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“Too Old for Children and Too Young for Grown-ups”: Gertrude Stein’s *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*

Jacquelyn Ardam

In 2009, Simon & Schuster published *Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude* through their Atheneum Books for Young Readers imprint. The book, written by Jonah Winter and illustrated by Calef Brown, introduces children to the life of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas through a canny pastiche of Stein’s distinctive style. Gertrude writes, Alice cooks, they drive in their car Auntie, they take their poodle Basket for walks, and they entertain writers and painters. One day, Picasso stops by. Winter writes:

And look who’s here, in time for tea. It’s Pablo Picasso the Spanish artist. Pablo Picasso looks so angry but no. Pablo Picasso is Pablo Picasso. He just invented Modern art which is not the same thing as being angry but then again maybe it is. Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t. Then again maybe it is. It’s so hard to invent Modern art. Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t. Maybe.¹

Winter gets a lot right about Stein’s style here and throughout the book. He lovingly mimics her repetitions, her syntax, her rhymes and rhythms, her puns, her lack of punctuation, her simplistic vocabulary, and especially her playfulness. For decades, critics have commented on the seeming childishness of Stein’s writing, and Juliana Spahr has even argued that Stein demands that we “abandon our fluency” when we read her—that we effectively put ourselves in the position of the not-quite-yet-literate child when reading her works.² Winter’s pastiche, though it clearly lacks the sophistication of Stein’s writings, shows just how suited

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576 some of Stein's stylistic trademarks—especially her repetitions, rhymes, vocabulary, and playfulness—are for an audience of children. And as Winter writes, “You can write whatever you want to too, if you're Gertrude. A sentence can be whatever, if you're Gertrude. You don't have to make sense (if you're Gertrude).”³

Unfortunately for Stein, this turned out not to be the case. In 1938, Margaret Wise Brown⁴ and John McCullough, editors at the William R. Scott publishing house, approached Stein about writing children's picture books.⁵ Stein responded that she was already at work on a manuscript,⁶ and went on to publish *The World Is Round*, illustrated by Clement Hurd, with William R. Scott during the next year. The publication process was not easy; the editors were dismayed by the fact that the manuscript could not be “age-graded”—it was “accepted” by children ranging from three to thirteen years old.⁷ Furthermore, the editors were very concerned about Stein's characteristic lack of punctuation, and Brown took on the task of adding commas into the book.⁸ While *The World Is Round* garnered a number of good reviews upon its publication in the fall of 1939, it was not a financial success,⁹ and William R. Scott (along with several other publishing houses) rejected the children's books that Stein wrote during the early 1940s.¹⁰ None of these texts—*To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, *The Gertrude Stein First Reader*, or *Three Plays*—were published until after Stein's death in 1946. Though Winter jokingly writes that “you can write whatever you want to too, if you're Gertrude,” he forgets to add the caveat: as long as you're not writing for children.

While *The World Is Round* has received a small amount of critical attention in recent years, Stein's other children's books have been largely ignored by scholars.¹¹ Critical interest in *The World Is Round* is likely due to the book's (comparatively) successful publication history, its prominent intertextual references, and its straightforward narrative, which easily lends itself to feminist readings. The book tells the story of Rose, a young girl who goes on a long journey up a mountain to find herself; in the chapter “Rose Does Something,” she carves “Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose” into a tree, thereby elongating and playing on Stein's famous dictum. The book is easy to assimilate into Stein's oeuvre and is fairly easy to read. The editor of a 1993 Barefoot Books edition of *The World Is Round* even makes this point by aligning a paragraph of Stein's with the text of a “tale” told by a not-quite-three-year-old boy.¹² Stein's other works for children, however, are much thornier reads and have been overlooked by the reading public and scholars alike. The book *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, which was first published in 1957 as part of the eight-volume *Yale Edition of the Unpublished Works of Gertrude Stein*, is, I submit, the most challenging of Stein's children's books, even as it takes on one of the simplest of children's forms—the alphabet book, also referred to as the abecedarian, abecedarium, or abecediary.

In this article, I focus my attention on *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* and consider it across several literary genres.¹³ Stein herself categorized *To Do*, along with her three other children's books, as poetry; in a 1946 interview with Robert Bartlett Haas, she said that “what poetry I have done has been in the children's books. . . . My poetry was children's poetry, and most of it is very good, and some of it as good as anything I have ever done.”¹⁴ As Joseph T. Thomas Jr. notes in his book *Poetry's*

Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children's Poetry, there has long been a divide in scholarship between literature written for adult and child audiences, especially when it comes to poetry. In his words:

Most critical treatments of children's poetry, particularly U.S. children's poetry, divorce the object of their study from its larger, poetic context. That is, children's poetry is usually treated in isolation, as something wholly apart from the poetic traditions of adult poetry. . . . [T]hese studies, though they are of high quality, are somewhat insular, referring largely to other studies of children's poetry or, more broadly, to other studies of children's literature, drawing only infrequently on the critical and historical conversations surrounding adult poetic texts. . . . When it comes to poetry criticism, stark lines are drawn between the child world and its adult counterpart.¹⁵

The scholarly ignorance of Stein's work for children, is, then, a systemic one. The fact that these works straddle two genres—avant-garde literature and children's literature—has led not to a proliferation of work on them by both brands of critics, as we might imagine, but instead to a dearth of criticism; a group of children's literature critics recently referred to *To Do* as "Gertrude Stein's unforgivably neglected children's book."¹⁶ This article, seeking to redress this neglect, traces the publication history of *To Do*, outlines its elaborate structure, and places it in the context of Stein's other works and of recent criticism on the genre. I argue that *To Do*'s problems are not only due to its difficult categorization but also to its formal inconsistencies; the book, though structured by the alphabet, deviates from the long history of the abecedarian form and seems to have very little interest in teaching the alphabet at all. *To Do* is didactic, but Stein's quiet investment in the text is in teaching (and justifying) a particular brand of Steinian writing, not in aiding the acquisition of language or letters. The structure of the alphabet becomes, for Stein, a means to her (un-elaborated) end.

Stein wrote *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* rather quickly in May of 1940.¹⁷ She sent the manuscript off to McCullough at William R. Scott; his copy never arrived and he would later borrow the copy that Stein sent to Carl Van Vechten. McCullough thought that the book "lack[ed] episode" and that its "characters [did] not recur with sufficient frequency to hold children's interest."¹⁸ Stein, however, was determined to see *To Do* in print, and, with the help of Van Vechten, sent the manuscript to a number of other publishers over a two-year period. The feedback was largely negative. Editors at Random House were "cold as a slab of alabaster" about the book,¹⁹ while Alfred Harcourt himself wrote that "[n]ot only is it somewhat in her difficult style, but it seems to me the idea isn't sufficient to carry a book."²⁰ Though Stein insisted to Van Vechten again and again in letters that *To Do* was a "child's story,"²¹ the main problem that publishers seemed to have with it was its very classification as a children's book. McCullough had tested the manuscript on children and found that it was "far too adult for a first reader."²² Margaret Wise Brown, a Stein enthusiast, was intrigued by it, but suggested to Stein that the book was appropriate only "for adults and an occasional child."²³ Even the members of Stein's inner circle agreed. After months of difficulty finding a publisher, Van Vechten wrote to Stein "I Love this book, but I have never

578 thought it was a children's book."²⁴ And early on, Stein reported that Toklas said that "it is too old for children and too young for grown-ups."²⁵ In December of 1940, frustrated with McCullough, Stein wrote the following to Van Vechten:

About *To Do* I think you are perfectly right, but then you know I am not at all stuck on its being a child's book, I called it a child's book, because it was about alphabets and birthdays but children says Alice have not [sic] monopoly of these things so Mama Woojums has always believed that Papa Woojums was right, and that people will love it but not as a child's book so when you pass it on to Mr. Gilman Low III of Scribners we won't tell him that it is a child's book since Papa Woojums who knows says it is not, and Mama Woojums who knows that Papa Woojums knows says it is not, and Baby Woojums wants everybody to like it, and is not at all keen on children's wanting it not at all not at all.²⁶

But Scribner's wasn't interested in publishing the book either. All in all, *To Do* was turned down by eight publishers of both adult and children's literature before it was accepted for publication by Harrison Smith in 1941.²⁷ But the book never made it into print. World War II cut off communications between France (where Stein and Toklas were living) and the United States, and Harrison Smith had problems with the illustrations and manufacturing of the book. These problems effectively killed the project.²⁸ Stein and Van Vechten, however, continued to correspond about *To Do* through and after the war; she was still inquiring about it in March of 1946,²⁹ even as she and Van Vechten focused their attention on bringing Stein's other projects into print, including the more recent *The Gertrude Stein First Reader*, which would eventually be published posthumously.³⁰ Despite her tireless efforts, *The World Is Round* is the only of Stein's children's books that she would ever see in print.

As we can see from her correspondence, one of the greatest problems with *To Do* was that it did not fall neatly into the category of children's literature. While *The World Is Round* may have been written in Stein's characteristic "difficult style," it had, at least, a familiar structure and narrative that featured a happy ending—"and they lived happily ever after and the world just went on being round"³¹—to bolster its children's-literature credentials. But Stein's *To Do*, which stands rightly accused of "lack[ing] episode" and of having too many characters, takes too many liberties to be easily palatable as a children's book. Likewise, *To Do*'s patent abecedarian form foreclosed the possibility of an exclusively adult readership. Most publishers were not concerned, then, with the quality of the book's content but with the ambiguity of its potential audience. Toklas's observation about *To Do*—that it was "too old for children and too young for grown-ups"—aptly summarizes this problem.

The genres that Stein traverses in *To Do*—those of children's and avant-garde literature—are not natural bedfellows and usually call for distinct audiences. And the audience for children's literature is always complicated by the fact that children, by and large, are not the buyers of children's books. Jacqueline Rose argues that children's literature "sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver)."³² One of the ongoing problems of children's literature, she suggests, is that the young child has little to no say in what

she reads; this, after all, is usually decided by her parent, who selects and often reads the book aloud to her. Books for children, Rose argues, are not about "what the child wants, but what . . . the adult desires."³³ Those writing, publishing, and buying children's books are not the intended consumers of children's books; the ultimate consumer of children's literature does not have buying power. The marketing of children's books is thus directed less at children and more at their parents. The fact that Stein's works for children could not be "age-graded" was a drawback for her editors at William R. Scott; that her work was "accepted" by children ranging in age from three to thirteen was considered a liability.³⁴ Part of the problem of *To Do*, as I see it, is one of marketing. How is it possible to sell a book when it's unclear to whom you should be selling it? The fact that *To Do* never made it into print during Stein's lifetime suggests that there is no easy answer to this question.³⁵

Though it has yet to be matched by critical scholarship, there has been an upsurge of interest in *To Do* in the publishing world in recent years. In 2001, Green Integer Press (known for publishing avant-garde and overlooked texts) released the first single-volume edition of the book.³⁶ In 2011, Yale University Press published the first illustrated edition.³⁷ Timothy Young, editor of Yale's edition, echoes the sentiment of many of Stein's contemporaries, writing in his introduction that "one can easily appreciate the view of Stein's friends and potential publishers: children are not the core audience for this book."³⁸ And in a recent review of the Yale edition, NPR reviewer Heller McAlpin slyly suggests that "one quickly understands why the long-winded *To Do* had difficulty finding a publisher" and that "*To Do* is more intriguing literary artifact than delightful read."³⁹ The critical ambivalence about the text still persists, even when it comes to the child-friendly Yale edition, which has been beautifully illustrated by Giselle Potter.⁴⁰

There is, then, a constellation of issues surrounding both the publication and the critical reception of Stein's work for children. We are faced with the divided market between books for children and books for adults, and, within that, the divided market for children's books—books for three-year-olds and books for teenagers are supposed to be different species. That Stein managed to collapse all of these categories in *To Do* has not been a cause for celebration. This text has always been categorized as the purview of the other—it's for the editor who publishes children's books, the editor who publishes books for adults, the younger child, the older child, the scholar of children's literature, the scholar of American literature, and so on. No one wants responsibility for this strange book. Stein's exasperation with the reception of *To Do*, in which she told Van Vechten that he might as well offer it to Scribner's as a book for adults, is telling. It seems she just wanted *someone* to read, and to like, *To Do*. As she wrote to Van Vechten, "please like the book, and think of all those funny stories in it, you do like them, please do."⁴¹

Yet liking *To Do* is a difficult task. Even though it falls into what may be the ur-children's genre, the alphabet book, the book's disruptions and additions to the genre complicate it considerably. In *To Do*, Stein assigns each letter of the alphabet four names and writes a short narrative about a character with those names. In some cases, she writes four distinct narratives about four different characters. In other cases, she

580 writes one narrative about four of the characters. And in other cases, she writes about some characters and ignores the others. There is no pattern of who gets a story and who doesn't, nor are the narratives the same length. Sometimes they are the length of a paragraph; at other times they take up ten pages. And there are aberrations in even this loose form; the section on the letter C, for example, only has one character. Moreover, the narratives in *To Do* are often, but not exclusively, about her characters' birthdays. Birthdays in *To Do* are not like birthdays outside of *To Do*: birthdays can be exchanged, stolen, multiplied, and lost. They can be taken away from children as punishment for bad behavior, and they can be split into pieces by sets of triplets who dislike sharing. Stein's book is thus both inconsistent in its own form and fantastical in its content.

Stein begins *To Do* by setting out the terms of the book:

Alphabets and names make games and everybody has a name and all the same they have in a way to have a birthday.

The thing to do is to think of names.

Names will do.

Mildew.

And you have to think of alphabets too, without an alphabet well without names where are you, and birthdays are very favorable too, otherwise who are you.

Everything begins with A.

What did you say. I said everything begins with A and I was right and hold me tight and be all right.

Everything begins with A.

A. Annie, Arthur, Active, Albert.

Annie is a girl Arthur is a boy Active is a horse. Albert is a man with a glass.⁴²

Stein thus introduces her book within the framework of a game; alphabets and birthdays provide her with an opportunity for play. "The thing to do" here is to be imaginative. Stein's idea of the "continuous present,"⁴³ first introduced in her lecture "Composition as Explanation," seems at work in these opening paragraphs, as *To Do* begins at a scene of writing. It feels spontaneous and unedited, and as if Stein is speaking to herself and telling herself how to write the book that she is writing. Patricia Meyerowitz suggests that the "continuous present" that characterizes Stein's writing is "a realization of the thinking that goes on at the moment of writing," and not "a description of thinking that was done *before* the writing was written."⁴⁴ Stein thus manufactures a continuous present tense in which we imagine that we are reading her book as she writes it. She goes on to give herself directions for writing and suggests that "[t]he thing to do is to think of names," and then answers herself with "[n]ames will do." Then, instead of producing names, Stein produces a lighthearted rhyme of "Mildew" (with "will do"), thus taking her own advice poorly. She sees an opportunity for play and grabs it, even if this means deviating from her stated intention. The whole book, then, is framed by this "Mildew"—this disavowal of "the thing to do" by the person who ordered that we do it in the first place. This moment is, then, a rejection of instruction, and, more specifically, of self-instruction. Stein is as quick to abandon her rules as she is to make them in this text.

The rhyme on "mildew" continues into the next paragraph, as Stein introduces a "you" who must "think of alphabets too." With this statement, Stein interpellates her reader into the text, and anticipates a certain resistance from him. When she declares "Everything begins with A," this imaginary reader interjects a skeptical "What did you say" that appears without quotation marks; there are, in fact, no quotation marks in the entire book. Stein's response begins aggressively ("I said everything begins with A and I was right") but ends on a playful note ("and hold me tight and be all right"). The end of the sentence can seem superfluous, as if the rhymes exist just for the fun in rhyming. But we can also read it as a warning of what is to come; *To Do* anticipates its difficulty in these imagined exchanges between author and reader and asks us to "hold on tight" to Stein for the journey ahead.

In these first short paragraphs, Stein sets out a schema for the book that she will break again and again. While the section on A begins "A. Annie, Arthur, Active, Albert," the section for B begins with a slight variation on this structure, with "B is for Bertha and Bertie and Ben and Brave and a birthday for each one" (8). The section for C begins "Then there is C for Charlie" (11), and the section for D begins "D is for Dora David Dove and Darling" (12). Instead of setting up a structure and keeping to it, as most alphabet books do (and I will discuss this in more detail later), *To Do* changes its form with each letter. The names for the A section are presented in list form with commas to separate them; the names for B are separated by the word "and." There is only one name for the letter C, and the names for D are presented in a list, without commas. Stein is similarly inconsistent throughout *To Do*, and she becomes as interested in sounds (and in variations of sounds) as she is in letters as the book progresses; thus, "G is George Jelly Gus and Gertrude" (22), and "K is Kiki, Katy, Cake and Kisses" (37). "Jelly" and "Cake" do not begin with "G" or "K," of course. In these moments Stein privileges sound over letter and disrupts the linearity of the alphabet, just as the rhyme of "mildew" with "will do" overrides all of the things that there are "to do." This is no way to teach the alphabet.

Between these lists of characters and their narratives, Stein sometimes embeds additional narratives of the letters of the alphabet themselves. For example:

So D comes after C. Just after. C does not care whether D comes after C or not he just does not care. C is C. What difference does it make to C that D comes after C.

But D does care he cares very much that it is such that E comes after D. It makes all the difference to D that E comes after D. Sometimes D says bad words to E says don't come tagging after me, I have had enough of E, let me be. But there it is there is no use in making a fuss E is always there, it is better to be like C and not to care (14-15).

Stein thus personifies her letters and gives them thoughts and desires. Sometimes she comments on their value; she writes, "[A]nd after T well there are a lot of useless letters, just think of them all U V W X Y Z, just think of them all there they are pushed up at the end just like a ball" (89). We are particularly conscious of her role as writer in these moments, as she critiques the value of these letters as tools. She has particular trouble with X—"X is difficult, and X is not much use and it is kind of foolish that X

582 should have been put into the alphabet, it almost makes it an elephant" (118). And the X characters certainly feel the same way that Stein's narrative voice does; Xantippe, Xenophon, Xylophone, and Xmas spend their narratives trying unsuccessfully to rid themselves of their Xs.

Stein's letter-centric narratives are not hermetic; they bleed into one another. The dogs Never Sleep and Was Asleep, which first appear in the F section, reappear throughout the text. We find out that Active, the horse of the A section, was once named Kiki, and sure enough, a Kiki shows up in the K section. Stein also includes a Rose in the R section. This Rose has a dog named Chilly (77); the Rose of *The World Is Round* has a cousin named Willie (and, for that matter, a dog named P  p  ).⁴⁵ Stein's focus in *To Do* is on singular letters in and of themselves; they do not, for example, ever join together and form words. But these inter- and intratextual references create a wide-ranging web that extends outside the covers of the text.

The birthdays in *To Do* are even more strange than the letters in it. They are similarly unstable, and many of the birthday narratives involve exchanges, thefts, multiplications, and loss. There is Brave, who "was a funny boy because he was not born on his birthday. Any day could be his birthday because he was not born on his birthday" (9). Then there is Charlie, "and January was his birthday, the whole month of January every day in it was his birthday" (12). There is Edith, who "was born late, she was born a month too late. She should have been born the fifth of June and she thought that was too soon so she was born the fifth of July oh my" (15). For the Js—"James, Jonas, Jewel and Jenny,"—"there were only two birthdays for the four of them and they quarreled more than before and pretty soon they tore the two birthdays in pieces and now there were six without birthdays" (36–37). In what is perhaps the most striking narrative in the book, a Mr. and Mrs. Quiet decide to take the birthday away from their big pet rabbit, because he eats another smaller rabbit every year on his birthday. When he no longer knows when his birthday is, he begins eating rabbits on every day of the year, "just as if every day was his birthday" (72). Mr. and Mrs. Quiet are understandably upset and then give away all of their other rabbits. Then:

[A]ll of a sudden the big rabbit's red eyes burst out into flame, the big rabbit was on fire inside him and he and the cabbages and carrots he had not eaten were all flaming and the smoke and fire were coming out of him and the little house he lived in was burning and Mr. and Mrs. Quiet who were looking at him found it all terrifying, they were so frightened they could not do anything, they could not get any water to put the fire out they were so frightened they could not move about and so they just sat there watching and pretty soon it was over the burning there was nothing left of the big rabbit but a red cinder and that Mr. and Mrs. Quiet put out by dropping tears on him. And after that Mr. and Mrs. Quiet lived very quietly with their goats and everything but they never after had another rabbit. (73–74)

Birthdays in *To Do* are not just malleable; as the book progresses, they become more and more dangerous. Stein begins the book with "Alphabets and names make games and everybody has a name and all the same they have in a way to have a birthday" (5).

The operative phrase, here, is "in a way," and Stein exploits its ambiguity to the utmost degree. By destabilizing the youth-oriented markers of language and time—the alphabet and the birthday—Stein creates a frankly horrifying world of indeterminacy and unexplained metamorphoses. As Richard Bridgman has briefly noted, the book is "dominated by acts of aggression and disaster." Though he suggests that "the over-all effect is not morbid" because "the fantasy distances the violence and cruelty,"⁴⁶ critic Barbara Will thinks otherwise. Will writes of *To Do* that "acts of inexplicable violence occur without warning and without meaning, 'all of a sudden'; things happen, ominously, causing multiple deaths and sparing only a random few. This unpredictable violence turns everyone, even adults, into frightened and submissive children."⁴⁷ While I agree with Will, both she and Bridgman overlook the most interesting thing about *To Do*—that its most serious violence does not take place in its narrative content, but in its narrative framework. In other words, the violence that Stein does to the alphabet and to time (via her representation of birthdays, which normally function, as Bridgman describes them, as "one's particular anchor in the world of time"⁴⁸) is much more interesting than the violence of her cannibalistic rabbit. Stein begins by designating the alphabet as deterministic—"without an alphabet well without names where are you, and birthdays are very favorable too, otherwise who are you" (5)—but spends her entire text dismantling any sort of stable self that would come with a name and a birthday.

While the tale of Mr. and Mrs. Quiet is probably the most horrifying in *To Do*, the story of Active, with its metamorphosing names and birthdays, is more representative of the rest of the narratives in the text. Stein begins by introducing Active with a fairly straightforward series of sentence-length paragraphs:

Active.

Active is the name of a horse.

Everybody has forgotten what horses are.

What horses are.

What are horses.

Horses are animals were animals with a mane and a tail ears hoofs a head and teeth and shoes if they are put upon them. (5–6)

In this introduction, "Active," usually an adjective, is an unlikely name, and stands out among Annie, Arthur, and Albert in the earlier list of A characters. All we hear of these characters is that "Annie is a girl Arthur is a boy Active is a horse. Albert is a man with a glass" (5). Active the horse gets a three-page narrative; our human characters, delineated by the most basic of markers ("girl," "boy," "man"), don't get any. Stein thus privileges here the unusual and the unexpected. And when she introduces Active, she does so with a hint of nostalgia, anticipating that her young audience is unfamiliar with horses, and goes on to describe them in a blazon-like list of physical attributes. Her verbal slippage from "horses are animals" to "horses were animals" confirms her belief that horses no longer matter in her world; this is, in fact, what the story of Active will confirm.

584 After Stein explains about “what horse-shoes are” (6) she continues:

He had a birthday he was born on that day so everybody knew just how old he was, he was born on the thirty-first of May on that day, and then he began to say he was not born on that day he was he began to say he was born on the thirty-first of June, and that was none too soon. He liked to be born later every day. Well anyway, there he was and Active was his name, it was his name now but it had not always been, it had once been Kiki, not that he ever kicked not he and he used then to pull a milk-wagon. Then the war came, Kiki was twenty, twenty is awful old for a horse but Kiki had always had plenty, so even at twenty he was young and tender and pretty slender. (6)

Here Stein does several interesting things. We have the first instance in the text of a malleable birthday, changeable at will; Active decides “to be born later every day.” But then we find out that Active has a stable age of twenty, which is “awful old for a horse,” but then again that he was “young and tender and pretty slender.” Stein thus continually undermines herself. Does Active change his birthday, or does he just wish that he could? How is he old for a horse but young and tender at the same time? Stein’s characters throughout *To Do* dwell in uncertainties such as these. In the world of the book, a character can be both “awful old” and “young and strong” (6) at the same time, and, as often as not, making a wish about a birthday is a performative gesture. Active wants to be younger; thus, he *is* younger. And when the J characters, for example, threaten to take away each other’s birthdays, their birthdays disappear, and unfortunately for them, “later on when they all wanted their birthdays back again they went out to find them but they were gone perhaps a duck or a lobster had eaten them anyway all four birthdays were gone not one of them had one” (36). Birthdays in the text lose their capacity to mark personal time, and, at the same time, morph into objecthood.

Names are just as troublesome as the pliant birthdays in *To Do*. We find out that Active used to be Kiki. He did not get this name, Stein tells us, in a moment of linguistic play. She explains the name change later:

So the soldiers came along and they thought he was young and strong and they took him along. . . . Then nobody knew where he was, and he was no he was not gone away nor did he stay but he was at the front where there was shooting and he was pulling a little cannon along, and they did not know his name but he was so young and strong they called him Active and he always came right along he and his little cannon. (6–7)

Active’s name change is thus not his decision, as was his (possible) change of birth date. Active’s new name is an aptonym (unlike the earlier “Kiki,” which was ill-fitting because he “was never kicking”). And Active likes his new name; Stein writes, “I like being Active better than being Kiki who was never kicking” (7). The ideal names for Stein, in *To Do*, are adjectival; she insists that names are not arbitrary, but meaningful.⁴⁹ But Active’s name change comes at a moment of violence, in the middle of a war. Stein here sees violence as an opportunity for changing the self. And the male horse’s name change—from the feminine Kiki to the gender-neutral Active—is also at play. War de-feminizes the horse, and gives him the opportunity to reach his full potential.

When the war ends, Active is sent home, but he is no longer needed there because of the rise of the automobile. "They" return to calling him by his original name:

[A]nd they called him Kiki again but Active was his name and he said he would lose his mane if they took away his new name. Well they all cried like anything, they just all cried and cried and then Active forgot everything. . . . So he said he thought an automobile, just one day he said he thought he would be an automobile not a new one an old one and he was one, he was an automobile and an automobile never has a name and it never has a mane and it has rubber shoes not an iron one and finding rubber shoes does not mean anything like finding iron horse-shoes did and that was the end of everything. (8)

With the end of war, then, comes the end of Active and the return to Kiki. But in the world of *To Do*, characters can change at will, and thus Kiki/Active turns into an automobile because he'd rather be one than a horse, whose pre-war labor has been rendered obsolete. Stein provides no description of the metamorphosis whatsoever; it just happens. But this turn is not a happy one, and it ushers in "the end of everything," including the end of Active's narrative. The automobile, presumably the product of Fordist labor, "never has a name," and thus loses its signifying ability; Active no longer signifies in the postwar economy. And while finding iron horse-shoes used to bring luck (6), finding rubber shoes, or tires, now means nothing. In his transformation, Active loses what made himself himself, and he becomes a soulless product. While not all of Stein's narratives have similar endings, this unmooring of personhood (or, in the case of Active, of horsehood) is a common thread throughout *To Do*. The violence of this narrative is not in Active's experience at war; it's in his experience back home *after* the war. He is rendered useless, and, to combat this, he becomes a machine and thereby dissolves his identity.

The violence of *To Do*, as I've previously suggested, works at both the level of form and content. Stein destabilizes the personal markers of names and birthdays throughout her text, and in the case of Active and many of her other characters, erases all possibility for establishing a sense of self. In this sense, the characters of *To Do* could not be more different than the Rose of the more conventional *The World Is Round*. But even more interesting is what Stein does to the generic forms of the alphabet book, which Karen Coats suggests is "primarily didactic,"⁵⁰ and which George R. Bodmer suggests is "didactic almost by definition."⁵¹ Stein's violence to the genre is more subtle than the violence in her narratives, and her refusal to conform to one of the many established forms within the genre undermines the potential didacticism of her text. Put simply, it's hard to imagine any child learning the alphabet by reading *To Do*. Why then did Stein choose one of, if not *the* most didactic of genres, to structure her book?

In her excellent book *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter*, Patricia Crain traces the long history of the alphabet book. She maps out the changes in the genre over time—the shifts from the image-less hornbooks of pre-Renaissance Europe to Comenius's phonologically focused *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (the first alphabet book with images) to *The New England Primer's* "image-rhyme combination" that marks "a purposeful turn away

586 from the alphabet's inherent meaninglessness."⁵² In tracing this history, she delineates three types of alphabetical forms. The first are "swallow alphabets" (85), in which letters "display tropes of consumption—letters eating other letters, letters being eaten by children, letters in the mouths of animals, letters pictured with, or as, food" (85). The second are "body alphabets" (88), in which images of letters are anthropomorphized into human shapes, and imitate human bodily actions. This type of alphabet, for Crain, places emphasis "not on the act of the consumption of the alphabet, but on the *result* of this internalization" (88). The third type of alphabetical form, the "alphabet array" or "the worldly alphabet" (91) which takes the familiar "A is for . . . B is for . . ." form, "emphasizes the alphabet's function of ordering and arbitrary arrangement" (91). Crain continues:

With its apparent encyclopedism or scientism, its impulse towards organization and categorization, this is the alphabet most obviously a product of the Enlightenment. Whether objects, animals, or body parts, this alphabet represents, in words or images, the world at large, arrayed through the arbitrary but powerful order of the ABCs, forcefully producing a world that is knowable, graspable, and most strikingly, obtainable. . . . The alphabet array alerts you to the vast quantity of things in the world up for consumption.⁵³

For Crain, alphabet books become over time a way of representing the capitalist world; through consumption, internalization, and accretion, "the alphabet book posits the world of imperial and capitalist enterprise as one that is already inside the language-learning child."⁵⁴ Learning the alphabet is not just a step in learning to read, for Crain; it is a way of submitting to the capitalist system.

Karen Coats, writing contemporaneously to Crain, offers up an alternative schema for categorizing alphabet books. Borrowing terminology from the philosopher J. L. Austin, Coats argues that alphabet books are either constative or performative. In constative alphabets, she claims, "language is not material, it has no body; rather it is an epistemological tool, an abstract way of 'knowing' the concrete world."⁵⁵ In performative alphabets, on the other hand, "the letter itself . . . become[s] an *object* for representation rather than a transparent *instrument* for representing. Letters become performers in and of reality rather than simply pointers to something outside themselves."⁵⁶ She argues that in the twentieth century, "the view of language as presented in alphabet books [changes] from a traditional, linear, epistemological, masculine model, in which language is a way of knowing an existing reality, to a more performative, ontological, integrated model, in which language is recognized as a vehicle for actively constructing that reality."⁵⁷ Michael Heyman suggests that the shift that Coats charts is not so much an innovation in the twentieth century, but is more accurately a "rebirth" of performative forms, the likes of which Crain traces in swallow and body alphabets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which he traces even further back into medieval illuminated manuscripts.⁵⁸

Despite their difference in terminologies and methodologies (Crain takes an historical approach, Coats a theoretical one) both critics point towards a fairly rigid division between types of alphabet books. In some, letters are referents or "epistemological

tools" for knowing the world outside the text (in this category we can include Coats's constative alphabets and Crain's alphabet arrays); in others, letters are material agents or material objects that either act of their own volition or are acted upon (in this category we can include Coats's performative alphabets and Crain's swallow and body alphabets). This divide is fairly clean; in the works that both critics study, there seems to be no overlap. The letters of alphabet arrays don't suddenly jump out of their referential roles and take action, nor do the letters of body alphabets suddenly start referring to anything outside of themselves. Letters are either a means of learning the world or an end in and of themselves.⁵⁹

One of the most generically transgressive things about *To Do*, then, is that Stein's letters are both referential *and* material. The book is organized by an alphabet array of names—"D is for Dora David Dove and Darling" (13)—but also includes letters acting, feeling, and speaking on their own volition. Stein writes that "[s]ometimes D says bad words to E says don't come tagging after me, I have had enough of E, let me be" (14).⁶⁰ Her alphabet is both constative, or referential, and performative, or material, and she will often draw on both possibilities within the same narrative. In her section on Y, Stein introduces, in referential mode, "Yvonne and You, Yes and Young. These are the Y's why not" (127). Like Comenius before her, she plays on the aural aspects of the letter, and perfectly rhymes "Y" and "why." This moment of play, soon to be repeated, accrues more meaning as the narrative progresses. Stein then begins the story of Yvonne Yet and Yes Young, a married couple, who are moderately happy until they hear a man singing "imagine if you can how much it would cost to get back a letter if it could be lost" (129). This reminds them that "they had put the letter Y in an envelope and now where was it" (129–130).⁶¹ Yvonne and Yes get very nervous, and exclaim "Y Y Y Y oh why are we only Y oh why oh why" (130). In an oral reading of the text, the differences between "Y" and "why" are collapsed, and the letter and word become substitutable; the lament for "Y" can be heard at the end of the sentence as well as at the beginning, or we can hear a repetition of "why" at the beginning.⁶²

Stein further complicates the "Y" when we find out what has actually happened to the letter. She writes:

The letter Y you see the letter Y is in an envelope and when it falls into the fire it burns. Now if a letter burns then it is not there. Believe it or not it is true.

Now the letter Y was put into an envelope they remembered that and the envelope was put into the fire, that is what happened to the letter Y. Of course that is what happened to the letter Y and that is because it is in cry and in Oh my, that is the reason why the letter Y was put into an envelope, and into the fire and the envelope was all burned up and in the ashes there were no sashes there was nothing at all, the letter Y was gone. (130)

There are several issues at work here. First, Yvonne and Yes, the referents of Y's alphabet array, are suddenly faced with the materiality of the letter, and they learn that the material object may be lost, or, more specifically, burned up. Second, Stein plays with homonyms once again and introduces the possibility of an epistolary letter along with the alphabetical letter. The "letter Y" in an envelope becomes a synecdoche for

588 an epistolary letter, which can be burned, and thus the material Y becomes a referential Y. But this synecdoche is doubly complicated, because both sides of the equation are operating with the same term; the (alphabetic) letter stands in for an (epistolary) letter. This synecdochic logic is also at work when we hear why the letter has been burned—it's been burned because Y is "in cry and Oh my." The Y letter/letter must be burned because it is synecdochic of sadness.

Crain notes that the alphabet array form always works on the logic of synecdoche. She explains that "the synecdoche 'A is for apple' gives the alphabet a mouth and a voice, binding the names of the letters to the names of things in the world . . . [In alphabet arrays,] synecdoche is the figure of non-mimetic representation: A stands for apple because A is *in* apple."⁶³ In the letter-burning narrative in *To Do*, the Y acts not just as a tropological reference to an epistolary letter or as a synecdoche for "cry," but also as a material letter and as a phonological substitute for "why." The letter is both referential and material, but it is interestingly non-performative. Stein uses the passive voice to describe the letter-burning incident; she avoids attributing the event to an agent in such passive phrases as "the envelope was put into the fire." Yvonne and Yes didn't do it; the only agent that we can implicate is Stein's authorial voice, which has the power to make letters of the alphabet, and thus her characters' identities, disappear. Indeed, after the letter is burned, Stein writes that "those are sad days when a letter the only letter that can make you know that you are you is burned away" (131), and Yvonne and Yes spend the rest of their narrative stealing signage and stealing names from newborns in an effort to get their Ys back. Though they succeed, and Stein tells us that "they lived happily ever after," they learned to be "very careful . . . of the Y's they never said Oh my and they never said cry and they never said try" (134). We also find out that they "had a great many children but they never gave them any name that began with Y not one" (134). Stein effectively cuts off the Y lineage, and thus ends any generative prospects of the letter, both in terms of the proliferation of children and the proliferation of language.

However, the loss of letters doesn't extend to Stein's narrative. Even though Yvonne and Yes lose their Ys, Stein is still able to refer to them by their names, which, of course, include the Ys. We could imagine, for example, that the loss of letters would turn her characters into "vonne" and "es"—at least until they regained their Ys in their narrative. But Stein does not write by the rules that she sets out for her characters. We see this most clearly in moments when Yvonne and Yes lament their losses; Stein writes, "Yvonne could not say to Yes what do you think Yes because there was no letter Y and Yes Young could not say to Yvonne I will take care of you Yvonne because the letter Y was burned away, away away away" (131). Stein, however, still has access to Y, and she can write "Yes" and "Yvonne" and "away away away." There is thus a major discrepancy in *To Do* between content and form. Stein tells us that Y has been burned away, but if that were true, wouldn't it be unavailable to Stein as well? How can it be burned away for the characters, but not for the authorial voice? While it may seem dogmatic to expect absolute consistency between narrative and form from most texts, the very fact that *To Do* falls into the category of didactic meta-discourse (as do all books of its genre) demands such consistency. If Y is a material object that can be lost, why can

Stein still use it for its referential qualities? Why is Stein's personal alphabet different from *the* alphabet? What is Stein, writing in the most didactic of genres, trying to teach us in *To Do*?

In her aptly named "P is for Patriarchy," Coats argues that alphabet books take on the task of inscribing us into the patriarchal symbolic order. Following Lacan, she suggests that:

To learn to read, to enter into a relationship with a written text, is to enter into a relationship of unequal power. The text is mute, unresponsive, and often resistant. That children embrace this relationship so willingly and exuberantly is largely because they are used to relationships of unequal power. Their job is to figure out what the Other wants of them, how they can make themselves desirous to those in power over them. Learning to read is an acceptance of the arbitrary power structure of the dominant culture.⁶⁴

For Coats, then, a child's reading of an alphabet book is an unknowing acquiescence to the symbolic order, to the "arbitrary power structure[s]" of language and social authority that are implicit in the alphabet. But Joseph T. Thomas Jr. argues that Coats leaves something out in her analysis. He writes that "the very purpose of an alphabet is to be rearranged; if it suggests linearity—if it, as Coats maintains, writes us into the symbolic order of the patriarchy, it simultaneously suggests this order's opposite."⁶⁵ In other words, learning the alphabet is not an end in and of itself. We learn the alphabet so that we can *use* the alphabet to build words, sentences, paragraphs, novels out of it. And it is the rare alphabet book that features only letters and images; most alphabet books, from Comenius's on to the present, supplement singular letters with words. In Kate Greenaway's influential *A Apple Pie*, A and "apple pie" aren't equated only pictorially; they are equated, by the author, through the words "A apple pie."⁶⁶ This may seem obvious, but previous studies of the genre, including Thomas's, have glossed over the fact that alphabet books are as engaged in using words as they are in presenting letters (whether referential or material). This is not to say that Coats, Crain, and other critics ignore the words, phrases, sentences, or even the poetry of alphabet books. They pay them ample attention. What these critics do is sidestep the simple fact that reading the text of an alphabet book requires knowledge that the book presupposes doesn't exist. If a child can already read the text of an alphabet book, it's unlikely that she *needs* the alphabet book for any didactic purpose. There is thus an inherent temporal problem in the genre; the alphabet book constitutes its audience retroactively. This problem is solved, however, by spatial reading practice. Many alphabet books, like many children's books in general, are read out loud to children by adults. This aural audience of "readers" is the actual intended audience of alphabet books; this is the audience that has something to learn from the text. The genre requires a community of readers/speakers to fulfill its didactic purpose, and the child who learns from it is not so much a reader as she is a listener. The child who reads an alphabet book on her own does not read to learn the letters of the alphabet; she reads for the sake of reading or for the sake of learning something other than the alphabet.

590 Toklas's response to *To Do*—that it was “too old for children and too young for grown-ups”—resonates, then, not just with Stein's work, but with alphabet books in general. And *To Do* makes an interesting intervention in the genre, as it privileges the process of reading and writing over the process of learning the alphabet. Stein assumes that the learning of the alphabet has already happened for her readers: from the early lines “[t]he thing to do is to think of names” and “you have to think of alphabets too, without an alphabet well without names where are you and birthdays are very favorable too, otherwise who are you” onward, she focuses not on the learning of letters, but on the process of writing. The book opens prescriptively, and Stein announces that her alphabet is meant to be rearranged, and that the rearrangement of letters leads to names and characters, and then to birthdays, as she builds a narrative around individual identity, and often around the loss of identity. I contend that Stein's strange turns in these arenas, which I've focused in on in my analyses of *Active/Kiki* and the Y family, are ultimately about the power of the writer. Stein does not make Kiki's transformation into an automobile realistic in any way; it occurs purely because of Stein's fancy and without explanation. The narrative of the letter Y in the fire is similarly disconcerting; the only way we know that the Y got placed in the fire is that Stein tells us. To Will's suggestion that “acts of inexplicable violence occur without warning and without meaning,” I want to counter that in *To Do*, Stein is particularly conscious of the fact that *she* is the one who makes things happen and that she is the only one who can provide meaning—through rhetoric and linguistic play—in the metamorphosing world that she creates.

The book thus couples its instructive beginning with an acute awareness on Stein's (and her readers') part that there is no logic, coherence, or causality in the world of *To Do* other than that of the author. Consequently, there is an extreme tension between the overarching linear (and should-be) didactic form of the text and its violent and chaotic content. Indeed, Stein's interest in didacticism was long coupled with disdain. In 1931, Stein published *How to Write*, quite possibly the least useful writing manual ever written. Even in this text, writes Marianne DeKoven in a detailed study of Stein's most experimental works, “Stein violates the sanction of all literature that the reader have some way to move from one word to the next. The prevention of reading is, of necessity, the denial of literature.”⁶⁷ Even though Stein embeds *How to Write* with appealing dictums (such as “a sentence is not emotional a paragraph is”⁶⁸), it often reads like a list of playful non sequiturs: “Now all this is still sentences. Paragraphs are still why you were selfish. // Shellfish are what they eat. This is neither a paragraph nor a sentence.”⁶⁹ *How to Write* also prominently features inscrutable, agrammatical passages that pose as instruction, such as, “Grammar is made whether there has been a better whether it is alike are to be hand in hand which is stitches a polite that is a dollar ball carried a mainly for only timely bother in only begs legacy.”⁷⁰ In the book's introduction, Patricia Meyerowitz states the obvious: *How to Write* “certainly does not tell you how to write.”⁷¹

Several years later, in 1936, Stein gave a lecture titled “What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There so Few of Them,” which was later published in 1940. In the lecture, Stein tells us:

The thing one gradually comes to find out is that one has no identity that is when one is in the act of doing anything. Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially you are not that when you are doing anything. I am I because my little dog knows me but, creatively speaking the little dog knowing that you are you and your recognizing that he knows, that is what destroys creation. That is what makes school.⁷²

Stein's thoughts about identity here are interesting; she privileges action over identity and recognition, and insists any creative act is indeed an act—it consumes the individual and temporarily erases identity. She emphasizes the process of creating, not the product, and suggests that this is the only way to make a masterpiece. The masterpiece may in the end be about identity, but for the writer to achieve master status, she must empty herself. Later, when Stein writes that recognition "destroys creation" and that "this is what makes school," she links school, and thus learning, to the death of creativity. To learn is to recognize and to be recognized; it is to be conscious of the self, and this consciousness is exactly what Stein wants to erase in the writing process so that a masterpiece can be achieved. It is an ironically prescriptive moment; Stein instructs her audience to disavow instruction as a means to artistic production.

Stein revisits her uncomfortable relationship with instruction with the aptly titled and commanding *To Do*, written nearly a decade after *How to Write* and four years after her "What Are Master-pieces" lecture was first given. The sequence of these works helps reveal *To Do*, as I suggested earlier, as an instruction manual for writing rather than a primer on the alphabet. The letters of the alphabet are the building blocks of Stein's writing; instead of an arbitrary structure, the alphabet becomes a meaningful way for her to teach a (supposedly) youthful audience about the power of words. From her preference for aptonyms, to her numerous and resonating puns on homonyms, Stein insists in *To Do* that words are meaningful. In this text, she is wholly invested in the power of creation, and despite her insistence in "What Are Master-pieces" that identity must be erased in the writing process, Stein conjures a world in which her distinctive narrative voice is omnipresent, and in which things happen only at her will. Indeed, the entire book is framed by the command for imaginative play. The introduction of "Mildew," which both adheres to this instruction for play while undermining the command to begin a book by creating names and birthdays out of the alphabet, creates a push-and-pull in the text between authoritative power and an undermining of this power.

For Juliana Spahr, Stein's work "is as much one of building as of subverting,"⁷³ and it "does not deny authority but instead advocates its dispersal."⁷⁴ While Spahr suggests that Stein's slippery language puts interpretation on the side of her readers and encourages them "to be their own authors"⁷⁵ in the interpreting of her work, I want to suggest something different. When it comes to *To Do*, Stein instructs readers to be their own authors, not of her works (in an almost reader-response manner, as Spahr suggests), but of their own. *To Do* does not teach alphabet acquisition; it is instead a guide to *using* the alphabet. In the opening lines, Stein implores us to see how much can come out of just twenty-six letters—from the alphabet comes names, from names come

592 birthdays, from names and birthdays come identities, from identities come hundreds of narratives. And Stein's consistent dismantling of these identities (and the narratives that contain them) is an acknowledgment that the author's power lies as much in her ability to destroy—a character, a form, even the alphabet itself—as it does in her power to create. *To Do*, which masquerades as a children's book, is then both a guide to and justification for her creative work. When Stein begged Van Vechten, "please like the book, and think of all those funny stories in it, you do like them, please do," she wasn't just asking for his approval on *To Do*; she was asking for wholesale recognition and affirmation of her creative process.⁷⁶

Notes

I wish to thank Michael North, Brian Kim Stefans, and the M/ELT Reading Group at UCLA for their generous comments on this essay.

1. Jonah Winter, *Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude*, illus. by Calef Brown (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 12–13.

2. Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 46.

3. Winter, *Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude is Gertrude*, 26.

4. Brown, who was also a children's book author at the time, would go on to publish the massively popular children's books *The Runaway Bunny* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942) and *Goodnight Moon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), both illustrated by Clement Hurd.

5. Leonard S. Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown: Awakened by the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 99.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 105.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 100–1, 105–6, 108–9, 111–14, 118–20.

10. Donald Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, by Gertrude Stein, vol. 7 of *The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Works of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), viii–ix.

11. Barbara Will is the exception to this statement. Her "And Then One Day There Was a War": Gertrude Stein, Children's Literature and World War II" is the only article dedicated to surveying Stein's works for children. Will supplies a useful introduction to all four books, then focuses mostly on *The World Is Round*, but the connections she makes between the texts and Stein's political affiliations—she argues that the books "explore [Stein's] own fraught and even contradictory personal and political tendencies" (352)—seem overstated. See Barbara Will, "And Then One Day There Was a War": Gertrude Stein, Children's Literature and World War II," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 340–53.

12. Jonathan Cott, introduction to *The World Is Round*, by Gertrude Stein, illus. by Roberta Arenson (Boston: Barefoot Books, 1993), xi–xii.

13. While there are admittedly a number of possible frameworks for considering *To Do*, I choose to examine the book within the context of children's literature and the history of the abecedarian form. Stein's interest in the alphabet was not unique, of course; various modern art groups, including the Futurists, Constructivists, and Lettristes, shared Stein's interest in the letter as form.

14. Gertrude Stein, "A Transatlantic Interview—1946," *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1971), 23.

15. Joseph T. Thomas Jr., *Poetry's Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children's Poetry* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007), xiii.

16. Michael Heyman, Angela Sorby, and Joseph T. Thomas Jr., "Lively Rigor: The 2009 *Lion and the Unicorn* Award for Excellence in North American Poetry," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 33, no. 3 (2009): 377.

17. Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, vii–viii. Stein's *To Do* was not her first foray into the topic of birthdays; in 1924, she wrote *A Birthday Book* for Pablo Picasso's son Paulo. Picasso agreed to do the illustrations but eventually backed out, and despite Stein's efforts, the book was never published. Stein's *A Birthday Book* follows the form of other popular birthday books by Longfellow and Whittier (xiv–xv). Gallup explains the form thusly: "[E]ach day of the year appeared on a separate page, with a blank space for the insertion of the name of a baby born on that day under an appropriate quotation chosen from the writings of the particular poet" (xv). Stein's birthday book provides, not surprisingly, a strange twist on the form. She writes, for example, in the January section: "January the twenty-eighth and August. // January the twenty-ninth as loudly. // January the thirtieth to agree, to agree to January the thirtieth. // January the thirty-first usually. Used. Usually. Usually. Used" (131). Clearly, Stein's is not an ordinary birthday book filled with inspirational quotations; Gallup deems it characteristically "hermetic" (xv). For more, see Gertrude Stein, *A Birthday Book* in *Alphabets and Birthdays*, vol. 7 of *The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Works of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 127–154.

18. Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, viii.

19. Bennett Cerf, quoted in note to vol. 2 of *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten 1913–1946*, ed. Edward Burns (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 678; hereafter cited in text as *Letters*.

20. Van Vechten quoting Harcourt to Stein, 10 February 1941, in *Letters*, 701.

21. Stein to Van Vechten, 3 June 1940, in *Letters*, 676.

22. McCullough, paraphrased by editor, note to letter Van Vechten to Stein, 16 June 1941, in *Letters*, 727.

23. Stein to Van Vechten, 13 January 1941, in *Letters*, 694.

24. Van Vechten to Stein, 23 November 1940, in *Letters*, 689.

25. Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, viii.

26. Stein to Van Vechten, 10 December 1940, in *Letters*, 691. In his introduction to *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten 1913–1946*, Edward Burns elaborates on the term "Woojums," which populates so many of the letters between Stein and Van Vechten: "It was often used by Van Vechten as a term of endearment for Stein and Toklas and other friends. Its origin may be a mixed drink described in his novel *Parties*. 'Woojums,' however, took on more meaning at the time of Stein's American lecture tour in 1934–35: it describes their sense of a family unit. . . . The family that emerged in 1934–35 is an organic outgrowth of the role each had assumed in the other's life. Gertrude became Baby Woojums (sometimes referred to by the pronoun *he*), Alice Toklas became Mama Woojums, and Carl Van Vechten became Papa Woojums. Part of Toklas' and Van Vechten's role as parents was to look after Baby Woojums—Gertrude. They established among themselves a family model that reflected the emotional importance each had come to assume for the other" (3–4). These pet names turn up in Stein's *To Do* in the section on the letter "V," and their appearance in the book speaks to the importance of this alternative family to Stein. Also interesting is Stein's positioning of herself as a child in the Woojums clan. Gertrude Stein, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001), 105–111.

27. Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, ix. These publishers are William R. Scott, Scribner's, Random House, Atlantic Monthly Press, Funk and Wagnalls, Dutton, Simon and Schuster, and William Morrow.

28. Gallup, introduction to *Alphabets and Birthdays*, x.

29. Stein to Van Vechten, 9 March 1946, in *Letters*, 809.

30. *The Gertrude Stein First Reader* and Stein's later work for children, *Three Plays*, were published in a single volume by Houghton Mifflin in 1948, with illustrations by Francis Rose. *Three Plays* was never intended for publication, and the plays were performed only once in 1943 (Will, "And Then One Day There Was a War," 346). Interestingly, the book's jacket states that "like *Alice in Wonderland* it is a juvenile for adults" and that "[i]n many ways it is the purest Stein extant." Gertrude Stein, *The Gertrude Stein First Reader & Three Plays*, illus. Francis Rose (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

- 594 31. Gertrude Stein, *The World Is Round*, illus. Roberta Arenson (Boston: Barefoot Books, 1993), 145.
32. Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 1–2.
33. *Ibid.*, 2.
34. Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 105.
35. *PMLA* focused the “Theories and Methodologies” section of its January 2011 issue on the difficulties of delimiting the boundaries of children’s literature. See in particular, Marah Gubar, “On Not Defining Children’s Literature” *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 209–216.
36. Gertrude Stein, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001).
37. Gertrude Stein, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, illus. Giselle Potter (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).
38. Timothy Young, introduction to *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, by Gertrude Stein, illus. Potter, 7. Young provides a useful introduction to the book and notably traces a number of references in the text to other members of Stein’s circle.
39. Heller McAlpin, “Gertrude Stein’s Silly—and Stilted—‘To Do.’” NPR, June 1, 2011, www.npr.org/2011/06/02/135852533/gertrude-steins-silly-and-stilted-to-do.
40. The Yale edition is a large hardcover book (with dimensions of 8 x 9 inches) and features 28 color illustrations by Potter. The Green Integer edition is a small (6 x 4.25 inches) text-only edition, more useful for scholarship than for reading by children.
41. Stein to Van Vechten, 14 October 1940, in *Letters*, 685.
42. Gertrude Stein, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001), 5. All subsequent references are to this edition.
43. Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation,” in *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla E. Dydo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 498.
44. Patricia Meyerowitz, introduction to *How to Write*, by Gertrude Stein (New York: Dover Press, 1975), x, emphasis added.
45. Stein, *The World Is Round*, 3.
46. Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 311.
47. Will, “And Then One Day There Was a War,” 346–347. Drawing an historical connection between *To Do* and the climate of World War II, Will writes that *To Do* “remains shadowed by the dark realities of life in wartime in a way that *The World Is Round*, written just before the war, does not, or at least not entirely” (346).
48. Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, 312.
49. Stein’s preference for aptonyms in *To Do* contrasts interestingly with the reservations she expresses toward names and nouns in her 1935 lecture “Poetry and Grammar.” For more, see Gertrude Stein, “Poetry and Grammar,” in *Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry, 1800–1950*, ed. Melissa Kwasny (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 288–310.
50. Karen Coats, “P is for Patriarchy: Re-Imaging the Alphabet,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 25, vol. 2 (Summer 2000): 90.
51. George R. Bodmer, “The Post-Modern Alphabet: Extending the Limits of the Contemporary Alphabet Book, from Seuss to Gorey,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 14 vol. 3 (Fall 1989): 115.
52. Patricia Crain, *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to The Scarlet Letter* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18.
53. *Ibid.*, 91.
54. *Ibid.*, 96.
55. Coats, “P is for Patriarchy,” 90–91.
56. *Ibid.*, 95.
57. *Ibid.*, 88.
58. Michael Heyman, “The Performative Letter, from Medieval to Modern,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 30 vol.1 (Spring 2005): 100. It should also be noted that unlike the alphabet

books that Crain and Coats discuss, indeed, unlike most alphabet books, the first edition of Stein's *To Do* was *not* illustrated. As discussed earlier, problems with its would-be illustrations were part of the reason it wasn't published even after it was accepted by Harrison Smith in manuscript form.

59. This divide between types of alphabet books (letters as material vs. letters as referential) gestures towards a long thread of atomistic philosophy concerned with the units of knowledge and representation that can be traced as far back as Plato and Lucretius. For more, see Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Robin A. H. Waterfield (London: Penguin Books, 1987); and Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*, trans. A. E. Stallings (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

60. Unlike her predecessors, Stein does not directly engage in the capitalistic enterprise that Crain argues is key to the form of the alphabetic array. Stein's letters correspond to names, and not to objects in the world that are available for consumption. Her focus, then, is not on knowing an exterior world, but on knowing an interior world that is shaped by its exterior. As we see in the narrative of Kiki/Active's metamorphosis into an automobile (surely a comment on capitalism), Stein is interested not in capitalism-qua-capitalism, but on the effects of the system on individual bodies and identities.

61. In this moment, as in many others in *To Do*, Stein shifts into free indirect discourse and conflates the authorial voice with that of her characters. Since there are no quotation marks in the text (nor are there, for example, Joycean em-dashes), Stein's narrative is particularly fluid, and distinguishing the voices within it becomes particularly difficult.

62. Stein plays with both the aurality and images of other letters in the same manner; in a transition section between the letters V and W, she writes, "V is V and W is W. . . . Double you. Double you is two for you. Very was V and double you is a double of you. You and You. But really not, what what, no really not, it is a trouble to think double and when double you makes double V and when double v makes double you it is better to be v than u and yet u could be v if it was a trouble to you" (111). Stein's exchanges of "you" for "u" make the passage almost nonsensical, but an aural reading of it unwinds some of her play. The passage thus works on an aural, but not visual, level of reading.

63. Crain, *The Story of A*, 98. We might also look at this differently. While Crain suggests that "A" stands for "apple" because it is in the word "apple," we could instead see "apple" as a metonymic representation of the letter "A."

64. Coats, "P is for Patriarchy," 89.

65. Joseph T. Thomas Jr., "Letters to Children," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 30 vol.1 (Spring 2005): 80.

66. Kate Greenaway, *A Apple Pie* (New York: n.p., 1886), www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/15809.

67. Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 120.

68. Gertrude Stein, *How to Write* (New York: Dover Press, 1975), 24.

69. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

70. *Ibid.*, 43.

71. Meyerowitz, introduction to *How to Write*, v.

72. Gertrude Stein, "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There so Few of Them," in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 412.

73. Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 42.

74. *Ibid.*, 44.

75. *Ibid.*, 41.

76. Many of the questions that Stein raises in *To Do* have been further explored by other writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and have taken center stage in the Oulipo and Language Poetry movements. A comprehensive list of such texts would require more space, but a few alphabet-centric texts of note by avant-garde writers are Walter Abish, *Alphabetical Africa* (New York: New Directions, 1974); Djuna Barnes, *Creatures in an Alphabet* (New York: The Dial Press, 1982); Christian Bök, *Eunoia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2001); Matthea Harvey, "The Future of Terror" and "Terror of the Future," in *Modern Life* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2007); Harryette Mullen, *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Georges Pérec, *La disparition* (Paris: Denoël, 1969); Ron Silliman, *The Alphabet* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008).

