would not have been able to attend the conference.