
Karin Cope. *Passionate Collaborations: Learning to Live with Gertrude Stein*. Victoria, BC: ELS Editions, 2005. 343p.

CRAIG MONK
UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

With *Passionate Collaborations*, Karin Cope hopes to explore a literary criticism beyond poststructuralist theory, finding existing interpretative tools unsatisfactory for reading the texts of Gertrude Stein. It has taken Cope more than twenty years and a thousand discarded manuscript pages to find the voice to address her subject, and she here embraces a spirit of collaboration, merging a respect for cooperation with a sense of compromise, as one way forward. Stein's own collaborations, primarily with her relatives and literary friends, fueled her career, but they also blurred distinctions between Stein's creative achievement and the influence of those people around her. One of the features that distinguished Stein's approach from any of her contemporaries was her unwillingness to acknowledge the conventions of genre in her writing: she wrote about literature, for example, in the same manner as she composed her plays. In this spirit of collaboration, Cope fashions her appreciation of Stein in defiance of the conventions of criticism. Hers is a highly personal reading of the works that incorporates personal observation, mirroring her subject's writing of her own life across a number of her texts.

Cope begins with an analysis of Pablo Picasso's famous portrait of Stein, the gift of which from artist to subject testifies to another collaborative effort. By adapting the portrait form to her writing, creating a prose form without typical narrative action, Stein forced from her readers a more active participation in the creation of meaning. Picasso's resonant claim that Stein would come to resemble her picture ever more closely with the passage of time was belied by Stein's willful manipulation of her appearance for effect, something Cope connects with Stein's equivocal feelings about success and celebrity. Similarly, she finds in the early works of Picasso and Stein a shared interest in primitivism that interrogates both conceptions of self and definitions of art. At this point, Cope admits multiple voices to her text, carrying on dialogues that consider the enduring influence of Stein's physical presence as it is reflected in her texts and as it influences readings of that work. Moving beyond a simple curiosity all readers seem to have in the way Stein looked, Cope argues that meditations on corporeality are implicated in the narcissism with which Stein imbued many of her texts. This concern with physical presence is clearly related to the manner in which the author, like the cubist painters with whom she collaborated, concerned themselves with the connection between surface appearance and meaningful depths. The well-rehearsed reading of Stein through this middle section of *Passionate Collaborations* provides the study's most orthodox moments, passages that give way to a variorum of sorts:

criticisms of Stein, many provided by contemporaries from Ernest Hemingway to Wyndham Lewis, Eugene Jolas to Katherine Anne Porter, are hauled out and discussed. The question of Stein's relationship with Alice Toklas, how they both challenged and supported each other, is mirrored in the tone by which the voices in Cope's dialogue discuss the relationship.

The centerpiece of this study is a play, however, the script of which sees multiple voices coming together to discuss some of the more contentious, and infrequently addressed, issues in Stein scholarship. Set in a town hall, the drama begins with a young Stein scribbling personal notes that reflect her infatuation with Toklas in the years before the First World War. The uncharitable rants against the woman who would soon be her lover, words that frame her penchant for jealousy, are discovered by a researcher only after her death. The subsequent impact of this scholarly investigation on Toklas indicts the possible costs of scholarly investigation. Stein's ambivalence towards the Second World War is juxtaposed here with her practical concerns for self-preservation. There are intimations of collaboration with the Vichy government, and Stein emerges to read to the audience the introduction to her unpublished translations of the speeches of Maréchal Pétain. This act is contrasted with the personal disloyalty of *QED*, the early, unpublished novel that revealed to Toklas veiled details about Stein's romantic life. Discovered notes are discussed against the background of psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to gender, and debates that different manifestations of Gertrude Stein have with herself onstage find a counterpoint in the author's own "Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters," a short play reproduced here in its entirety.

Karin Cope's criticism-as-performance raises as many questions about scholarly inquiry as it answers about Gertrude Stein. One cannot imagine *Passionate Collaborations* serving as a primer for neophyte readers, though Cope provides many insights into reading works as diverse as *The Making of Americans* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Cope's enthusiasm as she acclimates to Stein's language gives rise to a contagious enthusiasm for the forms Stein, herself, used, and this presents the reader with a prevailing collaboration of sorts between critic and subject. *Passionate Collaborations* thus works to illustrate one reader's engagement with Stein's works, and on the pages of this study those texts seem more inviting than they may, otherwise. Cope, herself, acknowledges that readers often have a visceral reaction to Stein's technique, alternating between love and hate. That such strong feelings may change over time illustrates that reading Stein is an affective experience, giving even more validity to the story Cope wishes to tell—and the way she wishes to tell it. If this study is successful in normalizing the experience of reading Stein, it will fulfill one of its primary purposes, but readers may continue to question, however, whether this approach still qualifies as literary criticism. ✱