
Landscape and Identity as viewed by Gertrude Stein

Chetioui OTHMAN*,

University alger2-Bouzareah (Algérie),
othman.chetioui@univ-alger2.dz

Amrane NADJIA,

University alger2-Bouzareah (Algérie),

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Abstract

This study attempts to show how geographical environment and especially landscape that encompasses people affects their understanding of themselves and shapes their identities. As for methodology, the topic will be approached from a geocritical point of view that gives much emphasis for the American landscape: how it helped in creating a national identity and promoted the country's celebrity. The landscape and identity issues will be perceived through the vision of Gertrude Stein, one of the most controversial thinkers and avant-garde writers who outlived the nineteenth century and left their stamps printed on twentieth-century generations. This French expatriate of American origin, through an outstanding and prolific writings, acted as the ambassador for modernism. The study also sheds some light on the strikingly conspicuous fluctuations Stein made in writing as repetition and punctuation remained one of her mysteries and talents of style. It is not strange when Williams Carlos Williams, who got both amazed and impressed with Stein's language and described it as "smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean"

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout life, people's views, cultural values, dreams, fears and even expectations are all influenced by the geographical place one lives in. As old as human history, it has been known that the geographical condition plays an important role in the life of individuals and impacts on how they are and what decisions they take or attitudes they relinquish. According to their environment, people practice particular professions and activities, prefer certain groups of food, develop social relationships and behave in such a way that makes them distinctive from people of other geographical environment. Thus, generally speaking, individuals get much from their environment and share numerous characteristics of the place they live in. This paper tends to answer the following questions: to what extent does the geographical environment both influences and shapes one' s identity? And, how is the landscape viewed by Gertrude Stein? To discuss these two questions, the study follows a geocritical approaches that is developed by the French Westphal and the American critic and essayist Robert Tally. These two figures provided and developed a literary theory that builds a bridge relating literature and geography through several writings that included geocritical explorations before it turns into a standing theory. Previous studies have included many writings that incorporated geographical information. However, those writings have always been marked by history aristocracy and the notions of space and place have not been given such emphasis as that of time. It is only by the eighties of the previous century that writers in the humanities started to give importance to geography and place in particular. That time witnessed a spatial turn that would conspicuously reveal the great influence spatiality has in the field of humanities. In addition to the approach of geocriticism mentioned before, other fields of study developed after this spatial turn such as: literary mapping, cartography, cultural geography and so forth. Most of these studies discussed notions of space and landscape and the way they influenced identity shaping and reshaping. However, what is new in this essay, is that much light has been shed on the way the critic Gertrude Stein, the French expatriate of American origin, viewed landscape and identity. Gertrude Stein was an inspiring novelist, poet and a playwright who was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1874 and moved to France in 1903; Stein' s salon in France with her companion Alice B. Toklas was a meeting place for modern writers and artists like: Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis and Ezra Pound.

1.Environment and Identity

By the second half of the twentieth century geography imposed itself as a main component in the human record after a long period of history aristocracy. When people knew how much where they live affects their culture, they embarked on exploring as well as studying spatial issues. Cultural geographers made it clear that human life recording should never be restricted to time and that literary description of the story as a set of historical events has become eventually out of date. They were interested in studying the cultural components and how they are related to geography and ultimately understood the close relationship that exists between the geography of the environment and the cultures developed there. These cultures included people' s views, attitudes and values that are in turn influenced by the environment individuals live in. Being interested particularly in spatiality, the

geographer Laws noted that where we are says a lot about what we are. She explored a number of spatial factors that can affect identity including one's accessibility to particular places like nation state or neighbourhood that impacts on his citizenship and identity and also moving from one place to another through travelling that provides the individual to experience several spatialities domestic or external(Holland, Caroline et al. p.7)

The relationship between the geographical environment and people is reciprocal. The human being adopts the geography he lived in as a homeland and attempts to cope with the climate conditions he lives in. The human being throughout history and by tracing back man's achievements in several civilizations, the human being shaped his life according to the facilities that geography provides him. He develops certain crops and brought up some animals for self-satisfaction, built homes for shelter and warmth, made roads and created weapons for protection and made even water spaces for farming or recreation. The human being practiced many alterations on the landscape wherein he lives with his architecture and design. For this reason, people of rural landscape background may experience a lifestyle different from that of people descending from an industrial landscape. Similarly, those who live in a landscape of mountains or oceans will develop distinctive features regarding their clothes or the nutrients they feed on.

Ellen Churchill Semple noted that on the mountain, earth has given man strong leg muscles to climb the slope and along the coast, it has given him a vigorously developed chest and arm to handle his paddle or oar. In rivers and valleys, it attaches him to the fertile soil, nourishes his ideas and ambitions and narrows his outlook to focus on his farm. On wind-swept plateaus and waterless tracks of the desert, he wanders with his flocks from pasture to pasture and from oasis to oasis where the watching of a grazing herd gives him a sense of contemplation and the wide ranging landscape provides him with a big horizon. His ideas are simple, religion becomes monotheism and God becomes one, unrivalled like the sand of the giant desert (Semple, E.C., 2020 p.01)The climate condition that exists in a given environment also impacts one's living. People of the North Pole have the desire to stay in and keep warm as they are exposed to terrible cold weather whereas people in deserts prefer a nomadic life in search for water or other necessities.

People have always responded to their environment and it is not exaggerated at all to claim that one is " the product of the earth's surface" (Semple, 2011 p.1). This sentence reflects Ellen Churchill Semple's environmental determinism and clearly shows the pivotal intervention of geography in identity formation. In her book *The History of Erica and its Geographic Condition*, Semple intensifies this claim that is the impact of the environmental factors on human societies. She posits, as Stein does, the exploratory, migratory, open and free qualities of the American people as the product of America's geography. Semple noted that space, unconstrained existence, a buffalo hunt or an Indian fray seemed of great pleasure and that the changes in environment provided them with adaptability and vast opportunity had promoted the spirit of adventure to the extent that nothing was impossible.(Semple, 2003p.231,232)

Our geographical environment contains a large part of the human heritage. Zoran Roca and John Agnew noted that landscapes are treasures of the

past that shape everyday life and impact on future cultural processes. They represent the material frame of both historical memory and the sense of place and at the same time promote and justify our attachments, emotions knowledge and interests. Landscapes can also influence our decisions and actions. By providing the spatial context for everyday life, landscapes strikingly represent an everlasting witness to the formation and shaping of identities. Hence, changes in those spatial fixes along with varying geographical scope result in the formation of natural, economic and cultural character of territories. Landscapes, as elements that cooperate in the making of territorial identities, are crucial to fully recognize these changes. They are considered as the medium through which place identities are formed, recorded and claimed(Roca, Z. and Agnew, J. 2011 p.1).

2. Identity Crisis

It is undeniable fact that modern societies are marked by identity crisis. It is an issue that has been largely debated by specialists of different fields such as philosophers and literary writers. This identity crisis often involves major landscape disruptions. In this sense, landscapes do not merely represent the geographical scope, but rather, they gain an increasing cultural value on the local and global level.

3.Stein' s Landscape Writing

" Gertrude Stein, she came and there she was and here she is still. But what was she and what is this vast and contradictory, wonderful and maddening body of work? "I" means so much to us, has made so much possible, is so full of pleasure and still constant surprise. Yet there are long stretches that tax one' s attention putting the reader in a difficult position. The work asks us to invent new ways of reading," said Dita Fröller describing Stein' s arrival in America. (Joris and Rothenberg, 2008p. 3)

On October 24th, 1934 Stein and her companion Alice B. Toklas arrived in New York back from France where they lived as expatriates for thirty one years. It has been described as a triumphal return for Stein who has spent three decades writing many things seen by many Americans as prodigal and strange. When they heard the news of her coming, Americans all over the country got amazed and wanted to meet her in the six-month tour lectures. In France, Stein lived in Rue de Fleurus where her salon gained her genuine companions who visited her from time to another like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Ernest Hemingway. The salon was instrumental in building her fame and literary reputation.

Steins innovations changed something fundamental about Space-time relationship. She invented a continuous present experienced through the pulse of her words as a project to register for a new sense of time peculiar to her era that is writing in a way different from that of the nineteenth century. Stein has illustrated this in the Literary Club at Cambridge University saying a " prolonged present as a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years" (Joris and Rothenberg, 2008p.6). Stein did not start as a writer and her academic studies at the beginning were marked by an interest in experimental psychology. She got courses with William James at Radcliffe then began a course in pre-medicine at the Johns Hopkins University

4.Flatness of Landscape

The period of Stein's writing is notable not only for the considerable innovations she introduced, but also because she reached a startling finding about knowledge and representation through her experiments with landscape (Voris, L., 2016 p.3). The fact that all Stein's writing is devoted to autobiography is that she devoted most of her writings to the nature of identity and how it might be expressed through words although she saw in biographies and autobiographies a lesser form of literature. The justification she presented here is that they necessitate people and events to be confined in the stasis location in history; an idea that was completely rejected by Stein. (Vanskike, E.L., 1993 p. 151)

Stein's literary and linguistic innovations have been viewed by William Carlos Williams as "absolutely essential and inescapable" by alienating the words from their previous semantic associations and creating new forms of grammatical associations in sentences. She opted for releasing writing from the constraints of the dead burden of history. Williams uses a metaphor well-suited with Stein's writing free from history and scientific physicality that is "the United States viewed from an air-plane". Williams refer to the book Stein wrote including a new vision of geography and landscape of America as one would conceive through having a sweeping overhead view like that of an air-plane. Surprisingly, Williams used this metaphor in one of his essays he had written three years before Stein got her first glimpse of the U.S. Midwest from over the plane when she started her lectures tour in 1934. (Vanskike, E.L., 1993 p. 151)

The flatness that Stein perceived in the American landscape has molded her views about identity and writing. Stein saw an unbroken landscape that formulated the democratically fluid America. For Stein, flatness gained America openness and fluidity at the beginning of the twentieth century: a period marked by environmental determinism. She linked flatness with wandering and knowing this connection allows one to explore the spatial qualities of America as relatively flat, internally borderless and large, freely and easily roamed. Stein says: "wandering around a country has something to do with geographic history of that country and the way one piece of it is not separate from any other one" (Mix, DM, Esdale, L., 2018 p. 392). For Stein, flatness promotes wandering and both of them are linked to the privileged fluidity of the human mind. In a sense, wandering and land have something common with the human mind. If free from all the constraints of history, the human mind in this borderless landscape will take in and invent everything all at once. Thus, considering the linkage among the human mind, flat fluidity and open form may help us grasp this landscape as a democratic environment (Mix, DM, Esdale, L., 2018 p. 192).

In 1935 Gertrude Stein wrote her book "The Geographical History of America" that made Stein's view of the unbroken landscape clear to readers. In this book she assumed new thoughts on history, identity and writing. The perception of the flat landscape paved the ground for writing that tended to deny the history and the static identity. Similarly, in her "Useful Knowledge", Stein's in-depth meditation on American geography, introduces with her talented imagination a landscape typical to the one she would see years later from a plane flying over Illinois. During this flying tour, Stein saw, for the first time, America without the segmentation of cartographers. The unsegmented flat landscape that resisted being historicized or stated with a static identity was one of the most wonderful metaphors Stein has used to assert herself and unchain her writing from being

mired in history or shackled with a stagnant sense of identity. (Vanskike , E.L., 1993 p. 152).

It is in this sense that Stein celebrated modern America. She praised its modern architecture, air travel and cinema but , at the same time, she criticized those features of American life that do not respond to radical innovation. Stein's views towards such issue may seem paradoxical in that she linked America's modernity with its old features that is the natural landscape. In the G.H.A. Stein argues that " scenery has no beginning, middle and ending". For Stein, the timeless quality of the American landscape characterized a masterpiece and by claiming this aspect, Stein affirms her identity as an American writer (Weiss, ML.1998 p.69). Stein has made it clear that the relationship between history and identity is inseparable. She saw that if one is overwhelmed with history, so personal identity will be stagnant in stasis and this is a feature of the fixed identity that Stein disapproved as it gives up creating masterpieces (Vanskike , E.L., 1993 p. 152).

Stein's sense of identity is inspired by her struggles to gain celebrity for herself and sought to affirm that through her own writing. Who would believe that the one who had once being described by Skinner as perfectly intelligent but failed to be meaningful because it did not engage the knowledgeable part of her " fine mind" or when she was blatantly insulted by Lundell by claiming that many Americans doubt her ability to speak intelligibly that when she came back to Paris, there was a great demand in the United States for more writings of her and would be recognized by Thornton Wilder in a meeting with Stein for her literary invention bringing about a new epistemology, a new theory of time and new pleasures .(Retallack, J.2008p. 9, 10). Stein's childhood was dark of fear and frustration, she was lonely and shy in public with a " desperate inner life" although she has once self-described as mostly happy and indulgent child with five siblings in a complicated household. The father Daniel was often remote for business and the mother Amelia (Milly) exhausted with illness. The family lived in constant movement at Stein's early age from Pennsylvania to Austria to France to Baltimore to Oakland and then California at the age of six. In Vienna, Gertrude spoke German and in France where she lived the ages of four and five , she learned French at school, but when the family came back to the United States, her father forbade any other use of French or German to ensure the children's pure American English (Retallack, J.2008p. 16,17)

Stein, as a child, heard her parents speaking of a stillborn sister and a young brother had died. It was this conversation that would make her shudder later on. The two were buried on a chilly hillside in Pennsylvania. Her adolescence was colored with melancholy, fear of death and dissolution nevertheless; she went on with a highly strong ego that would be a source of inspiration for new generations later on. From these devastating moments, Stein's fascination with character and identity grew up and she has always opted for creating a resonant name for herself. With these events, Stein built her great legend that honor and fame were the ideals she was aware of since an early age and later in her life she declared that " no one really lives who has not been well written about" (Daniel, L., 2009 p.11, 12). In 1902, she and her intimate brother Leo travelled to England where she sat for a while at the British Museum living with English and the next year she left with Leo to Paris where she lives most of her life. Like many Americans at that time, Stein found Paris a second country from which to observe and describe her native land

and it seemed that her first years there were intended as a preparation for modern literature.(Hoffman, F.1961p. 7.8)

Stein's writing was an efficient way to confirm who she was. Through the innovations she made in writing, she tried to assert her identity as fluid and able to evolve. By the use of relative pronouns, the lack of named characters all refute the claim of that fixed identity. Stein never took part in the destructive sense of identity nor the fixative history. Her appeal of landscape as vast unbroken expanse exists in space not time. Unlike geographers and cartographers who identify landscapes with frontiers and names that mean its temporality, Stein rejected this damning sense of identity (Vanskike , E.L., 1993 p. 153)

5.Landscape and Fluidity

The fact that Stein reveres a fluid identity comes from her attitude that considers the geographical divisions an anathema. She often insists that those geographical lines are arbitrary and meaningless. These divisions make no difference on landscape and the fluid sense of identity. To delineate these differences, Stein in "wherein Iowa differs from Kansas and Indiana", uses comparative and superlative forms without revealing them verbally.

" Iowa means much. Much much much. For so much. Iowa means much. Indiana means more. More more more. As more. Kansas means most and most and most and most. Kansas means most merely. This is the difference between those three"

Here Stein, intentionally, does not provide what distinguishes one from the other. She does not approve The country been divided into states and ironically noted that anyone who can make a state, makes a state. The U.S. image that Stein shares with her contemporaries rejects clear linear borders as if it were the 1901 U.S. map. This vision is promoted by flying over Illinois during her lecture tour in 1934. Stein wrote of her delight and shock as she saw the stretch of a flat landscape through the window of an air plane. She realized how this image is different from that of the cartographer for the same area. Not only boundaries, Stein did not accept even the names of places. In " Wherein the South Differs From the North", Stein notes that naming a place does not make it a place. Thus, the work of an explorer is not to name places but to recognize them. For Stein, though giving names to places is inevitable, it is no more than reminders and orienters for regions and can never be considered important as persons names (Moon, M, 2008)

6.Stein and the Pastoral Landscape

Investigating Gertrude Stein's treatment of landscape displays that she did not only mark elements of the urban landscape such as: planes, big buildings, stores and universities, but pastoral landscape covered much of her writing. She spoke of the countryside and what exists there as the humans songs, sounds of birds and cow bells that turn her into a modernist shepherdess. She spoke as well of the Mississippi river, and the sound of flowing water in streams.(Amy Wells,2004) In Bilignin, with Alice B. Toklas, Stein lived with nature. She saw its greenness, breathed its air and heard its sounds. Stein was plainly fascinated by France at an early age. And then, as she broadened her imagination with extensive readings, pastoral influences penetrated her lens. Later on she named two most influential works "The Trail of Lonesome Pine" and Jean-François Millet's " The Man with

the Hoe" . Such influences together with her contact with Picasso and Cézanne cultivated her imagination and provoked her talent for the pastoral production: "Four Saints in Three Acts" as she partly enjoyed living in the country for some time. In works like "The World is Round", "Paris France", and "Wars I Have Seen", she rendered a landscape that included pastoral sounds like the tinkling water, the cowbell and the birds song. Stein in her works captures a landscape that evoke in the reader' s mind tensions between the country and the city, the urban and the rural, tension between the musical pastoral sounds interrupted by war sounds:

And now it is the end of April and today I heard the first nightingale twittering they first twitter in the daytime before they sing in the night time. And of course there are the bombardments...

...to be sure the birds are singing, and every night and every day the airplanes come over our heads but you get used to everything

According to Amy Wells, such extracts show the pastoral soundscape altered by the sounds of the war machines. The soundscape of the countryside now includes bombardments. In "The World is Round", Stein delves, through Rose, in meditations about elements of landscape and shows humans' relationship with nature through the protagonist Rose who thinks of climbing the mountain. As going to the top of the mountain was Rose' s objective, landscape and soundscape were among Stein' s objectives in that work (Amy Wells, 2004). The story is set in the countryside and Stein speaks of the blue mountains, the rain, little birds and the big bird. All these elements of nature were meditated by Rose. Human sound is a main motif here in " A Chair on the Mountain" evoked through Rose songs. Singing is rendered as a source for relief to Rose after thinking of her eyes, head, hands or mouth. Rose addresses the mountain "my mountain" that shows human's sense of belonging with nature. Rose thought of the blue mountain, but she did not find such color. It was green, there is grass and there are trees and rocks; green rocks.

7. Rose and the Question of Identity

" The World is Round" which is inimitable work of Stein tells the story of a little girl Rose. Although the work was designed for children, the ideas impeded there are too deep and influential. Rose has pinned on finding her place in a round world. She is searching for identity and in doing so, she accompanies dogs, rabbits, lions and other children (Smith, R., 2006). By exposing such landscape elements, Stein suggests fluidity of identity in a diverse world in which the human being has to integrate. This meditation about one' s perception of the self is reflected through Stein' s famous saying: " I am M because my dog knows me". It is a challenging pursuit that Rose struggles to establish a stable identity in unstable round world. To reveal this struggle, the writer uses a narrative that tells a story then folds back upon itself. There is also uncertainty and chaos inside Rose for her search of identity evoked through lack of punctuation to guide readers and repletion of words and phrases just for the sake of rhyme rather than meaning. Rose main target was to climb the mountain and indeed, she got there in spite of the difficulty. She sat there on her blue chair and she knew who she was. Unfortunately, despite all the confidence and certainty Rose felt, as she arrived there she started to fade " I am here and here is there oh where oh where. And Rose began to cry oh where where

where is there". Marth Rust Suggests that, in spite of the playfulness in the story, Stein tells children that it is impossible to get "there" and we may never know who we are (Smith, R., 2006).

CONCLUSION

This study tackled one of the most important dimensions in the field of literary studies and theory. This study strikingly provides geocritical explorations that reveals the geographical extension of literary texts. This approach spurred after the spatial turn in humanities in general and in literary studies and theory in particular. This study provided a clear view of how landscape is perceived by the critic and essayist Gertrude Stein and how this perception deeply impinged on her views of identity and writing. Stein' s conception of the flat landscape was fully formed after she had a flying travel over America during her lecture tour in 1934. Gertrude saw a unique whole without borders or frontiers. Stein viewed the country without segments and this meant for her that the ultimate existing differences should never constitute an obstacle in front of harmony and integration. This provoked her to encourage the fluid identity that transcends the mere limited geographical boundaries.

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