

Autobiographical Displacements

The Elusive Subject and the Figure of the Author in
Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*
and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*

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Abstract

This thesis explores conceptions of authorship and the representation of the author-figure in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982). It focuses on the structural complexity of these textual self-figurations that, in distinct yet arguably related ways, fuse fact and fiction and signify the self through the trope of autobiographical displacement. The close-readings aim to uncover how these experimentations with form both allow a certain degree of self-exposure and simultaneously divert attention from the author-figure characteristic of traditional depictions of the writing self. My argument is that these texts engage with canonized autobiography, and that Stein and Cha's generic subversions in effect problematize the underlying mechanisms of normative autobiographical narration. The contextualized juxtaposition further illustrates certain instrumental theoretical developments within the field of life-writing in general and feminist contributions to autobiography theory in particular.

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Introduction

This study investigates how Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982) diverge from normative autobiographies in their generic fusion of fact and fiction. It explores Stein and Cha's experiments with author-figuration, and the texts' implied reflections on the role of the author. My main argument is that these texts engage with canonized autobiography through their implicit questioning of the underlying mechanisms behind autobiographical narration, both thematically and on a metafictional level. As such, I propose that the texts' constant attentiveness to their own modes of representation may be seen to counter dominating views of authorship by offering alternative narrative strategies in relation to literary self-portraiture.

In his seminal essay "The Autobiographical Pact" (1973), Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a "*retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*" (4, emphasis added), and he further states that the genre demands that "the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist* must be identical" (5). Stein and Cha's self-expressions, however, unsettle such formal demands by splitting Lejeune's contractual autobiographical trinity in their distinct ways. *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* present instead captivating self-expressions positioned at the juncture between the verifiable and the fictional: I propose that their respective experiments with narrative voice result in innovative fictionalizations of the autobiographical act, with implications beyond that of mere entertainment.

This thesis is a product of my general fascination with author theory and theories of literary self-representation, and their intersections – especially in light of the much debated "disappearance" of the author on the one hand, and academic feminist engagements with authorship and autobiography on the other. The discourse on authorship holds questions that are reflective not only of theoretical developments but which are significant in terms of ontology also outside of academia. As Seán Burke writes:

Notions of the self, creativity, psyche, origin, source, theology, onto-theology, agency, free will, determinism, consciousness, causality, gender, cultural identity, objectivity, subjectivity, ownership, authority (scarcely to exhaust the list) are implied not only by the question of authorship but also by theories of the absence, death or disappearance of the author. (xvi)

What is more, I find that *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* both meditate on the politics of representation. By extension, Stein and Cha's formal tropes of displacement call attention to two engaging and interrelated aspects of female textual representation. First, these rather

defiant and subversive authorial figurations point to the fact that the category of the Author has traditionally been defined by white, middle class men, and further the mechanisms of canonization have resulted in a largely male-dominated canon (Burke 145) – as is indicated too, perhaps, in Lejeune’s use of the possessive pronoun *his* above. Simultaneously, the texts’ elusive autobiographical subjects evoke an awareness of the tendency of conflating the woman writer with autobiography, and of how texts by women writers thus have been reductively read as pertaining to particularities rather than as expressions of universal significance (Anderson 84). With these aspects in mind, then, the analysis hopes to uncover how these autobiographical displacements at once allow a degree of self-exposure and divert attention from the author-figure characteristic of traditional depictions of the writing self.

It is significant to note that Gertrude Stein is regarded a literary foremother of language poetry, and as such Theresa Cha’s name sometimes appears together with Stein’s in studies on experimental poetry. Surprisingly, however, scholars have not yet established a direct link between the texts of Stein and Cha. During my research, I have not come across any critical work exploring the, to me, rather evident connections between Stein’s poetry and Cha’s poetic prose, and nowhere is Stein’s autobiographical prose, *The Autobiography*, explicitly mentioned in relation to *Dictee*.¹ This opens the space of a different focus in the discussion of the authors’ self-signification: reading the texts in light of each other has proved both a delightful and productive experiment on my part. In general terms, Cha’s intensely beautiful portraits and unnerving tone contrast to Stein’s humorous hide-and-seek attitude in authorial matters, and their distinct, yet arguably related, textual constructions of elusive autobiographical subjects create, I believe, a constructive analytical dynamic. This is further underlined by the fact that Stein’s unsettling of the authorial signature signals important aspects of the “pre-history of post-modernist life-writing” (Saunders 11), of which Cha’s text is a primary example. Further, a contextualized juxtaposition brings to light certain instrumental theoretical developments within the field of life-writing in general, and feminist contributions to autobiography theory in particular.

¹ In *Everybody’s Autonomy* (2001), Juliana Spahr discusses the possibility of reading practices as a form of liberation in works by Gertrude Stein, Lyn Hejinian, Harryette Mullen and Theresa Cha on the basis of their texts’ democratic experimentalism and nonstandard language practices. Yet in her discussion of *Dictee*, Spahr writes that “there is no evidence of any direct line of influence between Stein and Cha” (50). My analysis is the first to compare and contrast the two.

Gertrude Stein and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933)

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was born in Pennsylvania in the United States, but spent the greater part of her life as a writer in Paris. Her literary and philosophical influence covers mainstream American modernism and the avant-garde literary forms, and she has greatly influenced contemporary feminist experimental writers. Stein's authorship is of critical interest to a wide variety of fields, including women's studies and queer studies, and her work has also received attention from structuralist and poststructuralist critics, language critics, and theorists of poetics (DeKoven 9-10). Indeed, Richard Kostelanetz introduces *The Yale Gertrude Stein* with the words: "no other twentieth-century American author had as much influence as Stein" (qtd. in DeKoven 8), and Marianne DeKoven further emphasizes "the centrality to major currents of twentieth-century philosophy of Stein's psychological, linguistic, epistemological, phenomenological and metaphysical thought" (10).

Nevertheless, as is thematized in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein's works remained largely unpublished until her autobiography made her famous. Fame brought wider literary appreciation, and yet due to the innovative complexity of her texts, Stein is generally perceived as a marginal writer. As DeKoven concludes, resisting canonization her *oeuvre* "fits neatly nowhere" (14). Stein's bibliography includes novels, poetry, plays, lectures where she meditates on artistic creation, film scripts, a libretto, children's books, and a detective novel. Famously, Stein's artistic production is "haunted by the claims of unreliability" (Spahr 34) due to its radical experimentalism, and her post-1932 texts offer "a vision of extreme fragmentation, abstraction, non-selectiveness, open-endedness, randomness, flux" (DeKoven 11). Thus, compared to the great body of her other work, *The Autobiography* presents a highly accessible account of Stein and Toklas' life together between 1907 and 1932. However, Chapter One suggests that Stein's surface-based audience-writing presents a radical textuality that invites reflection concerning the author-figure and the politics of textual representation.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and *Dictee* (1982)

Hak Kyung Cha was born in Pusan, Korea March 4, 1951, to parents Hyung Sang and Hyung Soon Cha, who grew up in Manchuria, but who were made exiles to Korea during World War II.² As is evident in *Dictee*, Cha's family history is marked by Korea's national history and the brutalities of colonialism. In 1962, when Theresa was eleven years old, the Cha family

² The biographical outline is closely based on Moira Roth's bibliography of Cha 151.

emigrated to Hawaii, and later to San Francisco, where Cha received her education at a Catholic school and excelled in her studies. She later went to The University of California, Berkeley, where she received her B.A. in Comparative Literature, and a B.A. and M.A in Fine Arts. Cha's published work includes "Pravada/Istina" in *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Literature* (1982) and *Dictee* (1982), a number of performance projects, video art, mail art pieces, and photography, and she was awarded several prestigious prizes, such as Berkley's Eisner Prize for Video and Film in 1975. She revisited Korea for the first time in 1979, eighteen years after she was made an exile. Theresa Cha died on November 5, 1982. A note on the author's death is printed on the back of the jacket: "Cha was murdered by a stranger in New York City, just a few days after the original publication of *Dictee*".

Dictee has received much scholarly attention, which is largely divided between those who read it in light of postmodern art and theory, and those who look to the text's actualization of Korean American and ideological issues. A central text in Asian American studies in the United States, Cha's autobiographical narrative has been particularly crucial for Korean American expression in particular. The unconventional life-narrative elaborates on female martyrdom, and presents fragmented reflections on lived as well as imagined experience. *Dictee* is an aestheticized and evocative narrative that transports the reader through time and space in its emphasis on others' texts and other(ed) subjectivities. Nameless and largely present only as absence, the narrator challenges the very notion of self-narration, and as such spurs a number of questions relevant to autobiography theory, including whether the text allows categorization at all, and, implicitly, whether the autobiographical mode might not just as much signal the reader's interpretation.

Theoretical framework and methodology

My study draws on several theoretical frameworks. The analysis is based on a close reading of the primary texts where the focus is on the structural complexity of Stein and Cha's textual self-constructions, and their experiments with narrative voice and focalization. Though the focus of this thesis is, for the most part, on the authors' experiments with form, my discussion also considers the philosophical, artistic and political implications of the formal subversions of *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*. As such, some attention is paid to publication history, the texts' reception history, and to theories of authorship and autobiography. The readings are also informed by postmodern theory and discourse theory. Needless to say, all readings testify to the subjective situatedness of the critic: the following is unavoidably a product of the

interpretive strategies that I have acquired during my time at the university. Too, the selective theoretical outline below locates my study within a feminist approach to literature. Yet, my theoretical point of departure in discussing female textual representation is not marked by a specific theory within feminist literary criticism.

In attending to the play with form, the texts' generic hybridization, my object is *not* to discuss how autobiographical *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* are. Rather, it is to discuss how these autobiographical experiments may be read as "acts of criticism" (Saunders 22) in relation to the literary tradition at large, and in contrast to formal autobiography as expressed by Lejeune's "pact".³ Notably, I apply Max Saunders's definition of autobiografiction in the analysis. Term was first applied in the early twentieth century, and is useful in the discussion of *The Autobiography*, as it signals "the literary relationship [...] between fiction and a self's autobiography" (Saunders 7) – a further postmodern development of which is captured in the term "auto/biographic metafiction" (Saunders 21), a taxonomical distinction appropriate for *Dictee*. Before I present the theoretical framework relevant for my reading of the primary texts, I should also like to make clear that in writing about the authors as they appear in the texts, I relate to the narratological concept of the implied author and *not* the actual flesh-and-blood Gertrude Stein and Theresa Cha, as their mind states in the act composition will, of course, remain unknown. According to Martin Gray, the term "the implied author" was coined by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1960) to describe the way in which a narrative "creates a sense of a particular kind of author, which the reader infers from hints and statements in the text" (147). In short, the image of the author that may be inferred from the text is *not* the same as the author, but a product of that text realized by the reader in the reading-process.

Autobiography, the role of the author, and feminist critique

Linda Anderson writes that for the early critics of the genre, "autobiographies are seen as providing proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves" (3). This view resonates with James Olney's conception of the

³ As opposed to Lejeune, Max Saunders does not regard autobiography and fiction as diametrically opposed but rather as profoundly interdependent (21). He notes how the emergence of the concept of autobiography paradoxically coincided with a general view that "all writing had an autobiographical dimension", and that arguably, "the distinction between autobiography and other forms such as biography and fiction is thus *always* blurred" (4). In other words, it could be argued that the genre has never been as clear-cut as to fit Lejeune's genre dichotomy.

autobiographer as “surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness grown out of unique heredity and unique experience”, and his assertion that “separate selfhood is the very motive of creation” (qtd. in Friedman 73). Similarly, Georg Gusdorf emphasizes that the genre’s “vital impulse to order [...] requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to constitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time” (qtd. in Anderson 5). The critical tradition of the 1960s and 1970s largely upheld a canon that privileges the autobiographies of “great men”, such as Saint Augustine, John Bunyan and Jean Jacques Rousseau (Anderson 3; Saunders 15), thus arguably ratifying a particular view of autobiography that largely coheres with the humanist conception of the self, later decentred and fragmented by postmodernism. As Stuart Sim explains:

Humanism has taught us to regard the individual as a unified self, with a central ‘core’ of identity unique to each individual, motivated primarily by the power of reason. [...] Rights and privileges could be ascribed to that subject, whose development and self-realisation came to be regarded as a central objective (if not the central objective) of Western culture. (qtd. in Malpas 57)

Naturally, feminist critics, among them Nancy K. Miller, argue that the genre is gendered in the sense that its promotion of the subject as universal implicitly affirms a masculine, Western heterosexual, middle-class subjectivity, bound up in exclusionary binary politics (Anderson 3). The argument is that the very category of the Author is tied to a patriarchal ideology which operates in such a way as to “delegitimize[...] women’s writing” (Anderson 11), thereby ensuring that the reality-defining role in most part is covered by men. Insofar as autobiography has “helped construct a history of selfhood” it can also be seen as “a site for negotiating and challenging the different ways meaning is given to the self” (Anderson 17, 15).

Roland Barthes’s seminal essay “The Death of the Author” (1968) is crucial in any discussion of authorship, as it advocates the linguistically oriented view that the author is “never more than the instance of writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’, and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language ‘hold together’” (127).⁴ In short, Barthes usurps the authority of the Author as an originator and instead ordains the reader as the meaning-making site. His overall argument is that, in the act of writing, identity and the author’s voice are dissolved and replaced by language, “a tissue of signs” (125, 128): the Author figuratively “enters into his own death” (125) by functioning merely as a “scriptor”

⁴ “[For] postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented [who has no central core of identity, and is to be regarded as in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time” (Sim qtd. in Malpas 57).

(127). This has implications for autobiography too: his autobiographical text, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1977), is, as Anderson notes, “probably the most famous attempt to write an autobiography ‘against itself’” in that it “deconstructs from within the major assumptions underlying the genre” (66). Its multiple subject positionings presents the view that the coherent self is a fiction – that the humanist notion is an illusion of the past. Similarly, the repeated beginnings have the elaborate effect of stressing the many (and inherently unstable, often contradictory) truths of a subject’s life, thus unsettling the meaning-defining nature of traditional autobiographic narration. It is of particular significance to my analysis of Stein and Cha’s elusive texts that Barthes, too, finds discourse which refuses fixity to be the most meaningful in terms of self-representation, precisely because it presents a “breaking up any simple identification, creating distance and multiple perspectives” (Anderson 70). Interestingly, critics have asked whether such a deconstructive approach marks the end of autobiography. However, as Burke and Anderson point out, “it is important to distinguish between critique and rejection.” By flaunting “the impossibility of escape into an unmediated selfhood, he [Barthes] also resituates autobiography within a different critical moment. Autobiography survives its reconfiguring by poststructuralism, by absorbing and acknowledging self-critique” (Anderson 70).

While the tendency towards multiplicity has been welcomed for its liberating possibilities, however, several feminist academics have raised a theoretical objection against Barthes’s proposed dissolved subject and absented, de-authorized author. That is, these notions are perceived by many as being at odds with a feminist political agenda, which involves the “valorisation of women’s writing” (Miller 198), the furthering of female agency, and the transformative potential of texts to demonstrate, and thereby affirm, the plurality of options to the female self – in short, to get away from the patriarchal construction of Woman (Anderson 83-4; Hutcheon 2).⁵ As Burke notes, Miller’s “Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader” (1986) pinpoints how the theoretical (“largely male-inspired”) anti-author turn occurred just as feminists had begun to unearth “the space of women’s authorship” (Burke 149), when previously devalued women-authored texts were invested with increased significance – a trend which involved establishing a women’s canon and “revising theories of autobiography” (Smith and Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory* 5, 7). In the

⁵ Linda Hutcheon remarks that “the difference between the postmodern and the feminist can be seen in the potential quietism of the political ambiguities or paradoxes of postmodernism. The many feminist social agendas demand a theory of agency, but such a theory is visibly lacking in postmodernism, caught as it is in a certain negativity that may be inherent in any critique of cultural dominants. It has no theory of positive action on a social level; all feminist positions do” (22).

wake of the proclaimed Author's Death, Miller stresses the continued importance of "the formation of female critical subjects" (194) by arguing that:

The postmodern decision that the Author is Dead and the subject along with him does not [...] necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* self, ego, cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentred, 'disoriginated', deinstitutionalised, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position. (196-7)

Burke's argument is that Miller manages to counter both Barthes's "anonymous textuality" and the opposing concept of universal subjectivity by opting instead for "a model of situated feminist subjectivity" (149) – an authorial positioning which, as will become apparent, is arguably exemplified in both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*. In other words, Miller's essay expresses the view effectively phrased as follows: "you must have a self before you can afford to deconstruct it" (Jouve qtd. in Anderson 83).

The most important aspects of early feminist theoretical revision to my thesis on autobiographical displacement and the primary texts' polyphonic structure include the counter-notion of "difference theories" and the proposed "relationality" of women's autobiography. While *The Autobiography* obviously predates feminist literary theory, *Dictee* does not, and the following outline presents much-circulated feminist thought around the time of *Dictee*'s publication. Its relevance to Stein's text concerns its reception. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist academics posed the following questions: "to what extent is [women's autobiography] characterized by frequent digression, giving readers the impression of a fragmentary, sifting narrative voice, or indeed a plurality of voices in dialogue? Is the subject in women's autobiography less firmly bounded, more 'fluid'?" And: "should this privileging of the personal and domestic be gendered female?" (Smith and Watson *Women* 10). In her study of women's autobiography, Mary G. Mason finds that "the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the discourse of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other'" but that this does not compromise the autonomy of the woman autobiographer (321). This essentializing logic is repeated in Estelle C. Jelinek's *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980), which "contrast[s] the autobiographies of women and men on several points" with the conclusion that men's texts are distancing, aggrandising, and coherent, valuing "linearity, harmony, and orderliness" as opposed to those of women autobiographers, who "emphasise personal and domestic details and describe connections to other people", and whose self-

conscious authenticating texts are characterized by understatement, diversity and a fragmentary and multidimensional aesthetic (Smith and Watson *Women* 9). The term “relational life writing” was coined by Susan Stanford Friedman in 1985 to signal the intersubjective model of women’s texts (Smith and Watson *Reading Autobiography* 278). Friedman argues against the “individualistic paradigms of the self” posited by seminal autobiography theorists Gusdorf and Olney, since it: “ignore[s] the collective and relational identities in the individuation processes of women and minorities” (72).⁶ Altering Olney’s manifesto, Friedman states that autobiography is possible when:

the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and is still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being. (74-5)

Later feminist theoreticians have critiqued the initial essentialism of such theories. Among them are Miller and Donna C. Stanton, who also argue against “the universalization of maleness as humankind in the literary canon” but whose “reading for difference” is premised on the notion of “multiple differences of the subject”, thus avoiding the essentialist conception of MAN and WOMAN, and the problematic “group identity” of the supposed “egalitarian sisterhood” found wanting in its reproduction of binaries (Smith and Watson *Women* 10). As Chapter Three discusses Stein and Cha’s texts in terms of language experiments, it is interesting to note that some feminist poststructuralists applied the term “difference” “to replace the notion of gendered identity as something innate, drawing attention instead to how ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are meanings produced within and through language” (Anderson 82).

Irrespective of theoretical approach, feminist critics agree that writing and theorizing women’s autobiography can help further subjects’ agency. As my analysis demonstrates, both Stein and Cha thematize literary canonization and the difficulty and essential importance of gaining a voice, on several levels. Indeed, Cha’s text in particular may be seen to demonstrate Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s point that “autobiography has been employed by many women writers to write themselves into history. Not only feminism but also literary and cultural theory have felt the impact of women’s autobiography as a previously unacknowledged mode of making visible formerly invisible subjects” (*Woman* 5), just as both

⁶ Friedman draws on Nancy Chodorow’s psychoanalytic theory of ego formation and women’s developmental difference, which holds that “the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate” (Friedman 77). Since girls do not depend on a dis-identification with the mother women have “more flexible ego boundaries” (Smith and Watson *Women* 17).

texts, by extension, illustrate that literary self-representations may have *real* consequences. The analysis points to how *Dictee* underscores texts' power of definition, their meaning producing mechanisms in relation to identity formation. It further discusses *The Autobiography*'s performative force in enabling the publication of Stein's work.

Autobiography and Postmodern theory

My analysis of the primary texts draws on postmodern theory, which necessitates a brief explanation of certain terms and concepts. This is particularly relevant in order to better appreciate Cha's rather aesthetically challenging text. I have chosen to elaborate on the position held by Linda Hutcheon since hers seems the most compatible with my own readings and analytic purposes. Hutcheon finds the postmodernist mode "resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political", stating that "it [often] takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement", which "ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (1, 1-2). Moreover, it serves to subvert and decentre the very concepts around which it evolves, self-consciously and critically underlining its own dual consciousness in the process (Hutcheon 1). Both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* offer the reader overt self-reflexivity, deliberate ambiguity, and they embrace plurality in their emphasis on their own textuality and intertextuality.⁷ Hutcheon stresses postmodern fiction's frequent twofold focus, which I find to be the case in *Dictee* – on artistic self-involvement, and its epistemological questioning of the representation of "real life", that is, that which is commonly thought to be true outside of texts (2). The resulting tension between the artistic and the real, claims Hutcheon, "finally defines the paradoxically worldly texts of postmodernism" (2). This enables the potential postmodern engagement with what Victor Burgin termed the "politics of representation" in that it brings to the fore the fact that all representations are "ideologically grounded" and inevitably bound up "with social and political relations and apparatuses" (qtd. in Hutcheon 3).

Prior to postmodernism, the notion of mimetic representation (which is the premise of realist texts), was largely left unchallenged. Postmodern writing, however, tends to scrutinize its own narrative mechanisms and conventions, thereby underlining the text's status as

⁷ "Intertextuality" is a term coined by the French critic Julia Kristeva to signal how texts always interrelate through for example allusion and imitation, and more generally how texts are interdependent structures of meaning since they are judged in relation to the literary tradition; that is pre-existing texts. This idea is connected to general structuralist analyses of linguistic structures which hold that language within literary discourse is a self-referential system whose structure has little to do with "reality" (Gray 151-2).

artefact, and such metafictional aspects are central in the author-figuration and the implicit reflections on the role of the author in both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as “not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency within the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break,⁸ of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion” (14). In other words, it is a literary creation which illuminates and problematizes its own construction as artifice: metafiction questions the general ability of texts to represent reality, and this scepticism towards the genre forms part of Stein and Cha’s formal subversions. To complicate representational matters further, much postmodern fiction, such as Cha’s text, “self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language”, and the argument is that texts cannot represent the real itself, they merely present *discourses* of the real (Waugh 14, 3), discourses that in effect *produce* what we come to know as reality, be it fictional reality or historical knowledge. Much postmodern fiction, including *Dictee*, unsettles the reader’s expectations through artistic de-familiarizing textual strategies and as such poses ontological questions concerning how we can know and understand the real, and how the real can be represented in texts by pinpointing the always operating filter of mediation (Hutcheon 1-2, 18, 30-1).

In Chapter Two, I discuss Cha’s problematizing of the representation of the past, and suggest how *Dictee* might be read in light of the postmodern sub-genre of historiographic metafiction. This mode of engaging with canonized history especially builds on insights derived from the theoretical analyses of historian Hayden White, who works to denaturalize conventional conceptions within historiography (Hutcheon 50, 48). White likens history writing to the writing of fiction in his influential *Metahistory* (1973), and argues that due to the unavoidable implementation of narrative techniques involved in the explanation and representation of historical data, “proper history” is always already a “philosophy of history” seeing as the recording of history can never escape the “precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively ‘historical’ explanation should be” (White xi, ix). In White’s words: “[t]he historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end” (7). It follows from the above arguments that “the historian

⁸“The alternation of frame and frame-break (or the construction of an illusion through the imperceptibility of the frame and the shattering of illusion through the constant exposure of the frame) provides the essential deconstructive method of metafiction” (Waugh 31).

performs an essentially *poetic act*” (White x) in narrativizing data, since the explanation of events necessitates selective choices of interpretation, literary tropes, restructuring, editing, and the like. As such, White’s claims may illuminate my arguments concerning Cha’s deconstruction of canonized history, and her challenging of the exclusory politics involved in knowledge-production and circulation.

Chapter outline

The first two chapters open with a section explaining each text’s version of the trope of autobiographical displacement with a view to Lejeune’s trinity in order to prepare the ground for the discussion of its implications in terms of author-figuration and the textual representation of the role of the author. Chapter One, Rhetorical Third-Personality: Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, investigates Stein’s author-figuration as expressed through the play with contemporary discourses of genius and im/personality, and through the author’s mode of writing the self as “seen from the outside” (A 170). The coda considers how *The Autobiography* might be read in light of Stein’s lecture, “What Are Masterpieces and Why Are There so Few of Them”, which meditates on artistic creation. Chapter Two, The Rhetoric of Apparent Authorial Absence: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*, discusses the elusive autobiographer, and the signification of the author-figure in its apparent disappearance in favour of multiple subjects. The analysis looks at how *Dictee*’s female-focused deconstructionist approach to textual representation bears the mark of historiographic metafiction in its illustration of underlying politics of authorship. Reading *Dictee* is not a stroll down logic lane, and I have therefore found it necessary to allow a little more space to Cha’s text than is given to *The Autobiography*. Chapter Three, The Elusive Subject as Seen From the Outside: A Comparative Analysis, takes the discussion of the trope of displacement further by way of juxtaposition. Where the first two chapters explore the text-internal mechanisms of Stein and Cha’s generic fusions respectively, the final chapter brings to the discussion additional aspects of autobiography theory that might shed light on Stein and Cha’s implied autobiographical strategies. It also proposes ways in which *The Autobiography* may be regarded a forerunner to the kind of postmodern self-expression found in *Dictee*, with an emphasis on textual self-reflexivity. The Conclusion suggests ways in which the analysis can be extended, and presents concluding remarks on how these experimental self-figurations reflect on the implied role of the author and the politics of authorship in literary self-representation.

1 Rhetorical Third-Personality: Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

The depiction of the author-figure is quite simply complicated in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and this characteristic ambiguity continues to puzzle its readers to this day. Generally considered one of Stein's most accessible texts, in terms of structure, *The Autobiography*'s complexity concerns its unorthodox investment in the role of the author.⁹ This chapter discusses how Stein's self-representation subverts distinctions between fiction and autobiography. Further, it explores *The Autobiography*'s experimental self-figuration and its inversion of the logic of the autobiographical genre, which effectively demands that the reader "rethink the role of the signature" (Anderson 76, 13; Perloff 65). The calculated role-play arising from Stein's claim to poetic license in the midst of a generally truth-demanding genre invites reflection concerning the author-function both text-internally and on a paratextual level.

The Autobiography is a pivotal work in Stein's career on several levels: it marks her transition from an object of ridicule to receiving more appreciative readerly attention, as Alice B. Toklas wittingly anticipates in the text itself. Prior to *The Autobiography*'s enabling success in entering the literary marketplace, most of Stein's work was rejected by publishers, and the author was largely known merely in relation to other Parisian Left Bank artists, as an influential art collector of the avant-garde, and hostess of the legendary Saturday evenings at 27 Rue de Fleurus. In this study, it is crucial to note that an industriously circulated myth around Stein's person has informed much of the reception of her work prior to and after – and arguably partly because of – the publication of *The Autobiography*. As Marianne DeKoven points out, this myth has to a great extent served to devalue her work by reducing the author to a personality. "Moreover," DeKoven continues, "the most widely accepted myth of the history of Stein's reputation is less interested in *her*, even as a personality, than in her association with important men: William James, Picasso, Matisse, Apollinaire, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wilder, Anderson" (8). The recent appearance of "Gertrude Stein" in this very capacity in Woody Allen's film, *Midnight in Paris* (2011), playfully underlines her valued

⁹ See also James E. Breslin 901; Leigh Gilmore 56-7; Anna Linzie 142; and Cynthia Merrill 14-6. "Third-personality" is Max Saunders's term. For his usage, see *Self Impression* 136-64.

literary impact, while also, in part, introduces the Stein myth to a new audience.¹⁰ With the myth in mind, then, it is interesting that *The Autobiography* directs attention to and simultaneously diverts attention precisely from Stein's personality, in what may be read as an impersonalized autobiographical text due to its mode of third-person narration. Indeed, my aim is also to demonstrate how the text may be read in light of Stein's theoretical lectures on the subject of identity: the implied authorial intention may in fact be to subvert any hunt for personality by way of self-conscious rhetorical aesthetics. I will argue that *The Autobiography* indirectly engages in the contemporary discourse of impersonality as well as that of genius. However, as will become apparent, many reviewers have overlooked Stein's ironizing tone, and for this reason the authorial genius-figuration has frequently caused controversy.

Significantly, *The Autobiography* is almost uncharacteristically accessible in its portrayal of Stein and Toklas's life between 1907 and 1932. In a humorous and surface-like manner, it reflects on "how two americans happened to be in the heart of an art movement of which the outside world at that time knew nothing" (A 33), describes their charitable work for the American Fund for French Wounded in their little Ford car named "auntie" during the First World War (A 183, 187), and explains the genesis and publication processes of Stein's work. It also presents numerous amusing views on the various famous habitués of the atelier and their art. This has led several critics to label the text as "chitchat" and "anecdotal and gossipy" (Breslin 901),¹¹ often qualifying their dismissal with the quote: "remarks are not literature" (A 85, 237), which is an echo of Stein's advice to Hemingway. According to Ulla E. Dydo, Stein too regarded *The Autobiography* as "audience writing" while "works like *Stanzas* – virtually everything Stein wrote up to 1932 and a good deal that she wrote after she became famous – she described as her 'real kind' of books: a literature of word compositions rather than a literature of subject matter" (qtd. in Perloff 61).¹² Such categorization of aesthetics into "high" and "low" literature must be understood in the context of avant-garde modernism, which objected to mass-audience appreciation and regarded autobiography a

¹⁰ As DeKoven notes, however, "if it were not her writing, her reputation as a 'personality' would not have persisted as it has in the public mind. The myth of the interesting-woman-whose-work-can-be-ignored allows the notion that it is her life, and not her art, which supports her reputation. The world thinks of her as a personality, but it would not do so if she were not such an important writer" (11). Notably, Marjorie Perloff rightly describes as "[t]he longing for 'the image of the real Gertrude'...has bedevilled Stein criticism almost from the beginning" (62-3) as well as the related Stein parodies that revel in the myth. For further discussion, see Perloff's "(Im)personating Gertrude Stein" where she deconstructs Robert A. Wilson's (1979) play *Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein* (played by Pat Carroll) which was advertised as "one-woman play, the essence of Gertrude Stein", which invites the audience to laugh at "the stereotype of Gertrude the Eccentric" (63).

¹¹ See for example B. L. Reid's *Art by Subtraction* (1958).

¹² For further information, see Ulla E. Dydo's "*Stanzas in Meditation: The Other Autobiography*".

commodity genre. As Anna Linzie notes, Stein was well aware that her experiments with autobiography, “a lesser form of writing”, might jeopardize “her status as a Modernist genius” (143).¹³ Several critics have remarked how the genre jars with Stein’s aesthetics since its conventional – and to Stein undesirable – function is to produce identity in its development-premised and recognition-based narration, the very notions Stein sought to avoid in her writing (Merrill 14; Breslin 901). This critical observation accords with Stein-the-character’s comment in *The Autobiography* itself: “For sime [sic] time now many people, and publishers, have been asking Gertrude Stein to write her autobiography and she has replied, not possibly” (A 271). Presumably, this induced her to jokingly perform her “creative struggle” with autobiography in precisely an autobiographical statement, in which identity arguably is not the issue (Breslin 901), and which presents a clear breach of Philippe Lejeune’s contractual condition: identity between “the *author*, the *narrator*, and the *protagonist*” (5). Stein’s genre games, caused by the simple multiplying strategy inscribed in the fictionalized narrative voice of Toklas’s persona, involves destabilizing the text’s status in terms of authorship.

On its own, the title indicates that the reader is faced with a life-narrative authored and narrated by the historically existing person of Toklas, in which Toklas herself figures as the main character. However, only one of these “contractual” autobiographical presuppositions following the title is correct: Toklas is the narrator of *The Autobiography*, but she is not its author, nor does she appear as the predominant character. On the structural level, then, Toklas is the “I” who tells the story of Stein’s life, and as such *The Autobiography* presents a case of autobiographical displacement due to its dissociation between author and narrator.¹⁴

Consequently, the text may be labelled a third-person autobiography. As Max Saunders suggests, transferring the narrative position to Toklas is a “complex manoeuvre which both accepts and denies her own and Toklas’s identities as themselves, by creating them as seen by each other: Stein’s portrait of Toklas portraying Stein” (360), which thereby presents “the

¹³ For an extensive account, see Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996).

The Autobiography self-reflexively comments on the “avant-garde rejection of marketplace rewards” (Curnutt 299), and mocks both her fellow artists and herself. Cf. “She began to tease me and say that I should write my autobiography. Just think, she would say, what a lot of money you would make” (A 271), and:

“But Henry, Gertrude Stein used to answer dolefully, don’t you think I will ever have any success, I would like to have a little you know. Think of my unpublished manuscripts. But Henry McBride was firm, the best that I can wish you, he always said, is to have no success. [...] He does not think that now it would hurt her” (A 133).

¹⁴Karin Lokke terms *The Autobiography* “an autobiographical text rooted in an effacement of self” (15), and Linzie notes how “*The Autobiography* has been described [by Timothy Dow Adams] as a development of the quintessentially American genre of the ‘tall tale’, one prominent feature of which is ‘pretending to be someone else writing about (one’s own) exploits’ [...] the result is ‘a new genre – the mock autobiography’” (143). Also, Saunders states that “it has much in common with the *Künstlerroman*. But Stein eschews the pseudonymity of the modernist *Künstlerroman-à-clef*” (360).

inside as seen from the outside” (A 170). Though there is little cause to question the general truthfulness of the text’s content,¹⁵ the added play with narrative voice introduces a fictional element: Toklas’s authorship. In Saunders’s words, it is therefore “an indisputable example of a fictionally authored auto/biography”, a rhetorical move whereby “the generic label becomes ironized” (19, 369). As will become apparent, the act of fictionalization allows Stein to negotiate her way past the conventions which to her made an autobiographical statement impossible: “the problem of the external and the internal” (A 130), that is, of “the self and the other: the problem of autobiographical identity” (Merrill 11). I will return to the text-internal effects of the duality of voice below, suffice it here to say that it takes the form of a textual game of hide-and-seek, and that the displacement operates in such a way as to result in the text’s near reading like that of a detective story where the reader’s task is to figure out the complex mystery of the authorial attribution of the text at hand.

Text-internally, the most explicit meta-comment on whose hand actually penned the life-narrative arrives with humorous linguistic force on the final page:

About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it. (A 272)

In effect, this further destabilizes the author location since it self-consciously upholds the pretence even at the revealing moment: Stein has Toklas-the-narrator tell the reader in an offhand way that Stein has authored her [Toklas’s] autobiography – “And she [Stein] has and this is it”. This ingenious statement reads as though “Toklas had really had the idea/intention of writing an autobiography, so in conception at least it really is hers; it is as if Stein is just being *her* secretary” (Saunders 368),¹⁶ when all along it is Toklas who is portrayed as too busy to write her autobiography: “I am a pretty good housekeeper and a pretty good gardener and a pretty good needlewoman and a pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor and a pretty good vet for dogs and I have to do them all at once and I find it difficult to add being a pretty good author” (A 272). Not only does she un-mask and re-mask the authorial act thus, Stein simultaneously brings into the equation Defoe and the fictional character Robinson

¹⁵ Naturally, not all found these characterisations agreeable. In the supplement to *Transition* in July 1935 (Vol.23), Henri Matisse, Tristan Tzara, Maria Jolas, George Braque, Eugine Jolas, and André Salmon published a pamphlet entitled “Testimony against Gertrude Stein” to demonstrate disapproval and correct her facts. Breslin notes that the text is “marked at once as an autobiography and a fiction (since it is the autobiography of someone other than the author). [...]The book is an historical memoir; the book is a fictional construct” (911). Linzie too makes the point about the fictionalizing strategy, see Linzie 145.

¹⁶ Cf. “Before I decided to write this book my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein, I had often said that I would write, *The wives of geniuses I have sat with*” (A 18).

Crusoe, who in fact was based on a real person (Alexander Selkirk) who had written his own autobiography prior to Defoe's fictional text about the fictionalized character (Saunders 368). Stein's characters are of course *not* fictional in this sense. The only fictional element is the supposed attribution of authorship to Toklas, which spurs questions that are partly left unanswered (Breslin 913).¹⁷

Stein herself commented on the text's composition in the following manner: "the narrative in itself is not what is in your mind but what is in somebody else's ... And so I did a tour de force with the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* [sic], and when I sent the first half to the agent, they sent back a telegram to see which one of us had written it!" (qtd. in Merrill 14). As Linzie notes, the agent would indeed have cause to doubt its authorship, only being in possession of the first half (148). Thus, the following question demands attention: to what extent is the reader, prior to the reading-process, made aware of the fact that the autobiographical text is written by Stein, and most importantly, what difference does it make whether or not "By Gertrude Stein" is added on the title page? Initially, *The Autobiography* was serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* from May to August, 1933. Interestingly, the revealing "By Gertrude Stein" preceded the heading of each of the four instalments, which would decidedly confuse readers as one cannot, per definition, write anyone else's autobiography. Since this was the custom of the magazine, however, the attribution of authorship to Stein through the inclusion of the authorial signature does not necessarily signal Stein's intention – thus, it remains unknown whether she wanted to draw such direct attention to the playful doubling around which *The Autobiography* revolves (Saunders 355). Stein's decision that her name be removed from any part of the cover and title page when the text was originally published by Harcourt in its entirety in September that same year, might indicate that she wanted to keep the reader as confused as possible throughout (Saunders 355). Instead, the first book edition included sixteen illustrations, several of which added to the authored confusion.¹⁸ The most interesting in relation to authorship attribution is the much discussed Man Ray photograph, the original frontispiece and dust-jacket, where Stein is sitting at her desk writing, out of focus, with Toklas coming in through the door in the distance surrounded

¹⁷ Though, of course, it could be argued that any self-transcription transforms the self to fiction. To be on the safe side, I would like to repeat that any reference to Stein and Toklas in relation to text-internal affairs has to do with the implied versions, unless specified as the "real" or "historical" person.

¹⁸ For an overview and discussion of the original illustrations, see Paul K. Alkon. In this context, it is notable that the first illustration shows the first page of the handwritten manuscript of *The Autobiography*, and also that the last figure as it is a painting of Alice B. Toklas by Francis Rose – which equally, though more obviously, represents "Toklas" as a construct, though this goes unremarked by Alkon. Alkon concludes that "the effect would be similar if there were only words" (881).

by light. Thus, the photograph is reflective of the equivocal grammatical subject of the text itself in its ambiguous positioning of the two women (Breslin 904). The first book edition involved a great deal of publicity work, which as Saunders writes, “doubtless helped the book become a bestseller” (356). While Stein is revealed as the true subject on the front-flap in a note on the text’s themes, the back of the jacket extended the joke of Toklas’s fictive authorship with the following commentary:

Since the first announcement of the forthcoming publication of this book, innumerable questions have been asked about Alice B. Toklas. Who is this author? [...] Does she really exist? One newspaper critic, Harry Hansen to be exact, even went so far to suggest that Alice B. Toklas did not exist. He was promptly rebuked by three correspondents [...]. (qtd. in Saunders 356)

Naturally, the reputed questions were fictional, just as the hoax about Toklas is “that she doesn’t exist in the way she was being claimed to exist, as ‘this author’” (Saunders 356).

When the “By Gertrude Stein” is declared in peritext, the mystery is somewhat narrowed down to the questions of genesis, authority, reliability, and the extent of the possible and signalled collaboration. In other words, a degree of carefully choreographed indeterminacy remains even if the reader is made aware of the official status of authorship. What is more, *The Autobiography*’s reception history reveals that critics have continued to speculate about the status of its authorship, some of which suggest various degrees of co-authorship on Toklas’s part due to its un-Steinian style.¹⁹ However, as Richard Bridgeman concluded after studying the manuscript: “the physical evidence indicates that *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was written by Gertrude Stein alone, with few hesitations or changes” (qtd. in Bloom 92). Also, in interviews, Toklas herself has repeatedly denied that there is truth in the rumours (Linzie 160). To echo James E. Breslin: “perhaps the most important point about this debate is that it seems to have been generated not just by any extraliterary curiosity about the book’s composition, but by an actual literary effect the book has on its readers – namely, the effect of raising questions about just whose book it is” (903). This thesis will not continue the speculation, but merely note that such debates have informed the text’s reception. My object in the following sections is to discuss the effects of the trope of fictive authorship, its autobiographical displacement, and the consequent depiction of the author, as it generates questions concerning the author-figure on several levels.

¹⁹ Linzie concludes that, “this is a non-issue. Nevertheless, most critics who have engaged with the question of authority/authorship in relation to *The Autobiography* have tried to settle the question, either arguing that Toklas influenced the text greatly or contesting rumours that she co-wrote Stein’s bestseller” (141).

1.1 Writing Other, writing Self: “Gertrice/Altrude” and authorial authority

According to Lynne Z. Bloom, the “narration of one’s own autobiography through the persona of the individual about whom the biography was supposedly written is [...] completely innovative and utterly unique” (82). If this is the case, it follows that Stein entered a commodity genre only to answer the modernist call to “make it new” by writing an autobiography from the view of the Other. Remarkably, *The Autobiography*’s perhaps most explicit reference to its authorial agenda comes towards its end:

It was also about this time that Harry Gibb came back to Paris a short while. He was very anxious that Gertrude Stein should publish a book of her work showing what she had been doing in those years. Not a little book, he kept saying, a big book, something they can get their teeth into. You must do it, he used to say. But no publisher will look at it now that John Lane is no longer active, she said. It makes no difference, said Harry Gibb violently, it is the essence of the thing they must see and you must have a lot of things printed, and then turning to me he said, Alice you do it. I knew he was right and that it had to be done. But how. (A 223-4)

What is to be observed is that the answer to “But how” rings loud on a meta-level: due to certain aesthetic principles, the request resulted in the construction of a different space for self-expression. The ambiguous and overtly constructed authorial voice, which is playfully projected onto Toklas, presents, I believe, a merging of the two implied figures of Stein and Toklas. In other words, the narrative position has two occupants, and as such moves beyond a single personality: the autobiographical subject is thus at once subjective and objective, personal and impersonal. In her third-person autobiography, therefore, Stein implicitly explores the concepts of authorial positioning, authority, and authorial autonomy through the simple formal rhetoric of shifting the narrative position away from the author, placing Toklas as grammatical subject and her textual self as the observed object.²⁰

The strategy of directing attention to Stein is almost immediately evident. The first-person pronoun is playfully repeated no less than forty-three times over the course of the first three pages under the heading “Before I came to Paris”, only to decidedly turn Toklas’s life-story into the story of Stein’s artistic production and Toklas’s relationship with Stein (Saunders 362). For example, introductorily Toklas states that the period of her life, after her

²⁰ In “Autobiography in the Third Person” Lejeune says of *The Autobiography* that “the game is a double one, both novelistic and autobiographical. The novelistic aspect requires the construction of the witness character, the invention of a perspective for that character, and the forging of a style to provide the consistency necessary to sustain the narrative as a whole” (43). In “Fictional Narrative, Factual Narrative”, Gérard Genette discusses the relationship between author and narrator, and holds that “their rigorous identification (A=N), to the degree that this can be established, defines factual narrative” and that “their dissociation (A≠N) defines fiction” (764), which, as he indicates, places third-person autobiography “closer to fiction than to factual narrative” (765), a problematic movement in some respects, as it blurs distinctions between various forms of “fictionalization” (765, 761). Genette’s concludes, with Lejeune that *The Autobiography* “is not a biography of Stein fictitiously loaned by her to Toklas but more simply (!) an autobiography of Toklas written by Stein” (765).

mother's death, is best described by Stein – even though it occurred prior to their meeting: “In the story of Ada in *Geography and Plays* Gertrude Stein has given a very good description of me as I was at that time” (A 8). Notably, this shift of ground has several functions. The narrative voice effectively deflects the reader's expectations and desires for psychological details, as brought on by the genre's classic confessional mode of the Augustinian “inward-turning gaze” (Anderson 17), and turns instead to self-promoting intertextuality. Simultaneously, *The Autobiography* flaunts its own artifice in this more or less explicit narrative repositioning – and already it is possible to detect Stein's “great shout of laughter” (A 24) at her own games. By extension, Toklas's statement, and its merged focalization, may suggest a deep understanding between the two women to the extent that they can interchangeably speak for one another. Alternatively, as many critics would have it, the underlying voice-pretence could be seen to provide textual proof of Stein's silencing egotism and dominant airs, underlining Toklas's function as dummy or textual tool.²¹ Either way, there is arguably a distinct duality of expression in this third-person autobiography, which subversively disrupts the traditional monological autobiographical discourse ensuing from Lejeune's autobiographical trinity (Bloom 86). Consequently, Stein counters the dominant autobiographical formula which is seen to reproduce and thereby confirm “a certain conception of authorship” and validate its status of authority over texts that in turn are seen to provide direct access to the writer's self (Anderson 3). That is, Stein's deliberate displacement of autobiographical subjectivity resists the reproduction of “[t]he unified, transcendent ‘I’ of the autobiographical tradition” (Anderson 25). Nevertheless, Stein remains, albeit ironically, conventionally self-absorbed.

A further effect of the dynamic voice-play has been to make critics connect Stein's rhetoric to her lesbianism. Indeed, Leigh Gilmore labels the implied subjectivity a “lesbian subject position”, and takes it to be a codified expression of Gertrude and Alice's real-life love and lifelong partnership (57). This reading, argues Gilmore, may be supported by a scribbling found in the margins of Stein's manuscript to “Lend a Hand”, where she plausibly toys with the idea of merging their beings in text: “Gertrice/Altrude”.²² When the Other who

²¹ In their *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (1988) feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see Toklas's as a “fictionalized as a creature who functions like a rubber stamp” (qtd. in Linzie 149), which appears to be a common critical view of her position in the narrative.

²² Gilmore argues that the doubled signature “reveals Stein's ambivalence about the self as a unified figure” and that this “suggestive marginalia [...] destabilizes the signature on which traditional interpretations of autobiography depend” (59).

speaks the Self is a lover, these distinctions are arguably somewhat relaxed, as understood through the clichéd expression “my better self”, and the like. Nonetheless, this specific strategy of third-personality challenges the singularity of the subject, as well as “assumptions about the autonomy/authority of the author” (Gubar 61). As such, in the place of the traditionally stable and male autobiographical self, we find not only generic fusion but further a destabilizing doubling of the “I” by a doubly marginalized autobiographer: a homosexual woman – triply so when one takes into account that Stein was also Jewish (in a Europe that faced increasing anti-Semitism). The author playfully challenges an institutionalized genre through countering conventions from within, and by taking on the “masculine” discourse of genius of which canonized autobiography is traditionally thought to signal and sustain. Consequently, I hold that Stein’s multiple experiments with autobiography amount to what DeKoven calls an “undoing of patriarchal portraiture” (9).

In terms of design, the audience-friendly fusion of voices results in a more accessible version of Stein’s characteristic stylistics. Indeed, Breslin writes that “the book’s style blends the domestic particularity, whimsical humor, and ironic precision of Toklas with some of the leading features of Stein’s writing – e.g., stylized repetition, digression, a language that continually points up its own artifice” (904).²³ The fiction of Toklas’s authorship is gestured towards in the repetition of Toklasian characteristics, which supposedly explains *The Autobiography*’s narrative approach, as in: “I do inevitably take my comparisons from the kitchen because I like food and cooking and know something about it” (A 46). Possibly, the quote comments on the fact that the real Toklas does not know much about writing fiction, thereby underlining that her voice is the determining fictionalizing factor in *The Autobiography*. Furthermore, the text is full of structuring announcements: “I will tell the whole story as I afterwards learnt it but *now* I must find Fernande and propose to her to take french lessons from her” (A 24, emphasis added), which simultaneously adds to the metacommentary. Though the writing of text was started “about six weeks ago” (A 272),

In “The Mind, the Body, and Gertrude Stein” and “Somagrams”, Catharine Simpson contextualizes and discusses Stein’s lesbianism, and states that the author gradually came to accept and eventually celebrate her homosexuality, and that Toklas’s love and support was highly significant to Stein’s happiness and creativity (493-5). She understands the translation of Stein and Toklas’s love into codes to be primarily motivated by the wish “to protect her private relationship with Toklas” (502), though notably same-sex sexuality was illegal at the time. Stimpson also discusses authorial conditions for women writers, and Stein’s relationship to contemporary feminism and the concept of the New Woman.

²³ Cf. “There are a great many things to tell of what was happening then and what happened before, which led up to then, but now I must describe what I saw when I came” (A 10). “I say that we did not know but yes perhaps we did know” (A 21). For a discussion of extratextual evidence of the real Stein and Toklas’s copying of each other’s expressive mannerisms, see Stimpson 496, and Nicola Shaughnessy 24ff.

Toklas's "now" in the above quotation refers to the proposition of French lessons that occurred in 1907. The quote thus illustrates the mode of the continuous present for which Stein is so famous, and evokes awareness on the part of the reader that the documented events are fictionalized in their narration. In short, Toklas-the-narrator draws attention not only to the narrated incidents but, significantly, to the act of representation itself.²⁴

In comparison to the real Toklas's own memoir *What is Remembered* (1963), which according to Bloom, is a more private and personal account of their lives together, the narrator's descriptions of the same events in *The Autobiography* have a cut-and-dry quality (87-8), which also playfully reminds the reader that this life-narrative is a construct that presents artfully distilled versions of lived life. Perhaps the most explicit example of how Stein plays down would-be intriguing aspects is when she has Toklas voice the following:

Within a year I also had gone and I had come to Paris. There I went to see Mrs Stein who had in the meantime returned to Paris, and there at her house I met Gertrude Stein. I was impressed by the coral brooch she wore and by her voice. I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead. I have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of the three cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began. (A 9)

It is remarkable how specific Toklas is in her attention to generalities, while simultaneously withholding the personal reasons why this incident made her life "full", and moreover, what this new dimension entailed. The reader is left to ponder the real significance of seemingly arbitrary sentences like: "I went too to the Casa Ricci in Fiesole with Gertrude Stein and her brother. How well I remember the first summer I stayed with them. We did charming things" (A 96), which obviously implies that Toklas was singled out and welcomed also outside the official visiting hours of the Saturday evenings. Naturally, the report of their first meeting probably signifies a powerful experience of love at first sight, however, the reader is constantly reminded that s/he will never know the truth of their "sexual/textual relationship" (Linzie 151). Put differently, *The Autobiography* is not the self-analytical autobiography one may expect to find, quite the reverse: most things are characteristically signified only as absence, between the lines, or merely through suggestive sentences such as: "My memory of it is very vivid" and "What happened in those early years. A great deal happened" (A 135, 98). Most often, no explanatory information follows other than objective facts that document their movements in terms of travels and what pieces Stein was working on at the time – that

²⁴ On the continuous present, see Stein's "Composition as Explanation" 24- 30.

is, biographical information in little need of interpretation. The unsentimental and oftentimes rather detached tone in which the narrator conveys these facts does not waver even in reports of more sinister events, such as the death of a friend: “During our absence Eve had died and Picasso was now living in a little home in Montrouge” (A 183). Their dramatic experiences and anxiety during the First World War with the bombing of Paris is equally promptly summarized in one sentence: “We were all pretty unhappy and this was despair” (A 181).

In addition to self-reflexively flaunting the text’s status as artefact – with varying degrees of explicitness – the carefully choreographed narrative voice perfectly warrants Stein’s aesthetic demands in relation to autobiography. *The Autobiography* is a highly selective, excluding, self-portrait. In her function as the observer and reporter, “Toklas” chooses what is to be included in “her” autobiography – and how. The full significance of the implementation of *The Autobiography*’s narration of Stein’s “inside as seen from the outside” (A 170) will become apparent in the subsequent sections of this chapter. However, this narrative rhetoric of documentation is what I take to be one of the two main answers to the question of “how” (A 224), in the opening quote of this section.²⁵ The second of which, is to advertise and authorize Stein in her capacity as author, with the expressed agenda of ensuring that her unpublished manuscripts be published (A 213), and thus get the recognition they deserve. Furthermore, the mediating narrative voice is invested with calculated naivety in addition to a great admiration for Stein, allowing Stein to have Toklas-the-narrator perform a number of artistic functions – which add greatly to the book’s entertainment value, and demonstrates the artist’s expressed excellence.

Significantly, *The Autobiography*’s numerous slant observations are ascribed to an outsider in possession of insider-knowledge – “gradually I knew” (A 20) – but whose mediation of the events retain a degree of reticence and wonderment, which simultaneously signals authority. We infer from the text that Toklas’s is a voice of reason among perhaps less reliable artists – as when Mildred Aldrich turns to Toklas for confirmation: “One day she said to me, Alice, tell me is it alright, are they really alright. I know Gertrude thinks so and Gertrude knows, but really is it not all fumisterie, is it not all false” (A 133). Most importantly, of course, this validating function essentially extends to Stein’s work: the clear-

²⁵ Bloom is often quoted in this context, as she discusses Stein’s “variations on three major uses of point of view, to perform egotistical, interpretive, and objective functions” (81). These variations are: the egotistical function, “an honorific function” to “give her dignity and authority” (83), and Toklas’s functions as reporter (84), intermediary (88), and re-enforcer (85), as well as her role in Stein’s self-advertisement (84). My own analysis of the text-internal functions is inspired by Bloom, whose arguments are similar to those of Lejeune in his “Autobiography in the Third Person” 34-43.

headed Toklas champions, contextualizes and partly explains Stein's writings, and thus Toklas imbues the author's opinions with a sense of authority and lends credence to her art (Bloom 85). Take for example the following passages of sober reflection on Toklas's part:

People were roaring with laughter at the picture [La Femme au Chapeau by Matisse, exhibited 1905] and scratching at it. Gertrude Stein could not understand why, the picture seemed to her perfectly natural. . . she did not understand why because to her it was so alright, just as later she did not understand why since the writing was all so clear and natural they mocked at and were enraged by her work. (A 40)

And:

In fact it was largely to please Mildred that Gertrude Stein tried to get the Atlantic Monthly to print something of hers [...] Another thing used to annoy Mildred dreadfully. Gertrude Stein's name was never in Who's Who in America. As a matter of fact it was in English authors' bibliographies before it ever entered an American one. This troubled Mildred very much. [...] And then she would say, I know it's alright but I wish Gertrude were not so outlawed. Poor Mildred. [...] Who's Who has added Gertrude Stein's name to their list. The Atlantic Monthly needless to say has not. (A 210)

What is to be observed is that these examples of self-advertisement paint a picture of Stein as a misunderstood and wrongfully "outlawed" author. Toklas's task is to correct this impression so as to give the author a fair chance to succeed by pointing out that the misconceptions of Stein's art are caused by a critical failure to grasp her ingenious originality. Elsewhere, Stein emphasizes that it is often the misfortune of the true artist to receive recognition late in life or worse, posthumously (A 129).²⁶ With wit and confidence, then, Toklas significantly takes it upon "herself" to inform the reader that it is for the likes of Mildred that Stein ought to receive serious attention: "poor Mildred" was made to suffer for Stein's isolation in the literary world. Naturally, projecting a sad face onto her character adds to the humour, which is further underlined by the fact that *The Autobiography's* first readers read the text precisely in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Moreover, Mildred is but one name on the impressive list of people who, according to the narrator, wanted to see Stein's writings in print, and whose artistic authority thus ingeniously serves as proof of the author's own claim to authority in her field.²⁷

It is also notable that Stein makes comedy of those who fail to grasp the complexity of her style, as when "the very American young man" from Grafton Press was sent to tell her that the director thought her unorthodox syntax was due to limited knowledge of the English

²⁶ Cf. "Sure, she said, as Pablo once remarked, when you make a thing, it is so complicated making it that that it is bound to be ugly, but those that do it after you they don't have to worry about making it and they can make it pretty, and so everybody can like it when the others make it" (A 28).

²⁷ The incorporated perspectives on Stein's texts include those of Harry Gibb (A 223), H. G. Wells (A 123), Henry McBride (A 133), Myra Edgerly (A 138), John Lane and wife (A 141), Janet Schudder (A 221), Mina Loy and Haweis (A 144), Carl Van Vechten (A 150), and Sylvia Beech (A 211), and many more over the course of *The Autobiography*.

language or, “perhaps you have not had much experience in writing”. Stein laughingly answers: “Oh yes, she said, oh yes. Well, it’s alright. I will write to the director and you might as well tell him also that everything that is written in the manuscript is written with the intention of its being so written and all he has to do is print it and I will take the responsibility” (A 76). The encounter is strategically placed since Stein spends most of the narrative space contradicting such suspicions – noting, for example that she enjoyed Shakespeare at the age of eight (A 82). Thus, the narrative cancels out these ridiculous claims, topping it off with the statement that she “has always been admired by the precious. But she always says some day they, anybody, will find out that she is of interest to them, she and her writing” (A 78). Hence, the untraditional move of self-narration enables “Toklas” to devote *The Autobiography* to establishing authorial authority on the part of the real autobiographer, Gertrude Stein – whose full name incidentally is repeated so many times that its rhythm and weight is etched in the reader’s mind. The repetition extends to intertextual referencing to other works by Stein, which remarkably often redirects traditional autobiographical attention to her creative productions.²⁸ This strategy involves countless repetitions of the author’s literary achievements, their genesis and titles, with the seemingly elaborate effect of creating interest in her other texts – or, in the very least, a familiarity with their titles and an increased understanding, provided by the author herself, of her texts’ underlying mechanisms.²⁹

Equally entertaining is Toklas’s narrative function as intermediary. As Bloom writes, it “softens the direct thrust, blunts the egotism, evades the hubris, and communicates her own appreciation of the rightness of Stein’s opinion of herself”, and as such the displacement of narrative voice allows the author a “greater freedom and latitude of expression” (85). Put differently, the constructed position of Toklas’s naïve reports rebuffs any direct arrest of Stein for frequently insulting fellow artists and acquaintances. The matter-of-fact-like tone in which the offence is relayed adds to its humour, such as when Toklas innocently describes Stein’s relationship to André Derain: “They never became friends. Gertrude Stein was never interested in his work. He had a sense for space but for her his pictures had neither life nor depth nor solidity”, or when Stein characteristically insults two people with one sweep of the pen while in the guise of her supposed partner in crime: “Mary Pickford, she was so blonde, so pale, so nothing and Fernande would give a heavy sigh of admiration” (A 48, 33). Much of the humour in *The Autobiography* springs from the many absurd associations delivered with

²⁸ Cf. “But all this and much more, all the physical life of these days, she has described in the life of the Hersland family in her *Making of Americans*. The important thing to tell about now is her education” (A 82).

²⁹ Some critics have gone as far as to suggest that the text functions like an aesthetic manifesto. Cf. Lokke 22.

imitated childlike honesty: “I always like Alice Derain. She had a certain wild quality that perhaps had to do with her brutal thumbs and was curiously in accord with her madonna face” (A 29).

Elsewhere, Stein makes fun of Ernest Hemingway’s pretentiousness under the pretext of having Toklas mention in passing that there is more to Stein and Hemingway’s dispute than she is aware of (A 233). The displacement of narrative voice thus allows Stein to criticize Hemingway’s former writing style, take credit for the subsequent improvements that led to his success, and ensure her audience that she has a “weakness for Hemingway” presumably because: “he takes training and everybody who takes training is a favourite pupil. [...] And that is Hemingway, he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums” (A 234).³⁰ As such, the narrator’s humorous pretend-naiveté cancels out any sense of direct personal attack on Stein’s part, which may otherwise have been the case had the statements been announced from the narrative position of the first-person. The offended parties, however, might have found the narrative tricks doubly insulting, as they are delivered with a mocking smile, accompanied by Stein’s confident declaration that she is not one for false modesty:

Oh hell, she said, listen I am fairly well known for saying things about anyone and anything, I say them about people, I say them to people, I say them when I please and how I please but as I mostly say what I think, the last that you [Lipschitz] or anybody else can do is to rest content with what I say to you.
(A220)

1.2 The discourse of genius: the question of authorial autonomy

There is little reason to doubt Stein’s sincerity in her self-assessment as a writer of masterpieces deserving of praise, as her theoretical lectures and interviews confirm *The Autobiography*’s fictionalized self-impressions. Supposedly emanating from Toklas, the narrative voice certifies Stein’s claim to genius, positing the view that Stein’s *Melanctha* was “the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature”, that the “monumental work”, *The Making of Americans* “really [marked] the beginning of modern writing”, and that her “revolutionary work” and her poetry “has so greatly influenced the younger generation” (A 61, 233, 90, 226). Indeed, the narrator considers Stein to be a cut above other writers, as she approvingly reports:

³⁰ As Scobie notes, the Hemingway episode is “one of the very few times in the book where Toklas disagrees with Stein, and one of the very few times in which the narrator expresses anything less than full confidence in the trustworthiness of her own narration” (128). Hemingway’s hostile reactions to Stein is to be found in his posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* (1964), which, according to DeKoven is “perhaps the most vicious slander of Gertrude Stein in print, and one which has been the basis of all too many judgments of her”, where he also reveals a “fear of lesbianism” in his stereotypical portrayal (12).

The young often when they have learnt all they can learn accuse her of an inordinate pride. She says yes of course. She realizes that in English literature in her time she is the only one. She has always known it and now she says it.

She understands very well the basis of creation and therefore her advice and criticism is invaluable to all her friends. (A 85)

Notably, Stein's self-exaltation is judiciously executed, and must therefore be read with a view to the overall play with authorial positioning. If one accepts the preceding arguments concerning the destabilizing text-internal effects of the merging of perspectives, then these somewhat hyperbolic statements cannot be taken entirely at face value either. I propose, therefore, that the doubling of voice introduces into the self-portrait an ironizing, and thereby partly relativizing, element with implications for the reception of Stein's claim to genius.³¹ I do not, however, mean to suggest that these enouncements are fictions, but rather that they are part of Stein's fictionalizing genre joke. The overt self-advertisement and explicit egotistical scenarios contribute greatly to *The Autobiography's* humorous tone, and the comedy significantly undermines the text's apparent foundations. In terms of both form and content, Stein's autobiography subverts the paradigmatic authorial signature, and the alleged seriousness of the autobiographical genre. Central to my discussion of *The Autobiography's* statement that Stein is an author-genius is my proposition that the implied author-figure in this literary self-portrait must, to some extent, be viewed independently from the implied authorial voice. It is my argument that the merged narrative voice might in fact be seen to signal authorial autonomy, provided that the text's self-reflexive aspects are taken into account.

First, to better appreciate the significance of Stein's self-proclamations, the category of genius itself demands attention in terms of historicity. Naturally, the modernist notion is a development of the preceding conceptions of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which held that genius was at once a universal and uniquely individual capacity, and, in Barbara Will's words, the figure of genius was seen "as the quintessence of the subject as the centered, humanist subject incarnate – the ineffable Individual whose capacities were both deeper and greater than those of ordinary mortals [...], whose gender is always unquestionably male", an embodiment of "energy, creativity, originality, inspiration". In short, the transcendence of genius extends its figuration in its immeasurability as "both an essence and more than an essence" (2-3). In S. T. Coleridge's theoretical postulations, he likens the powers and subjectivity of the creative genius and his imagination to the creational powers of God in his definition of creative imagination as "the living power and prime agent of all human

³¹ See also Saunders 360-5, who concludes that, "the enunciatory strategy of the *Autobiography* thus enables Stein to write her autobiography as a woman in ways which pre-empt sexist ridicule by inviting and mocking it. Here too she creates women's autobiography for the twentieth century by accepting and denying it" (361).

perception, and as a repetition in the infinite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (qtd. in Harvey 75).³² Less religiously preoccupied, albeit equally concerned with the concepts of originality, the modernist cult of genius promoted an exclusionary textuality characterized by a certain inwardness, difficulty and highness. In other words, an aesthetic that embraced inaccessibility and autonomy, directed not at a mass-audience but rather at a select elite.³³ As such, the modernist conception of the term was, according to Will, “both embedded in and generative of cultural economic oppositions between high and mass, individual artist and collectivity, creativity and mechanization [which] could be asseverated on both sides of the great divide” (135-6).

Thus, when Stein’s good friend, Sherwood Anderson, who appears in *The Autobiography* (A 265) (and about whom she wrote A Valentine to Sherwood Anderson, *Idem the Same*), called Stein a genius, it signals praise for her inaccessible poetry, a feat which sets her apart from the ordinary writer (Will 136). And yet, as Toklas tells her reader: “It was difficult to get serious reviews”. Even T.S. Eliot, labelled a modernist genius himself, was dismissive of Stein’s style, at which the narrative reports: “Gertrude Stein was delighted when later she was told that Eliot had said in Cambridge that the work of Gertrude Stein was very fine but not for us” (A 263, 218).³⁴ Hence, Stein’s position within the literary field may be characterized by ambivalence and subsequent rejection from both aesthetic camps, and among publishers and in the Anglo-American press – that is, prior to the publication of *The Autobiography* she only had a few “disciples”, as Carl Van Vechten termed her small group of supportive readers (Will 133). Stein, who stressed that her work was self-evident, “clear and natural” (A 40), and in *Everybody’s Autobiography* that it is “as clear as mud”, in 1919 answered the *Atlantic*’s editor, Ellery Sedgwick’s accusations that her writing was marginal, and “could not find a handful even of careful readers who would think that it was a serious

³² The contextualization of the category of genius is largely based on Will’s account, and information relating to S.T Coleridge and T.S Eliot is a reworking of my unpublished ENG4471 paper: “Genesis Or, Creator and Creation: A Journey”.

³³ Stein reflexively comments on this contemporary version of authorial balancing act of targeting the “right” audience, which in sum, may signal a certain authorial positioning on her part. Cf. her comment concerning Elliot Paul, editor of the *Transition*: “He said he was afraid of its becoming too popular. If ever there are more than two thousand subscribers, I quit, he used to say. [...] He had a perfectly definite idea of gradually opening the eyes of the public to the work of the writers that interested him” (A 259-60). Stein herself states that “I do not want to make these books expensive. After all Gertrude Stein’s readers are writers, university students, librarians and young people who have very little money. [...] she wants her books read not owned” (A 264).

³⁴ Will argues that Stein “was at once interpellated by the high modernist discourse of ‘genius,’ yet remained generally uncomfortable or even ‘bored’ with this positioning on one side of the great divide [...] as she announced to *The New York Herald Tribune* in 1935: ‘I like ordinary people who don’t bore me. Highbrows, you know, always do’” (qtd. in Will 136).

effort” with the following comment, which significantly implies that the author’s target-audience was both highbrow modernists and the average reader of newspapers:

I don’t misjudge your public. I am not interested in them being literati, etc. [...] My work is legitimate literature and I amuse and interest myself in words as an expression of feeling as Shakespeare or anyone else writing did. This is entirely in the spirit of all that is first class in American letters whether it’s newspapers, Walt Whitman or Henry James. (qtd. in Will 133)³⁵

With regards to the critical response to Stein’s self-inscription into the ranks of genius, there is a remarkable tendency that many critics – even those who are not outright antagonistic, often overlook the play generated by the narrative rhetoric.³⁶ Irrespective of the extraliterary verity of Stein’s claims, the narrative mode inserts a distance between Toklas-the-narrator’s claims and the real-life Stein, a distance which arguably multiplies the communication. It is my view that the trope of fictional authorship has the elaborate effect of adding a layer of ambiguity even to the level of self-elevation in the author-portrait.

The view of Stein’s figuration as author-genius in *The Autobiography* depends on the understanding of Toklas as both narrator and her role in relation to Stein, as the perception of their interaction is determinative and, potentially, modifying. Further, it is significant that the narrator’s introductory observation of Stein sets the tone of her self-portrait.³⁷ Several critics point out how the author has constructed her partner textually in such a way as to act almost exclusively in consent with her own represented self – whose assertive “I AM” incidentally rings as loud as that of Coleridge. Toklas’s intentional secondary role is understood by some to signal a reductive or near agentless position.³⁸ This reading might of course be supported by such scenes as exemplified below, and seen in connection with Stein’s utilization of Toklas as structural frame. Bearing Toklas’s name, the autobiographical narrative functions as

³⁵ For Stein’s witty account of the correspondence with Ellery Sedgwick, see *The Autobiography* 211, where the aslant focus is on the confusion of the editor’s name and gender.

³⁶ Two major and mutually excluding tendencies dominate in the text’s reception history. In the words of DeKoven: “[t]he two most important, comprehensive studies of Stein to date remain Donald Sutherland’s *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of her Work* [1951] and Richard Bridgman’s *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* [1970]” (12). According to DeKoven, the former’s analysis fails to take modifying factors into account and detects only a self-aggrandising confidence, whereas the latter, “is correctly suspicious of Stein’s aggressive insistence on her greatness, and looks behind it, finding much evidence of her insecurity and deep fear of failure”, however, he “locates the origin of many of her literary innovations exclusively in pathology” and “often makes her appear a mere victim of neurosis” (13). On the basis of her evaluation of critical genius-assessments of Stein’s work and her person, DeKoven rightly calls for “a synthesis that would show the fear behind the power and the power behind the fear” (13). Sutherland and Bridgman are regarded major Stein scholars, and their views on Stein’s genius-figuration frequently occur in later receptions.

³⁷ See section 1.1, page 22. Breslin, too, questions Stein’s seriousness: “the playful tone makes it hard for us to be sure exactly how seriously we are to take this claim. The scene is deliberately simplified; circumstantial and psychological details are eliminated – to foreground the powerful, strange presence of Stein and the intuitive powers of Toklas” (907).

³⁸ See footnote 21.

a scene on which Stein flaunts her apparently exalted self-image, which arguably is tantamount to hubris:

Here I want to show you something, she [Stein] said. No, I said it has to be eaten hot. No, she said, you have to see this first. [...] In spite of my protests and the food cooling I had to read. [...] I began it and I thought she was making fun of me and I protested, she says I protest now about my autobiography. Finally I read it all and I was terribly pleased with it. And then we ate our supper. (A 124-5)

And:

Gertrude Stein adored the heat and sunshine although she always says that Paris winter is an ideal climate. [...] I, who have and had no fondness for a summer sun, often accompanied her. Sometimes later in Spain I sat under a tree and wept but she in the sun was indefatigable. She could even lie in the sun and look straight up into a summer noon sun, she said it rested her eyes and her head. (A 62)

Evidently, Stein appears to be a bit of a bully in her compromise of Toklas for the sake of her art – the rhythm of which cannot be timed to suit ordinary domestic or social rituals, and thus demands endurance and a certain sacrifice on the part of the artist and, imperatively, her surroundings – Toklas. Toklas prefers the shade and her food hot but as the naïve narrator she reveals that Stein, in her authoritarian manners, sometimes dictates otherwise. If one takes the sun to be a metaphor for artistic glory, and by extension the kind of limelight which would further Stein's literary career – the artist's perseverance signals that she is not afraid to place herself in the hot-seat of literary critics, quite the contrary. By self-consciously positioning her literary self so close to the sun, she saves her wings from melting by keeping up her rhetorical jesting. Arguably, Stein signifies a confidence which leaves her almost untouchable in terms of critical reviews because she anticipates and thereby forestalls the criticism that is sure to be levelled at her as a result of her self-reflexive abandonment of social expectations of modesty, especially for women (Saunders 363). Again, the act of fictionalization arguably functions as a shield since her autobiographical self is overtly figurative, constructed from contradictions, and mediated by a degree of invalidating – or at least destabilizing – exaggeration.

Alternately, then, with a view to Stein's ironizing overtures, the version of Toklas's "wifely" subordination may be understood as an implicitly intentional mode of parodic role-play where Stein casts her textual self in the role of "domineering and egotistical husband", to parody the traditional male genius whose female helpmate was by convention reduced to "a supportive, domestic role" (Lokke 15).³⁹ From this interpretive perspective, the two examples cited suggest a plausible loving laughter in its representation of artistic self-absorption. In

³⁹ For a reading of *The Autobiography* in terms of performativity, and as a "deconstructive maneuver", and "parodic heterosexual role-play" thus queering the figure of genius, see Will 144-6.

fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the joke, self-consciously, is on Stein in both cases.⁴⁰ With this in mind, Toklas's protestations to "my autobiography" and the persuasion brought about by the text's reading does of course not signal a manipulative or entirely egotistical Stein, but rather Toklas's gradual appreciation of the rhetoric of Stein's conceptual variations within the genre of autobiography – another metacomment on authorship. Read in this light, Stein's insistence on Toklas's attention signals Stein's wish and/or need for Toklas's approval before she can rest content with what she has written – a signalled reciprocity arguably, as will become apparent, with implications for *The Autobiography's* reception.

The reverse side of the often negative reading of Toklas as Stein's puppet further involves the characteristics signified by her capacity to recognize genius: "a bell within me rang" (A 9). Again, with a view to historicity, and in Will's words, Stein's placement of Toklas as recognizer of genius:

recall[s] earlier definitions by Kant, Schlegel, or Nietzsche of the transmission of "genius," of a receptivity and sensitivity to greatness that enables one mind to "awaken" another. If Gertrude is a "genius," therefore, then so too is Alice, whose "genius" is developed and awakened by engagement with Stein's own. (140)

Consequently, Stein's seemingly egocentric claims might be read as dissolving the modernist conception of genius as an autonomous category, by bringing into the equation a dialogical aspect, which serves to make the category of genius a "shared phenomenon" (Will 140) rather than the mark of the isolated artist. From this perspective, the definition of Stein as genius by Toklas may further invite the reading that Toklas inspired or even unlocked the full extent of Stein's capabilities as a writer. As Linzie asks, would the real "Stein have been a genius without Toklas?" (150). However, such speculation has no place here. Interestingly, though, the extent of the two women's interdependence, playfully manifested in *The Autobiography's* representational mode, might be seen to oppose the notion of Stein's genius since the category, by convention, demands artistic autonomy. This leads to the oft-asked question of whether the real Toklas undermines Stein's statement of autonomy, as brought about by the trope of fictional authorship, the merging of their voices, the portrayal of their interactions, and Toklas's real and described efforts to further Stein's literary career. Indeed, Linzie writes that Toklas's "indispensable role in Stein's life and work" could be seen to destabilize the

⁴⁰ Bloom, too, finds the portrayal of Toklas respectful: Stein "maintains Toklas's integrity and never makes her feeble or foolish, never jokes at Toklas's expense" (91). Linzie's highly favourable analysis of the character of Toklas is based on her "enabling functions" in relation to Stein's literary production: "Both structurally and thematically, *The Autobiography* emphasizes Toklas' arrival as the crucial event that, through her immediate recognition of Stein's genius, in fact inaugurates or creates it, and then goes on to enable it for the rest of Stein's life and beyond" (150-1).

notion of “individual authorship [...] from inside the text itself” which, therefore, demands “an extended consideration of the context of production as another ‘third space’, where boundaries between one and the other cannot be easily upheld” (146-7). Stein’s “double portrait” (Bloom 90), does admit a certain degree of collaboration since the narrator tells the reader that she (i.e., Toklas) is determined to have Stein’s unpublished manuscripts published.⁴¹ *The Autobiography* further depicts Toklas’s efforts as first reader, editor, typist, and finally, manager. Toklas did of course achieve her portrayed goal – and as a function in the text, Toklas’s figuration literally opened the doors to a wider audience, which again ensured the publishers’ serious attention. Nevertheless, Linzie’s proposed “third space” of Stein’s artistic production holds only up to a point – and this is where my proposed distinction comes in: the authorial voice is dialogical in that it includes both Stein’s and Toklas’s characteristics and is composed by Stein but playfully pinned on Toklas. This creates, as I have argued above, an alternative autobiographical space which neither allows traditional generic access to Stein nor Toklas but provides glimpses of both from a merged perspective. Crucial to the narrative, however, is the fact that the narrative voice – the text’s structuring mode – is a creation, a work of art. Thus, it does not necessarily bar the author’s genius-figuration.

Although the real Toklas was, as may be inferred from the text, “indispensable” to the author as her partner, practical enabler and perhaps Muse, the suggestion of a destabilizing “third space” in terms of authorship is, I would argue, less feasible. In *The Autobiography*, committed to “showing what she had been doing in those years” (A 223), Stein situates the origin of her work in its social context, which admittedly involved Toklas’s presence most of the time, yet the narrative stresses that the collaboration took place after the fact of artistic production – if accepted, the text should leave no reader in doubt as to whose creative imagination Stein’s texts present (Bollinger 243). If not, it would have implications for all creations that are not written and published, literally, in isolation. If one takes into account the modernist insistence on artistic autonomy as the premise for genius, the high stakes with

⁴¹ For examples of Toklas’s role in relation to Stein’s writing, cf. *The Autobiography* 77, 84, 124, and 261-65. In *The Author*, Andrew Bennett writes that the notion of authorial collaboration dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, and that “the idea of literary collaboration [...] seems only to have become a matter for consideration [...] once the Romantic conception of authorship, with its emphasis on expression, originality and autonomy, emerges as the dominant ‘ideology’ of composition” (94). For further information, see Bennett 94-107. “The scandal of collaborative autobiographies resides in the act of disregarding, twisting, or exceeding the autobiographical contract, defined by Lejeune as a device which, among other things, renders the act of writing transparent. A collaborative autobiography, on the other hand, ‘introduces a flaw into this system ... The *division of labor* between two people ... reveals the multiplicity of authorities implied in the work of autobiographical writing, as in all writing” (Lejeune qtd. in Linzie 148).

which Stein played become all the more apparent. It may also explain why Toklas, according to W. G. Rogers, “resented the way in which the double-voiced structure of *The Autobiography* cast doubt upon the independence and autonomy of Stein’s genius” (qtd. in Linzie 160).

True to the objectified perspective of the author-figure – Stein does not have the narrator describe the actual writing process: her writing happens off-stage when Toklas is out of the picture. Significantly, then, certain elements of the author-portrait mark a characteristic conception of the autonomous writer as one who sees the world differently, as *The Autobiography* arguably plays into the idea of the true artist as a lonely figure – in other words, the solitary genius who is set apart intellectually. To that end, Stein figures quite like the artist-as-outsider depicted in James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* (1916), since it may be inferred from Toklas that Stein experienced “lonesomeness” in her adolescence, and further that her creativity “in the old days” was premised on a withdrawal of the author: she wrote “night after night” in isolation, since “it was only after eleven o’clock that she could be sure that no one would knock at the studio door” (A 83, 223, 47).⁴² Also, Stein’s artistic exile sharpened her creative senses:

One of the things that I have liked all these years is to be surrounded by people who know no english. It has left me more intensely alone with my eyes and my english. I do not know if it would have been possible to have english be so all in all to me otherwise. And they none of them could read a word I wrote, most of them did not even know what I did write. (A 77-8)

Additionally, the entire text testifies to an extraordinary perception of the world with its many unexpected and bizarre remarks, as when their Ford car, “auntie”, takes them out to the trenches in the midst of war and the different patterns and colour schemes of the nations’ uniforms catch Stein’s attention, or when Stein is poetically inspired “by the sound of the streets and the movement of the automobiles”, often setting “a sentence for herself as a sort of tuning fork and metronome and then write to that time and tune” (A 203, 223).

Hence, because Stein includes into her genius-portrait an element of the parodic in her self-consciously manifestly egotistical mode, she might be said to relativize the concept of genius itself. The author thus both partly mocks those who have occupied the position before her, and simultaneously elevates her own authorial position in her, at times, polemic stance against the male-dominated tradition. In her expressed entrance into the domain of literary

⁴² Cf. “After the death of first her mother and then her father she and her sister and one brother left California for the East. They came to Baltimore and stayed with her mother’s people. There she began to lose her lonesomeness. She has often described to me how strange it was to her coming from the rather desperate inner life that she had been living for the last few years to the cheerful life of all her aunts and uncles” (A 83).

greatness, then, Stein's figuration is at once elitist and democratic (her readers need not be "literati, etc."), both affirming and dissolving the category as she reshapes it to fit the frame and purposes of her self-portrait. As we have seen, the performance of the two-fold narrative voice depicts Stein as a literary genius, a creator of "masterpieces" and arguably destabilizes the contemporary highbrow modernist monopoly of the term by including into the genius artist's portrait the person whose company implicitly made her life "full" too.⁴³ Crucially, however, in *The Autobiography's* apparent challenge to the modernist notion of autonomy, as well as the modernist privileging of inwardness and inaccessibility, its playful signification of Stein is both of a solitary, and as I will argue below, visibly out-of-reach author-figure.

Again, the reception of her text testifies to the great aesthetic divide which Stein had to negotiate: those in favour of her more difficult text often labelled this one false, while readers from the other camp celebrated its accessibility, among them was Ellery Sedgwick who welcomed the "true" Stein in a letter to the author dated 11 February, 1933, with the words: "I think you felt my constant hope that the time would come when the real Miss Stein would pierce the smoke-screen with which she has always so mischievously surrounded herself" (qtd. in Will 138). As several critics have noted, *The Autobiography* is often categorized as a text *about* a genius rather than a text *of* genius (Will 138). Consequently, Stein's theoretical meditations on literary greatness deserve some consideration here.

1.3 Coda: Identity and Entity, and autobiographic self-objectification

In "What are Master-Pieces and Why are There so Few of Them", a lecture held at Oxford and Cambridge, February 1936, Stein conceptualizes the creative imagination and authorial qualities that produce a masterpiece. In essence, her theory distinguishes between the states of identity and that of entity, or interchangeably, the human nature and the human mind of the authorial consciousness in the act of creation.⁴⁴ Imperative to her analysis is the fact that only the latter mind-frame enables the author to transcend all that is relational and common and thus create writing that is "free of contingency, circumstance, and chronological time" (Merrill 11). Productions that arise from an artistic existence in entity thus contrast to ordinary writings of non-genuses who create from a position of individual identity:

⁴³ Will writes that, "in calling herself a 'genius,' for example, she often seems to posit a 'being' at odds with both Romantic conceptions of the quintessentially centered self-authorizing self, and with the high modernist emphasis upon the genius as the great individual who must transcend the social in order to engage in the process of cultural revitalization" (8).

⁴⁴ The phrase "the human mind" is Stein's "preferred synonym for the interior being: 'Inside in any human mind there is not there is no time and there is no identity otherwise what is inside is not'" (Stein qtd. in Curnutt 299).

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 recognising that he knows, that is what destroys creation. [...] Everything that makes life go on makes identity and everything that makes identity is of necessity a necessity. (WAM 146-7, 151)

In other words, Stein defines identity as all states of being that are relational: both the awareness of one's exterior self to which others relate (e.g., the dog), and consciousness, by way of memory, of prior moments of oneself. As for subject matter, what makes a masterpiece is that it will stand the test of time, like The Bible and Greek classics, since it is not an expression of human nature (an effect of necessity and common-knowledge), which, once written "is not true or too true", and thus merely the human mind's "clothing" (Lokke 17; WAM 151, 149). Rather, the masterpiece, says Stein, "is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity. That is what a masterpiece is not although it may easily be what a master-piece talks about" (WAM 149). The determining factor, therefore, is the mental state of the composer, which must be characterized by authenticity, as Laurel Bollinger explains: "entity demands unity with the object under consideration, with the individual utterly immersed in the creativity of the moment" (247). As such, a masterpiece requires the non-existence in the writer's consciousness of time and identity during the artistic creation, since artistic genius is a condition of "knowing that there is no identity and producing while identity is not" (WAM 151). Stein qualifies her observation with the following argument: "Think about how you create if you do create you do not remember yourself as you do create. And yet time and identity is what you tell about as you create only while you create they do not exist. That is really what it is" (WAM 152). This is admittedly difficult (but not impossible), writes Stein, because "one has to know what is the relation of the act of creation to the subject the creator uses to create that thing" (WAM 147). That is, there must be knowledge concerning the subject matter, and that, supposedly, involves memory – and memory is premised on time, which is problematically relational. However, Stein avoids this aspect by stating that "when you know anything memory doesn't come in" (qtd. in Merrill 16).

This leads me to understand Stein's notion of composition in the state of entity in terms of the immediacy of dance choreography: when one's body knows the movements so well that no recollection is necessary in the act of dancing, and the rhythm of one's body and the flow of music is all-encompassing. In this mode of being, all there is is the intuitive consciousness in the dancer of the dance – to the extent that the audience, the stage and the lights cease to exist. Just like the true dancer, the writer of masterpieces in the act of

composition is at one with the objects s/he describes, and this unity divorces the creation from the author's facticity. Put differently, memory, consciousness of time – everything that situates the author in identity, does not inform the artistic composition: the double-consciousness necessarily involved in recognition and memory does arguably not interfere with writing. The analogy might thus further clarify Stein's point concerning "the question of a writer to his audience". An audience presents the following problem: "One of the things that I discovered in lecturing was that gradually one ceased to hear what one said one heard what the audience hears one say" (WAM 147). Of course, this double-consciousness is relational:

When you are writing before there is an audience anything written is as important as any other thing and you cherish anything and everything that you have written. After the audience begins, naturally they create something that is *they create you*, and so not everything is so important, something is more important than an other thing, which was not true when you were not you as your little dog knows you. (WAM 153-4, emphasis added)

The interior being, entity, is disrupted as the creative focus is divided between the topic of the lecture and the lecturing and thus creation breaks down when the creator is conscious of others' perceptions in the act of creation, or when it occurs with a view to reception or audience- appreciation. Hence, as Cynthia Merrill observes (12), Stein links identity to the external: "identity is not what any one can have as a thing to be but as a thing to see" (WAM 153) because when you are doing something with your complete attention you are existing in a state of entity.⁴⁵ For this reason, Stein's conclusion concerning the relatively small number of masterpieces may not come as a surprise: "There are so few of them because mostly people live in identity and memory that is when they think. They know they are because their little dog knows them, and so they are not an entity but an identity" (WAM 150).⁴⁶

With a view to Stein's aesthetic rejection of identity as presented in the lecture, then, it is easy to understand the author's answer when asked to write her autobiography: "not

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Merrill reads Stein's identity/entity distinction from a Lacanian perspective of the formation of the "I" in terms of the mirror stage when the child supposedly recognizes it's own self in a simultaneous experience of self-alienation: for Lacan "the constitution of identity ironically depends upon both a vision of the self as other, and the subsequent internalization of that idealized other" (12). Prior to this double-consciousness, then, the child does not place objectivizing restrictions on herself, as she is unaware of the various layers of perception: the immediacy of being becomes awareness of self-mediation (12). In the age of Facebook, Stein's objections to identity due to the inauthenticity introduced by a preoccupation with others' perception, and the consequent creation of a self-image that does not resonate with one's interior being, is perhaps not an altogether alien thought.

⁴⁶ Stein's lecture thus "offers a new way of envisioning the conflict between connectivity and isolation: the identity/entity pairing differentiates not so much between individuals as between states of existence in a single individual" (Bollinger 249), and this observation arguably supports my arguments concerning the genius-discourse of *The Autobiography* above.

possibly” (A 271). Stein, of course, objects to all the central ingredients of traditional autobiography because an autobiography is essentially an expression of human nature, a textual construction of a recognizable authorial identity. The autobiographical act is one of retrospection and self-analysis, and it values linearity of time, that is, historical time in the documentation of personal development and the autobiographer’s connections with others. In sum, it relates to “the business of living”, which Stein labelled antithetical to the human mind: the non-relational subjectivity, which is the premise of the masterpiece. Stein writes: “if you remember yourself while you are you you are not for the purposes of creating you” (WAM 147).

Hence, to echo Breslin: “Can Stein create an autobiography without identity, memory, and linear time”, and with the purpose in mind of creating an audience for her art? (903).

I once said what is the use of being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man, the boy and the man have nothing to do with each other, except in respect to memory and identity, and if they have anything to do with each other in respect to memory and identity then they will never produce a master-piece. (WAM 150)

As Breslin notes, Stein was “acutely aware that by attempting to incarnate her being in language and in an autobiography, she was running the risk of merely fixing, of limiting and deadening, herself” and therefore she must “refashion the form to show that she eludes or transcends the category of self or identity” (909, 902). Arguably, this is precisely where the real significance apparent displacement of authorship comes to show. Stein’s experiments with the form of autobiography, her act of fictionalization, might in fact exemplify her theoretical meditations on the role of the author in relation to the act of composition and the level of textual self-expression. Notably, a text can be about “the business of living” as long as it does not spring from a state of identity and avoids expressing transient particularities. Again, the analysis must be conducted with a view to the proposed distinction between the act of writing and the written. Interestingly, Breslin finds identity-subversive autobiographical elements on both the thematic and structural level: “what makes *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* so interesting is that it admits the conventions of memory, identity, chronological time – in order to fight against and ultimately to transcend their deadening effects” (903) so as not to produce a fixed conception of the author. This is where the multiple perspectives, the convention-disruptive rhythm of the continuous present (also termed “immediate existing” by Stein), and the double-portrait come into play. Remarkably, the year before she died, Stein acknowledged in an interview that: “I had struggled up to that time with the creation of reality, and then I became interested in how you could tell this thing in a way that anybody

could understand and still keep true to your values, and the thing bothered me a great deal at that time” (qtd. in Merrill 13) – an artistic dilemma which, according to Merrill, “ultimately led her to *The Autobiography*” (13).

Indeed, the portrait of the artist, by virtue of Toklas’s narrative function as framing-device, exhibits not only a merging of voices that cancels out any supposedly direct access to a singular absolutely recognizable authorial subjectivity. The narrative strategy results in what Breslin calls “an elusive center and discontinuous design”, which “plays down psychology and sticks to the surface, recording externals (objects, acts, dialogues) in a way that clearly manifests deliberate and idiosyncratic acts of selection and stylization”. Stein’s literary self-portrait presents “an abstraction, a deliberate simplification” (904, 906), which renders the author-figure accessible only up to a point. In other words, the Gertrude Stein of *The Autobiography*, displayed for the benefits of an audience, consists of various external aspects of her being through which her internal self is hinted at, and yet remains out-of-reach as a consequence of the author’s artfully innovative self-objectifying autobiographical strategy (Saunders 363).

Significantly, then, the double-portrait enables Stein to write her self from Toklas’s point of view, which in turn gives her leave to stay on the surface of things. What is reported in terms of autobiographical characterization concerns in most part behavioural patterns while concrete knowledge of Stein’s and Toklas’s interior selves, is almost entirely excluded. Notwithstanding, the reader is left with a strong sense of Stein’s being (Breslin 906; Merrill 15). Yet, the “reality” of Stein is based on trivial observable details like the fact that Stein “has an explosive temper” (A 15), that she “has a weakness for breakable objects, she has a horror of people who collect only the unbreakable” (A 18), and that she “could not back a car successfully” (A 189). Humorously, Toklas tells her reader, in a spree of (displaced) self-praise, that Stein “was not efficient, she was good humoured, she was democratic, one person was as good as another, and she knew what she wanted done. If you are like that, she [Stein] says, anybody will do anything for you” (A 189). Elsewhere, on occasion and to a certain degree, the author dresses herself down by presenting wittingly illogical conclusions like the following: “when Gertrude Stein was quite young her brother once remarked to her, that she, having been born in February, was very like George Washington, she was impulsive and slow-minded. Undoubtedly a great many complications have been the result” (A 243). Furthermore, the narrator’s only explicit description of herself is typically in passing and through reference to Pablo Picasso’s abstracting comment: “Ah the Miss Toklas, he said, with

small feet like a spanish woman and earrings like a gypsy and a father who is king of Poland like the Poniatowkis” (A 28). What is more, Picasso’s first-impression of Toklas’s exterior leads him to conclude: “of course she will take french lessons [with Fernande, his lover]”. The absurdity of this performance is added to by the fact that Picasso’s motives are laid bare in an aside: Toklas tells her reader that Picasso wants to leave Fernande for Eve, but that as per etiquette the replacement requires the former’s financial security before it is put in motion (A 23). The gist of such scenes – which arguably constitute the entire text – comes down to the dynamics of the characters’ interactions as based on the rhythm of their verbal exchanges and generalized behavioural patterns. In short, Stein “express[es] the rhythm of the visible world”, “mixing the outside with the inside” (A 130, 170).

What is more, as the reader accesses Stein’s world through Toklas’s teasingly selective, multiplying and, in relation to Stein, highly partial view, s/he is made aware of the fact that action in *The Autobiography*’s occurs off-stage. Here, action (which is necessary and thus creates identity) is merely fictionally reported by Toklas. This narrative strategy, together with the game of author attribution, accords with Stein’s theoretical preference for crime fiction where the central event most often occurs before the narrative begins (WAM 149). In *The Autobiography*, of course, the point of detection arguably involves the invited search for the author, whose figuration through Toklas and with the authorizing incorporated perspectives of her friends and fellow artists, might be understood as a transcription of the author’s “just thinking about anything and in thinking about anything I saw something. In seeing that thing shall we see it without it turning into identity, the moment is not a moment and the sight is not the thing seen and yet it is” (WAM 151). On the whole, then, the narrative both reveals the author-figure and redirects the reader’s attention (implicitly bent on discovering solid proof of the authorial interior self) towards the textual composition. *The Autobiography*’s multiple layers of representation, which, as I too argue, undermine a totalizing verifiable portrayal of the author, has led several critics to liken the text to cubist portraiture, often with reference to Toklas’s reports of Picasso’s portrait of Stein.⁴⁷ Among them is Saunders, who states that:

Just as in Cubism the painter breaks up the picture plane and traditional ideas of perspective, and shows a subject from several different angles at the same time, so Stein’s might be what Cubist autobiography – or Cubist auto/biografiction – looks like. [...] you can’t identify the subject as an individual, but just as someone with attributes. [...] abstracting space, time, personality, so that you become more aware of the composition than the subject – which is especially pertinent given that Stein is a writer: someone who *composes*: who sees (as she put it) ‘Composition as Explanation.’ (367)

⁴⁷ Cf. *The Autobiography* 10, 16, 28, 51-2, 61, and 63-4. For further discussion, see Breslin 905.

On one level, then, it could be argued that Stein refrains from creating identity in *The Autobiography* due to its subversive form and metafictional layer, which makes the text read as an autobiografiction. The question thus becomes: how does this line of thought relate to the fact that Stein labelled this text “audience writing”? Arguably, even a reading intent on finding “entity” in place of “identity” cannot escape this fact. However, I propose that even on the level of writing for the sake of an audience, that is, writing in an accessible voice, Stein might be said to keep clear of her concept of identity due to the literary fact of presenting merely the external “I” of Stein as autobiographer as a result of the construction of the textual self “as seen from the outside” (A 170). For this reason she avoids overt (relational) self-analysis. The text is accessible, yet the representation of a subjectivity in flux arguably captures the authorial “bottom nature” (Stein’s term for essence) – in a more accessible way than the most experimental portraits, in which she “attempted to create a linguistic structure that would serve as an aesthetic equivalent to the essence of her subject” while not admitting aspects that “might produce recognition” (Merrill 13).⁴⁸ Stein does relate to time, memory and identity in *The Autobiography*, however, one could claim that these autobiographical concepts are merely subject matters, while the crux of the text is to be found on another level: in *The Autobiography*’s subversive structure. In addition, this unquestionably experimental construction might very well have originated in a state of authorial entity: *The Autobiography* may be an expression of “the human mind”, and, consequently, not in relation or as a necessity. Put differently, the text was presumably written with the object of avoiding the conventional autobiographical exhibition of the internal self, which as Saunders notes resulted in “a new mode of autobiographic self-objectification” (358). One could conclude, therefore, that the Gertrude Stein of *The Autobiography* is not relational in the sense of standard autobiographical narratives.

This brings us back to the question of the narrative voice, of its being a relational construct due to the merged impression of its author and her partner. Again, insofar as one accepts the argument that the voice is a construct, then this relational aspect might in fact, paradoxically, free the author from the allegations of audience-accessible identity formation. The text may be created in a state of entity so as to retain entity in an otherwise identity-constructing form of narration by ingeniously offering glimpses of the authorial outer self to

⁴⁸ Cf. Wendy Steiner’s *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance* (1978).

testify to the genius of her interior “I”, without exposing her innermost being for evaluation.⁴⁹ Indeed, my reading accords in part with Merrill’s understanding of *The Autobiography*’s ending, who suggests that: “As an autobiographer, Stein offers us identity only to erase it in the end and replace it with entity”, and further that “Stein’s narrative trick is to reveal that the autobiographical “I” – the represented image, the narrative voice – is always an other. [...] Between the subject and her identifiable self there remains an irreducible gap” (16). Consequently, the identifiable author can be traced only in the text’s constructedness: “in the cunning action, the ravelling and unravelling of her text” (Merrill 16).

Thus, one might ask whether Stein’s autobiographic self-objectification borders on the modernist tenet of impersonality, often associated with T.S. Eliot, who in his “Tradition and the Individual Talent” attempts to “divert interest from the poet to the poetry” (*Sacred Wood* 59) by divorcing the emotions of the experience that is the material for the poet in the creative act from the person behind the poetry. The creative act is seen to function as a depersonalizing process where intense and personalized experiences are fused and transcribed into structured emotion as thematic elements, which thus communicate a general truth as the particularities pertaining to the poet are removed from the then autonomous poem. The poet thus “exists only in his poetry and as his poetry” (Olney 7).⁵⁰ It could be argued that Stein, as part of her aesthetic manifesto, accords with T.S. Eliot’s impersonality in her explicit statement concerning “associational emotion”:

Gertrude Stein, in her work, had always been possessed by the intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of the inner and outer reality. She has produced a simplification by this concentration, and as a result the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose. She knows that beauty, music, decoration, the result of emotion should never be the cause, even the events should not be the cause of emotion nor should they be the material of poetry and prose. Nor should emotion itself be the cause of poetry and prose. They should consist of an exact reproduction of either an outer or an inner reality. (A 228)

In Saunders’s words, “the implication for autobiography is that the autobiographical in art will be found elsewhere than in formal autobiography” (61). As already mentioned, Stein employs this rhetoric throughout by referring to her other art whenever she comes close to

⁴⁹ Perloff explains Stein’s strategy as part of a certain “resistance to description” (64). See also Breslin, who notes that “we are tempted to ‘identify’ Stein but are shown that we can’t”, and that the reader cannot pin her down as an identity (907, 909).

⁵⁰ Significantly, Saunders suggests a reconfiguration of the understanding of the modernist notion of impersonality: “as centrally preoccupied with the paradoxical relationship between personality and impersonality – a preoccupation which is expressed through their successive engagements with auto/biography and autobiografiction. [...] What modernist impersonality is impersonal about is arguably nothing less than personality”. Hence, Saunders’s neologism: “im/personality”, which signals “the inseparability of these apparently opposing terms” (58-9). For further information, see Saunders 57-62.

displaying more personal matters. Admittedly, there is a certain degree of impersonality about *The Autobiography* as a result of the objectifying narrative voice, just as there is a certain degree of intimacy indicated in the interaction between the two main characters. However, I would argue that Stein's self-conscious fictionalizing experiment with form ironizes even the contemporary textual rhetoric of impersonality in its countering of the autobiographical tradition and contemporary conceptions of authorship: Stein's structural complexity involves the restructuring of both the classic confessional mode of autobiography and the modernist impersonality (Saunders 358). To that end, the author intentionally disappoints any reader intent on understanding Stein's psyche.

2 The Rhetoric of Apparent Authorial Absence: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's take on the autobiographical genre involves complex formal experimentation: *Dictee* consists of what may at first seem like an arbitrary selection of textual samples that together cover a variety of genres, languages, and themes. Though perhaps not instantly explanatory this fragmentary form is key to Cha's particular autobiographical rhetoric on several levels. The stylistic twist of multiplying genres within the frame of self-representation most significantly enables and, indeed, involves the unconventional incorporation of a plurality of subjectivities. Cyclical and non-linear, the narrative moves between the represented subjects whose stories span across time and space, providing glimpses into half-forgotten textual realities both imagined and historically factual. As such, Cha's acclaimed autobiographical portrait also includes that of her mother, Hyung Soon Huo, who was born in Manchuria as the daughter of first-generation Korean exiles (Grice 45), as well as Cha's grandmother, a female Korean freedom-fighter: Yu Guan Soon, Queen Min, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, photographed Korean nationalist demonstrators, and unnamed photographed protestors facing execution. It also includes a transcribed depiction of an actor in Carl Theodor Dreyer's film *Gertrud* (1964), and a still from Dreyer's French black and white silent film *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (1928) of the actress Maria Falconetti as Joan of Arc (Lee 86). The narrative further interweaves representations of Western mythological figures such as Demeter, Persephone, and the nine Muses, as well as the figure of Princess Pari, and the near-lost lyric voice of the ancient Greek poet Sappho.

As Cha's extensive cast suggests, her text involves a more complicated displacement of autobiographical subjectivity than the one in Stein's text. Where Stein dissolves textual distinctions between Self and Other in relation to her life-long partner, Toklas, Cha includes in her self-narrative a whole range of perhaps less obvious Others. Here, we are faced with multiple subject positions, and through a democratic and fragmented structure the numerous subjectivities are allowed exceptional representational space. *Dictee* is a generic patchwork which features typed and handwritten personal and political letters, diary entrances, poems, passages from The Bible (often wrongly recited), transcribed scenes from films, fragments from St. Thérèse's autobiography: *A Story of a Soul*, rewritten ancient myths, historical narratives and documenting texts – some of which are re-contextualized and/or fictionalized. Various visual images are included, such as calligraphy by Hyung Sang Cha, diagrams, wall

carvings, and reprints of photographs and maps: one of post-war divided Korea, and two maps of the human body as perceived first by Eastern and then, ten pages later, by Western physicians. There are also long passages that simulate language exercises for translation and dictation, descriptions of various religious rites: Catholic and Confucian ceremonies, and a total number of twenty-six blank pages scattered throughout. *Dictee* is written in four different languages: English, French, Korean-Chinese, and Korean Hangul (Grice 49), and offers a variety of styles, each of which serves a different purpose. Remarkably, some non-English passages are left un-translated, whereas others are followed (sometimes pages later) by an exact, or near-exact, English version.

The fluctuating narratives are seemingly loosely organized into nine chapters, and each chapter is named after one of the nine Muses of Greek mythology and their attested domains, as found in Homer (*The Odyssey*) and Hesiod (*The Thegony*). With a view to recurring themes as well as to design, it is crucial to note that the Muses, poetic inspiration personified, were believed to be the daughters of the goddess Mnemosyne, whose Greek name translates to “memory” (muse, britannica.com). Carefully composed throughout, nothing appears to be coincidental in Cha’s narrative, which, in part, reads like a meditation on the properties of memory, as it illustrates the consequences of memory in relation to identity formation in individuals as well as on the grand scale of national identity.⁵¹ In other words, *Dictee* offers an impressive variety on all communicative levels, and, as will become apparent, form and content always correspond organically both in spite of and due to its structural fragmentation. Although these fragments are roughly divided into thematic sections, there is an overriding sense of connectedness running through the text. As the Muses are bonded by their sisterhood, the chapter-divisions are choreographed organically, arguably resisting strict categorization. Indeed, one might claim that the very structure of Cha’s communication serves to demonstrate thematically, on the one hand, a dominating tendency towards division (Grice 44), both within and beyond texts, and on the other hand, the fundamental interconnectedness of everything represented. Additionally, as the structure continually reminds us, the represented is always mediated through the mercy of, and/or mothered by, Memory.

Before I delve into the analysis of the implied author-figure and *Dictee*’s reflections on the role of the author, I would like to draw attention to the ancient aspiration of the fragment immediately following the page of Cha’s dedication: “TO MY MOTHER TO MY

⁵¹ This is a common interpretation. Cf. Helena Grice (2000), Lisa Lowe (1994), and Elaine H. Kim (1994).

FATHER”, since it arguably finds an echo on every subsequent page. The opening words of the twenty-six paged prelude are as follows: “May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve” (*D* unnumbered). The words are those of Sappho (c. 610-570 BCE) of Lesbos, and I propose that they introduce several important characteristics pertaining to *Dictee*. First, the quotation articulates a wish to command language so as to stir the audience and thereby demonstrate the power of words. Sappho’s words also establish Cha’s sensitivity to language and her engagement with the fundamental question of voice, as well as the continued emphasis on texts as acts of communication that affect our views of the past, present and future generally, and more particularly, in relation to identity construction. It also demonstrates how language is significantly connected to the body, to our anatomy, to the senses and to history. Second, Sappho’s “May I” also signals a certain self-reflexivity: such command of language may never be achieved, thus her opening words serve to foreshadow Cha’s preoccupation with states of speech inhibition – and by extension, her portrayal of alienation. Additionally, Cha’s choice to have Sappho introduce her own autobiographical text both signals the rhetoric of displacement, and simultaneously sets the autobiographical tone through the decisive use of the first-person pronoun, and further through the invocation of the authorial power to affect an audience.⁵²

Although the blurb on the cover announces that *Dictee* is “a classic work of autobiography”, the above description of its form shows that the text by far exceeds traditional genre definitions. Owing to the fact that this self-expression “transcends the self” through the aesthetic integration of multiple subjectivities, it operates within the field of fiction. At first, perhaps, Cha’s displacement may seem to reverse Stein’s humorous self-dramatization as author-genius altogether through the apparent near-disappearing of the authorial subjectivity from text’s autobiographical frame. That is, in *Dictee* the implied author figures less like a conductor compared to that of Stein as she appears in *The Autobiography*. Here, the rhetoric of authorial absence is of a different character. However, I will argue that

⁵² Interestingly, Sappho’s nine books of verse as collected in 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE by Alexandrian scholars, did not survive the Middle Ages, and is available today only as quotations in texts by other writers. Sappho is famous for her beautiful meditations on female bonds; various love relationships between women of the Sapphic *thiasos*; her educational community in celebration of the values of the goddess Aphrodite. Thus, her general poetic emphasis on the collective as interrelated to the intensely passionate and personal prepares the stage for Cha’s female-focused, multi-layered fragmented text. Sappho’s alleged exile to Sicily further fits the bill, as one of the major motifs figuring throughout *Dictee* is external and internal aspects of exile (Sappho, britannica.com). Sappho is often called “the ancient tenth muse” (Gubar 58), and as Kun Jong Lee writes: “the Greek poet has served as the godmother and major classical model women writers have sought for and relied on for example, guidance, inspiration, and self-empowerment in the Western feminist tradition” (78).

Dictee's implied author-figure too is amplified through its apparent absence, and that the subversive rhetoric results in a sense of authorial omnipresence.

The most autobiographical "I", the implied author of this unconventional autobiography, figures fleetingly throughout as the young girl who learns French at a Catholic convent school, and quite possibly as the young girl by the window towards the end of the narrative. There is a plausible autobiographical link to the adult Asian American protagonist who addresses a memory of her mother, reflects on the history of Korea, and who, on her return to the motherland, meditates on the implications of identity, the properties of memory and her own experience of identity-fragmented non-belonging as further facilitated by the performance of the U.S. naturalization oath. There is an undercurrent of autobiographical information that seems to correspond to the movements of the historical author: that is, the historical Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. However, it is not an autobiography in the sense of being a chronological causality-oriented representation of coherent subjectivity à la the humanist notion of transcendent individualism (Anderson 5), also partly ridiculed by Stein. *Dictee* does not bear the mark of self-advertisement, nor does it offer the usual didactic recipe for personal achievement, or any sort of concrete detailed personal account inviting a sense of an accessible, unmediated and stable self, expressive of the authorial signature (Anderson 3-8). As will become apparent, *Dictee* offers quite the reverse. In fact, *Dictee* stays clear of most conventional ingredients, and stages instead half-detached, associative self-impressions that subversively reflect on the author-figure and simultaneously question the very mechanisms of identity formation and, by extension, conventional conceptions of self-representation.

The multiple narrative voices nonetheless carry significant autobiographical weight. Yet, the structurally challenging body of text deserves the taxonomic label "auto/biographic metafiction" (Saunders 21) since it, like *The Autobiography*, presents an autobiographical case of displacement: *Dictee* presents oft-occurring dissociations between author and protagonist, as the implied author tells her story through those of others. Here, conventional autobiography's singular subject is further added to by the uncommon number of protagonists, and complex postmodernist metafictional layers. The experiment with narrative voice is thus further complicated by the fact that Cha takes the act of fictionalization to the next level. Suffice it here to say that the strategy of fictionalization finds various forms of expression, all of which in turn might be said to reflect on the role of the author and on the rhetorical aspects involved in the very act of representation. I will argue that *Dictee*'s focus on *representation* itself illustrates, by way of deconstructive rewritings, the inherent and

foundational difficulties involved in self-representation. It is my view that this strategy coincides with the author's stressing the importance of self-expression and representational space in relation to identity formation, knowledge-production and circulation. The following analysis aims to uncover how Cha's displacement both allows self-expression and simultaneously diverts attention from the author-figure characteristic of traditional depictions of the writing self, and to discuss how this rhetoric operates text-internally.

2.1 The role of history, national identity, language, and the figure of the mother

Significantly, then, *Dictee*'s countering of the traditional author-portrait in its rhetoric of apparent authorial absence, involves a form of storytelling that instead directs attention to aspects which convey glimpses of the autobiographical narrator's self-impressions. As such, Cha's immediate and self-expressive autobiographical abstraction presents the reader with meditations on the role of Korean history, national identity, the expressive functions of language, and the mother-daughter relationship, as expressed by the mother whose emerging figure in a sense reads like an embodiment of all these self-determining aspects. Thus, on one level, *Dictee* is about the Korean political landscape in history. As Helena Grice notes:

[...] three of the earlier sections deal explicitly with issues of Korean and Korean American national identity and history from a gendered perspective [...] 'Clio/History' deals with the Japanese invasion of Korea and the student uprising against the regime in 1919 [known as March First Movement]; 'Calliope/Epic Poetry' with the experience of deracination, both during the period of Japanese occupation and Cha's own experience of immigration to America; and 'Melpomene/Tragedy' deals with Korean division into the North and the South in 1949 by the United States and the then USSR, and the subsequent war between the two newly created countries. (44)

With a view to autobiography, it is imperative to note that Korea's national history, especially its period of ruthless military oppression by Japan, is seen from a personal, experience-oriented perspective. Arguably, Cha's narration of history presents the reader with an alternative history (in line with the postmodernist preoccupation discussed in the general introduction), and at the same time demonstrates history's complex subject-formative mechanisms (Scott 65-9). Cha juxtaposes fragments of official documenting narratives,⁵³ to

⁵³ Cf. the map of Korea post-World War II (*D* 78), and the 1905 Petition from the Koreans of Hawaii to President Roosevelt (*D* 34-6), a reaction to the Treaty of Portsmouth (September 1905), which "granted Japan undisputed supremacy in Korea" and was mediated by the U.S. after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) over Manchuria, making Korea a "Japanese protectorate". The Korean emperor asked that the great powers "intercede with Japan on behalf of Korea" at "the international peace conference held at The Hague in 1907", to no avail. Anti-Japanese guerrilla units continued the resistance, and Japan tightened its grip on Korean society. Consequently, "[l]arge numbers of Koreans emigrated to Manchuria, Siberia, and Hawaii before and after 1910" (Korea, historical nation, britannica.com). Grice notes that the female voices presented in fragments "contrast to the male 'authorized' voices with which they are juxtaposed" (*D* 44).

the stories of her own grandmother and mother, plausibly to counterbalance canonized historical narratives that fail to capture the inexpressible pain and loss at the level of individuals. Hence, her authorial object involves impressing upon the reader a *sense* of the brutalities, rather than attempting an accurate description through generalizing documentation of historical facts, thereby additionally investing history narration with identity-formative import and clear epistemological undertones. By situating biographical subjectivities explicitly in social and historical settings, Cha arguably underscores the constructed nature of subjectivity, that is, she seems to communicate a counter-canonical view through her replacement of the transcendent autonomous autobiographical subject in passages that clearly and self-consciously investigate the various cultural components that *produce* a subject's sense of self (Anderson 3; Grice 49). Thus, the narrative position demands attention: Cha's is not only an experience-based account of history in order to authorize marginalized and largely silenced women's experience (though this aspect too may be part of the authorial project, and will be discussed later). I propose that *Dictee*'s predominant object may be to display the constructive effect of experiencing historical events and their narration, so as to make explicit the processes that produce marginalized identity categories in the first place.⁵⁴

"Clio History" opens with a photograph of Cha's nationalist heroine, Yu Guan Soon, and a depersonalized documentation of her birth and death: "DEATH: 12, October, 1920. 8:20 A.M. She is born of one mother and one father" (*D* 25). The information provided has a mechanical feel to it, and the unnerving tone with which the author represents the preceding events is perhaps reflective of the systematic cruelties imposed upon Koreans following the Japanese annexation in 1910.⁵⁵ Soon is central in *Dictee*'s depiction of The March First Movement, in which an estimated two million participated: "Guan Soon forms a resistant group with fellow students and actively begins her revolutionary work [...] organizing the nation's mass demonstration to be held on March 1, 1919" (*D* 30). What is to be observed is that Cha stresses Yu Guan Soon's fundamental agency so that her Korean nationalism becomes an expression of her determinate subjectivity (H. Kim 16), and this positioning of protagonists is typical in *Dictee*, just as the discussed passages here exemplify the

⁵⁴ This is largely inspired by Joan W. Scott's essay on the notion of historicizing "experience" and history in relation to Othered identities. This reading also underscores the multiple significance of the term "displacement" in the analysis of *Dictee*, both formally in terms of autobiographical convention and on the level of thematics.

⁵⁵ "Koreans were deprived of freedom of assembly, association, the press, and speech [...] The colonial authorities used their own school system as a tool for assimilating Korea to Japan, placing primary emphasis on teaching the Japanese language and excluding from the educational curriculum such subjects as Korean language and Korean history". The ruthless Japanese rule over Korea lasted thirty-five years and ended with the Japanese surrender in World War II, August 1945 (Korea, britannica.com).

mechanisms of Cha's rhetoric both in terms of form and aesthetized autobiographical style. Interestingly, as Kun Jong Lee notes: "[Cha's] manipulation of the time and place of the Guan Soon-led Aunae protest gives the false impression that the sixteen-year-old girl led the anti-Japanese mass demonstration in Seoul on 1 March 1919" when her demonstration was held, "by the lunar calendar [...] 1 April 1919" (87).

According to Britannica Online Encyclopedia, on March 1, 1919, a Korean Declaration of Independence was read in the attempted appeal "to the conscience of the Japanese." The Japanese answer was to arrest "some 47 000 Koreans, of whom about 10 500 were indicted, while some 7500 were killed and 16 000 wounded" (Korea, britannica.com). Significantly, Cha does not provide her reader with these figures: instead she implements two techniques that arguably convey a deeper sense of loss through an emphasis on individual agency and experience. The author universalizes the experience of self-sacrifice by first manifestly individualizing it in the character of Yu Guan Soon so that the perspective is intensely personal in its stylistically detached meditation on martyrdom:

Her parents leading the procession fell. Her brothers. Countless others were fired at and stabbed indiscriminately by the enemy soldiers. [...] Child revolutionary patriot woman soldier deliverer of nation. The eternity of one act. Is the completion of one existence. One martyrdom. For the history of one nation. Of one people. Some will not know age. Some not age. Time stops. Time will stop for some. For them especially. Eternal time. No age. Time fixes for some. Their image, the memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike the captured image that extracts from the soul precisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their countenance evokes not the hallowed beauty, beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dy-ing. (D 37)

Notably, *Dictee's* poetic account of Soon's fate is made all the more affective by the fact that it stresses the inexpressibility of the suffering experienced, in a continuous meditation on the gap between words and experienced reality (Chang 79): "Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction [...]. They exist only in the larger perception of History's recording. Not physical enough" (D32). Its raw, instinctive repetition of the "dy-ing" sharpens the perceptive senses through de-familiarized language that further serves to make Guan Soon the face of the collective Korean martyrdom, and simultaneously places her on a par with the French national heroine Joan of Arc, whose name she calls three times (D 28), underlining Soon's status as "the Jeanne d'Arc of Korea" (Lee 86).⁵⁶ The invocation of the saint is followed by the even more explicitly collective turn: "The identity of such a path is exchangeable with any other *heroine* in history, their names,

⁵⁶ Saint Joan of Arc (c.1412-1431) was "a peasant girl who, believing that she was acting under divine guidance, led the French army in a momentous victory at Orléans that repulsed an English attempt to conquer France during the Hundred Years' War". She was burnt at the stake by the English. (Saint Joan of Ark, britannica.com).

dates, actions which require not definition in their devotion to generosity and self-sacrifice” (*D* 30, emphasis added).⁵⁷ Hence, Cha’s rather collective version of a life-narrative not only includes specific historical figures but, arguably, further dissolves the traditional binary opposition between the particular and the universal by emphasizing the individual Soon’s experience of universal human suffering caused by oppression, and her choice to rebel and thereby join history’s long list of martyrs.

Dictee’s thematic language-orientation gains autobiographical force as the emphasis on the physical and psychological dimensions of language are connected to origin, to the maternal body, and consequently to the socialization within the mother tongue.⁵⁸ On this level, *Dictee* relates to the past through the narrator’s female lineage, as it both merges and contrasts three generations’ experience of exile. This notably corresponds to the biographical information on Cha, and may explain *Dictee*’s many references to travel and return.⁵⁹ Like Odysseus, the most explicitly autobiographical narrator returns to the motherland (now The Republic of Korea) after many years abroad, as an exile. Her story, however, does not relate to a heroic past. Rather, it is “a family saga of the victims of Japanese colonialism and American neo-colonialism” (Lee 88). In her notes on the penultimate page, Cha states that the biographical elements in “Calliope Epic Poetry” are fragments from the journals of Hyung Soon Huo – Cha’s actual mother.⁶⁰ Thus, the reader is transported to Manchuria and the year 1940 through the narrator-daughter’s addressing her Mother (Lee 88):

Mother, you are eighteen years old. You were born in Yong Jung, Manchuria and this is where you now live. You are not Chinese. You are Korean. But your family moved here to escape the Japanese occupation. [...] Refugees. Immigrants. Exiles. [...] But your MAH-UHM, spirit has not left. [...] It is burned into your ever-present memory. Memory less. Because it is not in the past. [...] It burns. Fire alight enflame. (*D* 45)

The Japanese enforced linguistic colonization, thereby systematically silencing its occupied in order to take away the exiled Koreans’ sense of a collective national identity, their sense of belonging to the motherland, thus internalizing the oppression (Cheng 126; Lowe 45-7):

⁵⁷Cf. Elaine H. Kim for an excellent discussion of how “Cha reclaims and recasts in specifically female terms what has been a preoccupation almost to the point of obsession in Korean history – martyrdom” (15), when Korean women’s patriotism is traditionally thought to be best expressed through mothering patriotic sons (16).

⁵⁸ Notably, the maternal body is a prominent feature of many male-authored autobiographies too, especially those inspired by psychoanalysis. Cf. Anderson 73-81, and Judith Butler 61, 92, 107-27, for information on Kristeva’s body politics and the notion of the maternal body.

⁵⁹ Cf. the poems in the section “Elitere Lyric Poetry” (*D* 124-32), titled ALLER/RETOUR, ALLER, and RETOUR (Fr. “travel/go” and “return”).

⁶⁰ The next two pages present a reworking of my unpublished ENG4434 paper on *Dictee*.

To speak makes you sad. Yearning. To utter each word is a privilege you risk by death. Not only for you but for all. All of you who are one, who by law tongue tied forbidden of tongue. You carry at center the mark of the red above and the mark of blue below, heaven and earth, tai-guek; t'ai-chi. It is the mark. The mark of belonging. Mark of cause. Mark of retrieval. By birth. By death. By blood. (D 46)⁶¹

This passage illustrates how language is connected one's sense of self – and the question explicitly posed is: what happens to our sense of identity if our own language is taken from us? The text seems to advocate the view that a nation's fundamental connection is based on the shared mother tongue and cultural history, and that to negotiate the self becomes highly difficult when a foreign language, is the only means of expression:

You are yielding to them. They are too quick to arrive. You do not know them, never have seen them but they seek you, inhabit you whole, suspend you airless, spaceless. They force their speech upon you and direct your speech only to them. (D 50)

The loss of the power to define reality combined with an omnipresent threat of physical as well as mental oppression is therefore part of the Korean people's cultural heritage, which makes documentation of national history and identity all the more important and painful.

The narrator traces her roots, both literally and figuratively, by meditating on the return to her female ancestors' motherland, and by embracing her mother tongue, the mothers' love and sacrifice.⁶² Interestingly, Cha's narrative seems to suggest that language itself involves a "feminine or maternal space" (Anderson 73), which is connected to selfhood on several levels:

You are home now your mother your home. Mother inseparable from which is her identity, her presence. [...] No death will take them, Mother, I dream you just to be able to see you. Heaven falls nearer in sleep. Mother, my first sound. The first utter. The first concept (D 50).

These autobiographical reinterpretations of the mother locates the origin of the self's consciousness of identity in the emerging mother-figure, which thus, by extension, symbolizes Korea itself. Simultaneously, these passages signal the burden of collective/personal memory, and illustrate the underlying weight of Korean national history and its impact on cultural identity formation and consequent alienation for generations of

⁶¹ Another example of themes that link nationality and the sense of belonging to mother and motherland, and which supports my reading above, is the image of the anonymous wall carvings by Korean prisoners during the occupation, on the page before the title page. H. Kim translates this to: "Mother I miss you, I'm hungry, I want to go home to my native place" (10).

⁶² For further discussion, see Lowe 45-9, who notes that: "the daughter addresses her mother as if the writing itself could reverse the roles of mother and child, as if she might, in turn, attend to her silenced mother by writing for her" (48).

Koreans. Indeed, Cha refers to history itself as “the ‘old wound’ from which both nation and individual are struggling to recover” (Grice 45).⁶³

The centrality of language to self-affirmation is an underlying theme in *Dictee*, as is suggested by the countless fragments that express the young girl’s struggle of coming to voice on entering a foreign language, signalled through direct transcription of language exercises, depictions of bodily organs, and descriptions of the physical processes that enable speech.⁶⁴ This may further be seen in connection with the grown woman’s emphasis on her “second tongue” (*D* 85), which can be understood as the sign of her distance to her Korean origin and her past sense of self. The textual space devoted to Cha’s mother-figure also explains the narrator’s fragmented cultural identification, which prevents exclusive identification with either Korean or American culture, resulting in a certain degree of dis-identification with both categories.⁶⁵ Notably, this cultural duality can be seen in connection with the text’s expressively transcultural form: like its narrator it is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural construct that balances Eastern and Western textual traditions. The greater part is written in English, which of course corresponds to the narrator’s “second tongue”, and which might testify to the emphasis on American neo-colonialism in contemporary South Korea. Additionally, in view of the rhetoric of displacement, the text may well invite the interpretation that the structural fragmentation and multiple identity-expressions originate precisely in this experience of exile and resistance towards complete categorization.⁶⁶

In a fragment, the narrator performs the U.S. naturalization oath, which causes her to express: “somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image” (*D* 56) (Grice 47; H. Kim 20). As later passages show, the narrator’s return to the motherland confirms that her state of exile has inserted a distance between her past and present sense of self:

⁶³ Grice points to History’s representation in relation to the mother-figure: “*Dictee* acknowledges a debt to the mother-figure as a source of the daughter’s subjectivity, since the mother is also figured in the daughter’s text as metonymic of the nation [...] This metonymic figuration serves to express the explicit parallel at the heart of *Dictee* between the ravaged, ruptured and invaded female body and the colonization and bifurcation of the body politic. Thus, by telling the mother/body’s story, Cha also tells the nation/body’s story” (49-50). It should be noted that metaphoric figuration of colonized land as female body is not a new observation to feminist thought, as Simone de Beauvoir discusses the phenomenon in her foundational text *The Second Sex*.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Dictee* 3-5, 158, 161.

⁶⁵ For further discussion, see Grice, especially 46-50, where she links it to *Dictee*’s epigraph: “From A Far/ What nationality /or what kindred and relation / what blood relation / what blood ties of blood/ what ancestry / what race generation [...] what lineage extraction/ what breed sect gender [...] Tertium Quid neither one thing or the other/Tombes des nues de naturalized/ what transplant to dispel upon” (*D* 20).

⁶⁶ This theme is expressed in several of Cha’s other works, including her video installation, *Exilée* (1980), which may further encourage such an interpretation.

You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity. [...] Whether you are telling the truth or not about your nationality. They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. You say who you are but you begin to doubt. (*D* 56-7)

Readers outside of this particular cultural crux, might fail to understand the challenges involved in such displacement of identity.⁶⁷ If so, Elaine H. Kim's "Poised on the In-between: A Korean American's Reflections on Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*" will help to contextualize the narrator's dilemma, as she relays her own past identity struggles: Kim faced the American prejudice against Asian cultures, which involved the objectifying and excluding "paternalistic and racist gaze" (7),⁶⁸ as well as the Korean expectation that women conform to "20th century interpretations of Korean Confucian ideals of feminine modesty, frugality, chastity, fidelity, and maternal sacrifice" (6). Confucian values are incompatible with feminist concerns, which "were often dismissed in the [Korean] cultural nationalist movement as undesirably 'bourgeois' and 'Western'" (6). In short, Kim's reflects on Asian American women's identity challenge caused by double marginalization – as Asian and female – within American culture prior to *Dictée*'s publication, if not still. According to Kim, women were simultaneously side-lined in Korean culture, since: "official 'Korean' identity, if not relentlessly male, is most definitely male-identified" (5). In view of its context, it is of interest to my overall analysis that Kim, too, reads *Dictée*'s re-presentations as offering an alternative space in which the Korean American female's subjectivity remains uncompromised:

Refusing to be drawn into an opposition between "woman" and "Korean" or between "Korean" and "Korean American," Cha creates and celebrates a kind of third space, an exile space that becomes a source of individual vision and power. Indeed, far from dropping a specific identity in favour of endless difference, she predicts the breakdown of binaries that are part of the logic of domination. She foregrounds a highly specific cultural context, inserting Korea, Korean women, and Korean Americans into the discourse, thereby opening the space for an individual search for selfhood as well as non-reified, non-essentialized collectivity. (8)

2.2 Mythological subjectivities and the rewriting of ancient myths

Arguably, *Dictée*'s experimental structure makes this aforementioned "third space" accessible not only to Korean American women but to everybody as a direct effect of the rhetoric of textual democracy. That is, the rhetoric of allowing multiple subjectivities their say in

⁶⁷Notably, H. Kim remarks that "in the ten years since *Dictée* was published" Korean American communities have experienced changes "resulting in increased Asian American insistence on our complex, plural, and continually changing identities" (7). Cf. Grice 46-49 for a discussion of the binary logic of identity.

⁶⁸ Cf. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) on the resulting double-consciousness brought about by racism of this kind. Lowe writes that: "Asian American subjectivity is a complex site of different displacements", and that the Asian immigrant's sense of national identity is often defined by contradiction (103).

representational matters through what may be termed Cha's dethroning of the traditional autobiographical "I". Whereas Stein's modernist fictionalizing of the autobiographical genre seemingly involves a shift of the authorial responsibility, thereby intensifying the focus on her own character, Cha's act of increased fictionalization renders her rather invisible to the reader who expects a conventional autobiography. Indeed, her *absence* is intricately tied to her subversive structural and thematic displacement of authorial subjectivity. Cha's claim to poetic license within the autobiographical frame involves blurring fact and fiction on a whole other level than Stein: *Dictee* presents a rewriting of already existing fictional characters in their mythological contexts. These re-presentations arguably complicate the autobiographical project, since they serve to shift the reader's attention from the supposed underlying authorial self-expression to Cha's re-composition of the canonized myths of Princess Pari and the canonized Western Greek goddesses, Demeter and Persephone.

Before exploring the specific mythological aspects of *Dictee*, I would like to draw attention to their relevance in shedding light on the role of the author and the text-internal author-figure. Cha's rewriting of mythological texts is crucial to my thesis in two interrelated ways. First, it supports the argument concerning the effects of Cha's general genre-subversion, since her rewritings might be read as an explicit example of authorial presence through the rhetoric of apparent absence. Rather than expressing an expected authorial subjectivity, these rewritings of patriarchal texts underline the role of the author and express an underlying authorial agency. Because the mythological re-presentations quite obviously diverge from the original versions, I hold that they reveal the meaning-making powers of authors in general. As such, Cha might be said to dramatize the (re-)defining role of the author through explicit demonstration of her text's re-visioning aspects. If this is the case, then the authorial act of representation itself is the underlying subject. The obvious nature of Cha's re-appropriation of these ancient myths leads me to the second point, namely the implied feminist undertones of Cha's text, which may have autobiographical implications in proposing that the generic subversion serves a greater purpose than simply avoiding the expected authorial explicitness for the sake of mere entertainment. I believe there is ample textual evidence pointing in the direction of furthering female textual agency, though this will be discussed at length later.⁶⁹ Suffice it here to say that if one accepts this gender-oriented interpretation, the theme of coming to voice in these myths resonates with Cha's

⁶⁹ Notably, all critics writing on Cha listed in my Works Cited agree on this point.

preoccupation with representation, with the very act of telling stories within a liberating “alternative space”.

Hence, the two rewritten myths may be read to answer the call from the initial rewriting of Hesiod’s “Tell me, O Muses who dwell on Olympos, and observe proper order / for each thing as it first came into being” (qtd. in Lee 82) into: “Tell me the story/ Of all these things. / Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us” (D11).⁷⁰ The invocation signals that content, structure, and manner are left to the teller to decide for herself: the rewritten fragment represents an encouragement to voice whichever experiences that come to mind free of the forced order that so often defines male narratives (Lee 81-4). In “Polymnia Sacred History”, Cha presents a rewritten version of a traditional shaman song central to Korean folklore: The Myth of Princess Pari (also called The Cast Out Child, The Seventh Princess, or Karma).⁷¹ The dramatic narrative is performed by a group of female shamans, *mundangs*, during the rite of *chinogwi kut*, the dead soul ceremony, and is believed to establish contact with the sacred and thereby ensure the transportation of dead souls to The Pure Land (Sorensen 403-4). According to Korean tradition, Princess Pari is killed at birth because she is the seventh daughter of a king who craved a son. Nevertheless, the princess sacrifices her life a second time to revive her parents (who die as a consequence of failing to accept shamanist divination) by fetching medicine from the Underworld. Her quest can only be accomplished by her putting on the act as crown prince so as to be seen fit for Buddha’s help, and through marrying, slaving for, and giving God Peerless seven sons.

In order to better appreciate Cha’s rewriting and its implications, a note on the myth’s context is necessary. Pari is celebrated as an “ancestress of Korean shamanism” (Lee 92), for her virtues of selflessness goodness and strength, and crucially, for her capacity for filial piety – a central characteristic of the largely misogynist and highly hierarchical Korean “great tradition”, which holds that children are indebted to their parents due to having been given “the grace of birth”, an obligation from which one can only be relieved by continuing the patriline and mourning the death of parents through ancestor worship (Sorensen 405-6).⁷² Notably, however, female children are excluded from this because they are largely lost to their natal families as a consequence of the patrilocal marriage arrangements, which state that

⁷⁰ For further discussion of the appropriation of patriarchal texts and its implications, see Lee, who reads “*Dictee* as Cha’s feminist, subversive, and interventionist response to the call of the *Theogony*” (79).

⁷¹ Cf. *Dictee* 167-70.

⁷² Filial piety is the “cornerstone of Confucian ethics” and “part of the five human relations: righteousness between ruler and subject, love between father and son, differentiation between husband and wife, ordination between older and younger, and trust between friend and friend” (Sorensen 405).

women's primary function is to bear sons and continue the patriline of the marital home (Sorensen 408). In "The Myth of Princess Pari and the Self Image of Korean Women", anthropologist Clark W. Sorensen argues that since Princess Pari figures as a mediator with powers to remedy between this world and the Otherworldly, she is also celebrated as an archetype for female strength and myth-making powers within the "little folk tradition" where women control the domestic sphere and the spiritual welfare of their families, and as such the myth "allows them to affirm their moral worth as women and confront elements of valued great traditions [Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism] which seem to deprive them of moral excellence, legitimate religious roles, and even entry into paradise" (403). Although Sorensen's essay is recommendable for an extensive account of Korean religious practices and cultural influences, I would argue the reverse as to its conclusion. It seems to have escaped his notice that the myth advocates normative female behaviour within a misogynist tradition: the traditional shaman narrative, albeit with a strong-headed female protagonist, arguably adapts to, and thus reinforces, the very values of the hierarchical family system that Sorensen claims it to counter-act. To celebrate the strength of Princess Pari is one thing. To state that the myth has a feminist undertone is quite another, since the aspiration to fill the position of a filial-indebted son causes complete self-effacing in the primary agent: her agency only serves the purposes of superior others.

Judging by the rhetorical rewritings of the original myth, Cha too is likely to have found the original lacking in female focus and reciprocity. In *Dictée's* version, all patriarchy-originated cruelties are wiped out, and there is a remarkable absence of men altogether. Hence, there is no infanticide, no self-effacing marriage, and no forced giving birth to seven sons to counterbalance the king's seven "failures". Instead, this rewritten myth joins Cha's chain of narratives celebrating mother-daughter bonds and sisterhood solidarity as it centres on a girl whose mother's illness drives her to walk "very far [...] from the neighbouring village to take back remedies" (*D* 167, 169), and the young woman by the well who helps her first by ensuring that she recovers from exhaustion by offering the girl a drink of water from "Beneath" where "Earth is hollow" (*D* 167), and then by listening to her story when she has regained her voice:

the woman listened and when the child finished her story she nodded and gently patted the child's head. ... [The young woman's] basket was filled with many pockets [...] She said that these were special remedies for her mother and that she was to take them to her. The child thanks her and stands. She gives her a deep bow. [...] After a while she turned around to wave at the young woman at the well [...] but she was not anywhere to be seen. (*D* 169-70)

Furthermore, this female-focused take on the ancient story counterbalances the traditional Korean emphasis on the father-son relationship, and replaces self-sacrifice inspired by indebtedness with real affection and invaluable female bonds that extend beyond the duties of affiliation. Another major twist of tradition deserves attention. Death and the Otherworldly are only alluded to: “Beneath” and “Earth is hollow”, rather than the determining factor, just as the “the repetition of lowering the bucket into the well” is made to signal the drawing of reviving water, which helps restore the child’s voice and consciousness. Notably, the child’s recovery of voice may be understood symbolically, as will be discussed at length later.

Equally significant in terms of authorial strategy is that the text interweaves imageries from her rewritten version of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (Lee 91-4) so that the Pari story is further reflected in this reverse act of life-saving where the daughter, Persephone, is saved by her mother, Demeter, whose voice penetrates the Underworld to which her daughter was abducted by Hades: “*Let the one who is diseuse, one who is mother who waits nine days and nine nights be found. Restore memory. let the one who is diseuse, one who is daughter restore spring with her each appearance from beneath the earth*” (D 133).⁷³ Here, too, male figures are absent as they, in the original, are to blame for Demeter’s despair: Zeus, who inspired his daughter Persephone’s rape and abduction, only allowed her rescue when Demeter neglected the harvest and caused a famine, but as she had eaten a pomegranate seed, she could only be spared two thirds of the year (Lee 90-2). Readers familiar with the Greek mythology will realize the underlying context and relate it to the cruelties suffered by Cha’s other incorporated characters. If connected, the ancient story will add momentum to the penetrating voice that calls attention to that which is lost and only partly recoverable. The repeated emphasis on voice serves to connect the rewritten fragments from the *Theogony* not only with the re-figuration of Pari, but with the undercurrent of images where women regain or come to voice, a major theme throughout *Dictee*. Though this strategy seemingly brackets the autobiographical “I”, it nevertheless signals authorial authority through the deconstructive aspects involved in these rewritings of canonized patriarchal texts.

⁷³ The figures of Demeter and Persephone are also invoked on pages 88 and 123, though less explicitly so. Notably, Lee states that: “Demeter ultimately retrieves her daughter from Hades and celebrates the return of Persephone with the inauguration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, one of the most important mystery cults in antiquity and the archetypal image of mother and daughter” (91). Cf. “Making stand again, Eleusis” (D 130).

2.3 Autobiographical retrospection and the act of observation

The implied author's return to Korea is further thematized through the additional journey of her mind, triggered by the described surroundings of Seoul. Readers are allowed access to the near-autobiographical narrator's re-membered memories. On page eighty, we find the textual Cha's composed letter to "Dear Mother", apparently written eighteen years after the daughter last set foot on Korean soil in 1962, aged eleven. As so often in *Dictée*, it is remarkable how the temporality is deliberately confused and merged: in the several moments recalled over the course of nine pages, we are in 1980, 1950, 1962 and 1960 simultaneously. The great significance of the dates alluded to occurs to readers at different stages in the reading-process depending on their knowledge of Korean history. For many Koreans, two dates are immediately painfully familiar. From an autobiographical vantage point, all these dates reflect the narrative position, as personal and national history clearly intersect.

The narrator states that: "Nothing has changed", and that Korea's political "standstill" – that is, the "Civil War. Cold War. Stalemate" (D 81), is in sharp contrast to the personal changes resulting from her status as an exile. Then the letter-writer stresses that "it is not 6.25. Six twenty five. June 25th 1950. Not today. Not this day. There are no bombs as you had described them" (D 80). This particular date in history refers, of course, to the date of the invasion of South Korea (the Republic of Korea) by the North Korean Peoples' Army, which marked the beginning of a war where hundreds of thousands were killed and wounded.⁷⁴ Once again this invocation arguably reminds readers of the presence of the past to all whose personal histories were shaped by what to most readers figures only, if at all, as "dead words" (D 133) in history books (H. Kim 10). An awareness of this fact brings another time-level into the frame and adds to the image, gradually elaborated throughout, of the Korea "Mother" so desperately longed for during her "thirty six years of exile" (D 80), but which, at the time of writing and times resurrected in the transcribed memories, remains in a state of "Tragedy".

Towards the end of page eighty-one, the present tense is invested with increased intensity as the narrative shifts to another historical event which dominates the chapter – a direct consequence of the Korean War invoked above. According to Lisa Lowe, this section "alludes to the military suppression of 19 April people's revolt of 1960" (109).⁷⁵ The static images spurred by the emphasis on Korea's state of "stalemate" further contrasts the

⁷⁴ For further information, see Michael Hickey's "The Korean War: An Overview".

⁷⁵ H. Kim explains that: "the April 19, 1960 student-led uprising [...] toppled the U.S.-installed Syngman Ree government" (20), in the protest against "Korean patriarchal nationalism [...] the oppressors are the South Korean police and soldiers" (20). For an interpretation of this passage with a view to the equivocality of the narrative voice, see J. Kim 174-6.

narrator's recollections of a traumatic childhood experience, as the narrative continues: "I am in the same crowd, the same coup, the same revolt, nothing has changed. I am inside the demonstration" (*D* 81). Yet again we are transported back to another uprising against another oppressive regime, and the significance of the date of writing the letter reveals itself. The following passage illustrates autobiographical traits and narrative strategies:

It is 1962 eighteen years ago same month same day all over again. I am eleven years old. [...] Mother, you are holding my older brother pleading with him not to go out to the demonstration. [...] You can hear the gun shots. They are directed at anyone. Orders, permission to use force against the students, have been dispatched. [...] They fall they bleed they die. [...] you call me to run to Uncle's house and call the tutor. Run. Run hard. [...] I know the two German shepherd dogs. [...] I must brave them, close my eyes and run between them. [...] *De Mo*. A word, two sounds. Are you insane the tutor tells him they are killing any student in uniform. Anybody. What will you defend yourselves with he asks. You, my brother, you protest your cause, you say you are willing to die. Dying is part of it. If it must be. [...] My brother. You are all the rest all the others are you. You fell you died you gave your life. That day. It rained. It rained for several days. It rained more and more. After it was all over. You were heard. Your victory mixed with rain falling from the sky for many days afterwards. I heard that the rain does not erase the blood fallen on the ground. I heard from the adults, the blood stains still. Year after year it rained. The stone pavement stained where you fell still remains dark. (*D* 83-5)

Cha's merging of times in these flashes of memory may be confusing since the textual "now" functions as a kind of prism. The time of narration is supposedly April 19, eighteen years since the actual time of the recollected memories from 1962, which, as we are led to surmise, brings forth further memories of the trauma caused another two years back in time: 1960. In short, at the time of writing, the narrator occupies three stages of her own consciousness at once, all of which are captured in the present tense. As such, the narrative projects an impression of emotional vacuum where moments of lived life at once merge and fracture: we witness several points of view all distant in time, merged in writing that moves between the child's consciousness and the adult perspective on the same determining incidents. We may further observe how the narrative, in transcribing the many levels of memories relating to a single experience, indirectly comments on the mind's capacity for remembering, which has genre-interpretive implications. The impressionistic jagged syntax further conveys how, in moments of crisis, one's senses are over-perceptive as instincts take over and time-perception inevitably becomes distorted: certain movements and points in time seem to expand beyond the bounds of reported time, thereby revealing time's relativity to the human mind, both at the moment of experience and in terms of recurring memories. Perhaps one could argue that Cha on the narrative level also dramatizes a fundamental point in autobiography theory, namely that autobiographical merging of perspectives is necessarily involved in representing the traditional coherent autonomous self? Cha, contradistinctively, includes several perspectives, and thereby stresses the narrator's mental developments in the intervening eighteen years,

while also illustrating the more mature mind's capacity of retrospective meaning-making of past events.

Deeply moving, the memories described in the letter reveal reasons why the narrator's family emigrated – and within the autobiographical frame, it provides links not only to the autobiographical fragments scattered throughout the text, but also to plausible understandings of the text's recurring imagery in the multiple protagonists' tales. It comes to show, however, that the expressed events in this section might not quite add up autobiographically, which again, quite plausibly, is part of the subversive textual performance, and which in any case poses questions regarding the role of the author. As noted in the general introduction, Cha was born in 1951 as John Hak Sung Cha's younger sister, and the family emigrated in 1962 to the United States, when Cha was eleven years old. It is also historically verifiable that she did return to Korea for the first time eighteen years later “around the end of the year” in 1979 (Roth 155), and she may very well have been in Korea on 19 April the following year, which would verify the letter-writer's claim of it being the “same month same day” (*D* 83), twenty years after the narrated uprising, in which case all the “facts” would seem to fit the bill perfectly. Interestingly, though it may not come as a surprise at this point, extraliterary evidence suggests that Cha's brother is alive and well outside of the narrative, since critic Elaine H. Kim thanks John Cha for his help in her literary research (23). Additionally, he functions as the director of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Memorial Foundation (Min 154). The following question arises: how might this fusion of fact and fiction impact the reader's reception in light of the dust jacket's claim of it being “autobiographical”? Naturally, readers who do not take the trouble of reading the endnotes to secondary material on *Dictee* may very likely assume the death of the brother to be true also outside of the narrative. How may the awareness of John Cha's continued existence shape readers' conceptions of the role of the author? On this level too *Dictee* is purposefully coated in artistic embellishments, though some of the intersections of fact and fiction are less obvious than others.⁷⁶

For all intents and purposes, it arguably does not matter whether or not the historical Cha's brother did die in the student uprising on April 19, 1960, as presumably stated on page eighty-five. We are in the field of fiction in which the narrated events, historically verifiable or no, signifies authorial authority and underlying textual strategies. If the factual uprising is furnished with a fictional layer while moving so close to what might have been true, and that which will have been true for so many families on that very day, it follows that Cha's

⁷⁶ For further discussion of *Dictee*'s unreliability as documentary narrative, see Cheng.

fragments are, if nothing else, metaphorically true – voicing emotions harboured by a great many real people, many of whom undoubtedly lack Cha’s expressive skills. Another effect of the potential act of fictionalization is that of countering dominating views of autobiographical authorship and its supposed maxim of truth. By offering alternative versions of reality as well as spelling out the unavoidable merging of perspectives it may be said to render the traditional autobiographical project as equally guilty of false claims to coherence both structurally and on the level of selfhood.

What is to be observed, regardless of the autobiographically confusing connection, is that the brother, who is addressed as “you” in the preceding sections, might stand in for the large number of students who were made martyrs for their cause – in which case, “you” joins ranks with Yu Guan Soon in history.⁷⁷ If this is the case, then there is a transition of focus from a single individual to the collective of martyrs, playing on the double reference of the pronoun “you”, signalling the plural version (Lowe 50), as alternately underlined in “You are all the rest all the others are you” (D 85). Then again, the reference of “you” might also extend to “Mother”, whose love makes her abandon her political beliefs in order to save her son – or better still to the soldiers, whose uniform and externally projected identity Cha implicitly warns against (Lowe 50-1): “The police the soldiers anonymous [...] execute their role their given identity further than their own line of blood” (D 84). Again, the point might precisely be the multiplicity of interpretive possibilities resulting from the general incorporation of several subjectivities. Irrespective of the reference of “you”, the text seems to allow a reading of the “I”, whose memory we enter, to align with the implied author-figure.

Throughout *Dictee*, images of looking through material substances are often associated with memory and its transience, which causes the past to be only partly recoverable (H. Kim 12): “Suffice Melpomene, arrest the screen en-trance flickering hue from behind cast shadow silhouette from back not visible. Like ice. Metal. Glass. Mirror” (D 88).⁷⁸ Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the act of observation, and of striving to remember past experiences spurred by what is observed. Often, the narrator meditates on the distance in times simultaneously present in the viewer’s consciousness, which brings to the fore both the act of observing (and the observer) as well as the observed. Cha’s narrative strategy takes different forms in the different fragments, but it is perhaps most prominent in the transcribed scenes from Dreyer’s film *Gertrud* (juxtaposed to St. Therese’s *The Story of a Soul* in “Erato

⁷⁷ Cf. “she makes complete her life as others have made complete” (D 31).

⁷⁸ Also noted by Chang, who writes: “repeated images throughout the text of dust, mist, shadow, veil [...] offer difference in visual field, revealing vision as always filtered, mediated” (81).

Love Poetry”), where the narrative strategy involves describing the woman on the screen by lingering on her movements in such a way as to give the impression that the reader indeed observes the actor through the film medium: she is portrayed textually through a description of the camera angles and focalization, which gives a strong emphasis to the particular choices made by the director as to how the woman actor appears on screen (Minh-ha 48). Cha’s defamiliarized depiction thereby suggests the representational power of the editorial gaze. The narrative takes an additional turn in emphasizing the position of the observer in relation to representation: the transcribed film scenes are juxtaposed to a representation of a woman watching the woman on the screen, and this narrative technique is performed in such a way as to simultaneously make the reader aware of her/his own positioning in relation to the meditations realized through the act of reading *Dictee*. I propose that the reader is made aware of her role as observer in observing the observer who observes the woman represented through the photographic objective of Dreyer’s camera. As such, the reader is left with her own reception of the reception of the represented, which resonates with the phrase: “Witness sees that which contains witness in its view” (D160). In my view, the result of this complex strategy is precisely to place the act of representation and observation at the centre of attention by capturing the very processes involved in mediation, while underlining a sense of responsibility on the part of the “witness” or, “observer”.

2.4 On representation: the act of writing and History re-presented

Like *The Autobiography*, *Dictee* is thus deliberately self-reflexive, but greatly bypasses the former when it comes to the degree of self-fragmentation and fictionalization due to its added layers of complexity. Here, too, the experiment with narrative voice is intricately tied to the text’s metafictional aspects so as to direct the reader’s attention from the autobiographical subjectivity to *the act of writing*, and to representational concerns. Consequently, *Dictee* is an aestheticized life-narrative in which the predominant autobiographical theme is *representation* itself. In a highly postmodernist fashion, *Dictee* flaunts its status as artefact by problematizing representational mechanisms while extending this focus to cover the larger cultural discourses, canonized history, and the Western literary tradition.⁷⁹ Cha offers a classic case of the tension discussed in Linda Hutcheon between “artistic inward-focus” and

⁷⁹ Grice also notes that several of Cha’s representational strategies are typically postmodern 43-4. She further states that “Clio History” “is the re-examination and re-evaluation of national history” (45), where “Cha uses female narratives, including her own story, in order to question national versions” (49).

“worldliness” in its challenge of and elaboration on representational matters, which significantly serves to illuminate the underlying politics of authorship.

First, to return briefly to Patricia Waugh’s definition of metafiction:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writing not only examines the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

With this in mind, it becomes clear from the following discussion that *Dictée* presents a near text book example of this literary device in her pinpointing of representational matters.⁸⁰ Imperative to Cha’s text is the narrators’ stressing of the sign as expressive medium, as an extension of the text’s general tentativeness to language and the functions of dominant cultural discourses. Through various protagonists, Cha emphasizes the limits of words to fully express emotions, and the emptiness of words to signal the trauma behind concepts such as “atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction” which are “not physical enough” (*D* 32). Additionally, the many language exercises and incorrect recitations in effect serve to spell out the arbitrariness that through convention is made to link sign and referent, “word and world” (Hutcheon 32). As Cha concurrently emphasizes the physical aspects of communication, and the connection between body and mind in all expressions, she stages how subjects manoeuvre and negotiate their selves in language. It is my opinion that such a meta-critical pinpointing of textual conventions in combination with Cha’s “anatomising speech” (Loxley 19) has a de-automatizing function that arguably reinvests the sign with greater significance, perhaps paradoxically because she stresses the limits of language and states of speech inhibition in linguistic self-performances.⁸¹ Furthermore, the text “self-consciously reflects upon its own structure as language” (Waugh 14) through presenting the reader with statements such as the following: “this document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: *the word*” (*D* 33, emphasis added). In sum, there is a dual, postmodernist focus running through *Dictée* in that it both articulates the essential importance of writing, and the inability of the representation to

⁸⁰ Lowe (who does not mention historiographic metafiction), reads *Dictée* in terms of Fanon’s conception of “decolonizing” writing, stating that it “displace[s] the representational regimes of the institutionalized novel and official historical narrative by writing out of the limits and breakdowns of those regimes” by “meditating on the notion of blood as ground and figure of representation” (101). *Dictée* presents “a conception of history [...] that exceeds textualization [...] ‘history’ becomes ‘visible’ [...] Like the blood, which is itself not a ‘fixed’ material [...] it spreads, skews, seeps, and will not cohere into the developmental progress that narrative history and the novel demand” (111): “*Dictée* resists the core values of aesthetic realism – correspondence, mimesis, and equivalence – and approaches these notions as contradictions” (37), in a “‘feminized’ renarration” (49).

⁸¹ Cf. the poem in “Urania Astronomy”.

capture the entire meaning of that which it signifies due to the unavoidable distance between the *representation* and the *reality* it seeks to convey.

In “Clio History” we find the most direct indication of authorial intent as the narrator comments on the pivotal importance of documenting the experience of oppression:

Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound. The past emotions all over again. To confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will *not repeat history in oblivion*. (D 33, emphasis added)

In other words, the past must be narrated for future purposes, it must be put into expressive language (as far as this is possible), even though it involves reliving the pain. Hence, there is a strong sense of the past in the autobiographical narrator’s present, which is incessantly underlined as the self is shown to be a product of its experiences. In the act of writing, or rewriting, however, the past opens up into the future. It follows from this merging of perspectives, and the implied authorial intention, that to document the political past in various forms accords with the writing of self in this autobiographical frame. I hold that as the past and future are captured in the textual present, the autobiographical project demonstrably extends the single self and provides the reason behind the unconventional genre approach. In fact, the seeming generic frame-breaks diverting attention from the autobiographical self can therefore be read as the most expressive of the autobiographical narrator’s self-impressions.

An even more explicit accentuation of the act of writing and the creative process is to be found in the passages where the narrator comments on her own interpretive processes in relation to her representation of her mother, aged eighteen:⁸²

I write. I write you. Daily. From here. If I am not writing, I am thinking about writing. I am composing. Recording movements. You are here I raise the voice. Particles bits of sound and noise gathered pick up lint, dust. They might scatter and become invisible. Speech morsels. Broken chips of stones. Not hollow not empty. They think that you are one and the same direction addressed. The vast ambient sound hiss between the invisible line distance that this line *connecting the void the space surrounding entering and exiting*. (D 56-7, emphasis added)

This passage serves to pinpoint the position of the represented pen-holder while, albeit on another interpretive level, highlighting the “void” surrounding the represented character on her “entering and exiting” the narrative. Thus, Cha raises awareness of the fact that the only information retrievable in the future is that which the author chooses to make accessible

⁸² A further notable postmodernist meta-comment on the textual creative process, in the represented copy of handwritten draft (D 40-1), which became the printed pages thirty-seven and thirty-eight. This self-consciously illustrates stages of the writing process, underscoring the selective and editorial processes involved in the making of a text. Also noted by J. Kim, who adds that: “it [...] indicates the implied author, whom we assume as an organizing force all along” (173). For further discussion, see Jerome McGann’s “The textual condition”.

through documentation, the rest is “void” of meaning to the reader on entering the evidence of lived life. Put differently, the excluded is at best alluded to but nevertheless remains a blank: it will not form part of the future reader’s reality. Again, the distance in time between the writing and the recorded events is underlined in placing the apparent author on stage, which further exposes the text’s status as artefact, stressing its inability to present the whole picture. Just as the Egyptian ruins on the cover visually testify to the transience of time, the narrator spells out the documenter’s crux:

Face to face with memory, it misses. It’s missing. Still. What of time. Does not move. Remains there. [...] All other, subject to time. Must answer to time, except. Still born,. Aborted. Barely infant. [...] Missing.
The decapitated forms. Worn. Marred, recording a past, of previous forms. The present form face to face reveals the missing, the absent. Would-be-said remnant, memory. But the remnant is the whole. The memory is the entire. [...] All else age, in time. Except. Some are without. (*D* 37-8)

In addition to marking death and its stasis, the extract has implications for how the reader receives the textual traces of the past presented. Cha’s poetic passages may be seen to echo Dominick LaCarpa’s theoretical postulations that “the past is not an ‘it’ in the sense of an objectified entity” that can be completely and neutrally represented (Hutcheon 55, 48). Following the heading “Urania Astronomy” (the goddess gifted with foresight by reading the stars’ arrangements), Cha’s narrator meditates on our limited access to past realities: “I listened to the spoken true/or not true/ not possible to say”. She continues: “There. Later, uncertain, if it was / the rain, the speech, memory. / Re membered from dream. / How it diminishes itself. How to Dim /inish itself. As /it dims” (*D* 67, 69). Rather than presenting a coherent version of a represented past, form and content cohere with Cha’s structural strategy of fragmentation in its resistance towards what Hutcheon terms “totalizing narrative” (60). Insofar as these fragments are read in light of each other, we may safely say that the implied author is at once painfully aware of the difficulties involved in narrating the past and voices the opinion that texts have a reality-structuring function. In sum, the text’s self-reflexivity regarding the tension between the two positions leaves room for the suggestion that *Dictee*, as a professed self-portrait, is invested with political significance, marked by the formal frame-breaks.

As most critics have pointed out, *Dictee* is manifestly a gendered narrative. To that end, I read the deliberate experimentations with narrative voice to effectively explore the empowering notion of women’s coming to voice, of the various characters’ achieving the position of agency through self-affirmation. In light of the above, therefore, my claim is that *Dictee* questions the nature of historical knowledge on several levels, in such a way as to

combine characteristics pertaining to the postmodern subgenre of historiographic metafiction and a more general feminist critique of representation.⁸³ My reasons for advancing this claim is that the metafictional aspects exemplified in the analysis leading up to this point are all essentially connected to *Dictée*'s preoccupation with history writing, and with the general underrepresentation of women in canonized texts. In effect, both points boil down to the question of ideology, and its embedding in all forms of textual representation, and by extension – as poststructuralists would have it – of the language system on which all acts of verbal communication are premised.

For the sake of clarity, I will briefly address the question of knowledge-production and the circulation of naturalized “truths” with a view to Foucauldian discourse theory, as I believe it concurs with the implied authorial concern with History and canonized Western literary texts. In short, Michel Foucault advances the claim that our knowledge of the past and our conceptions of the present reality are discursively conditioned; that is, *produced* by dominant cultural discourses, which notably reverses the traditional view that reality is the originator of those same discourses (Ashcroft et al. 62-3). Discourses are seen to operate through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in their categorizing of our conceptual understanding of the world. From this perspective, the force of texts is evident in that they are instrumental sites of ideological competition for knowledge-production and distribution. To echo Hutcheon again: “our access through narrative to the world of experience – past or present – is always mediated by the powers and limits of our representations of it. This is as true of historiographical narrative as it is of the fictional” (51). Thus, dominant discourses are seen to decide what is accessible in texts: they determine what we read and that which is excluded from the system (Mills 21). Crucial to my analysis is that Cha’s narrative, on the whole, arguably asks: *whose facts* are we presented with? What are the implicit ideological agendas in literary and historical narratives? What happens in the process when historical events are put into language and structured into narrative? (Cheng121-5). If texts are intricately tied to dominant (ideological) discursive practices, it follows that accumulated notions that go into the category of, say, Woman, is the product of the dominant (i.e.,

⁸³ Ae-Ju Kim’s [Historiographic Feminine Metafiction and *Dictée*] is a similar study, stating that “Historiographic feminine metafiction is a counter-discourse to provide the oppressed including women with discursive subjectivity against a hegemonic patriarchal history. [...] Represented in terms of multiple convergence of historiography, fiction, and feminist writing, *Dictée* can be seen as a model of historiographic feminine metafiction, a hypothetical genre” (46). It is impossible for me to compare my interpretations to Ae-Ju Kim’s as her text is in Korean. The English abstract reveals an *écriture féminine* approach, which I largely avoid.

patriarchal) ideologies, which have been naturalized, conceived as true, as a result of categorical repetition.

All through *Dictee*, we are presented with aestheticized variations on normative textuality in the forms of decontextualized and re-contextualized historical events, images and canonized literary texts. Arguably, Cha's deliberate genre-experimentation both demonstrates a clear departure from patriarchal textual tradition and, through rhetorical defamiliarization, in effect decodes normative textual mechanisms that otherwise might pass unnoticed. Indeed, I propose that Cha consequently deconstructs canonical texts through her rewritings, and thereby challenges their ideological reality-structuring knowledge-production.⁸⁴ In other words, *Dictee*'s many subversive approaches demonstrate Hutcheon's point of "how representation legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of knowledge – including certain kinds of historical knowledge" (51). By way of artistic defamiliarization, then, Cha exposes the productive function of ideology-embedded discursive structures involved in cultural meaning-making in general, and in particular she demonstrates how automatized assumptions, naturalized and common-sense perceptions of the real, are in fact *products* of powerful cultural conventions reproduced in canonized texts (Hutcheon 1-2, 18, 30-1). Hence, it is my view that Cha summons the weight of tradition in order to deconstruct its very pillars from within by decoding and restructuring its foundations based on privileged discourses. Like Stein's performance of male egotism, Cha's implied intentions require authorial courage: it involves taking on the greater part of the literary tradition.

Cha's autobiographical act of fictionalization, then, equals writing women into canonized history and literary texts. Significantly, the authorial absence ensures a collective female presence, which both reveals the conventional absence of women in texts, and in turn asks the reader to pay attention to what absence may signify. *Dictee*'s thematic concern with forced silence and the undocumented, with that which passes into "oblivion", is emphasized in statements such as the following: "From another epic another history. From the missing narrative. From the multitudes of narratives. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations" (*D* 81).⁸⁵ Thus, the reader comes to understand the real significance of the text's twenty-six blank pages, as well as the implied autobiographer's positioning within

⁸⁴ Naturally, Cha's narrative is also ideological in its counterbalancing of patriarchal ideology, though hers is self-reflexively so. Within the frame of autobiography it arguably cannot assume objectivity.

⁸⁵ H. Kim too writes that Cha "disturbs established notions of history": "Korean women's experiences of history have been buried under layers of male narratives, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Western. [...] until well into this [20th] century, many Koreans took to heart the Confucian percept that female ignorance was a virtue and worldly knowledge a vice" (14).

non-normative narration: absence becomes presence on several levels in the narrative. The text exposes how dominant discourses to a great extent have defined women merely as absence, by exclusion from male-dominated written and/or oral texts. The underlying argument seems to be that the productive discourses concerning women have had a tendency of speaking on behalf of women, and thereby defining women and women's experiences, rather than allowing women textual space to speak for themselves: "rendered immortal their acts without the leisure to examine whether the parts false and parts real according to History's revision" (*D* 28).⁸⁶ In sum, the writing of women has therefore been fundamental in the production of the category of Woman, to which factual and fictional women must relate, since many of the accumulated ideas have become self-evident facts. That is, they have been naturalized and are a dominant part of our everyday realities, and our conceptions of our selves.⁸⁷ Within this theoretical framework, the construction of "Woman" as an embodiment of ideology through largely male-authored texts is of great significance in relation to women's subject-formation. By analysis, this awareness calls for texts to counterbalance canonized views of women.

Integral to Cha's genre-experiments is the constant movement between the individual and the collective, and between the internal and the external (Grice 45). To quote Julia Chang:

language flows from the body, internal rendered external. bodily fluids mark the transition between interior and exterior, subject and society. no longer contained by skin, they signify traversal of boundaries. hence speech as secretion, ink as blood. hence also blood as ink, as mark, as document. **the rain does not erase the blood fallen on the ground...the blood stains still.** (79, emphasis original)

This collapse of traditional distinctions between body and mind, self and other provides the common denominator of the text's many fluctuating fragments and is perhaps most clearly conveyed through *Dictee*'s repetition of blood imagery. Just as in memory "the blood stains still" (*D* 85), the awareness of collective suffering is here metaphorically embodied in the narrator as knowledge running through her veins: in *Dictee*, mental and physical impressions are connected to literal blood. What is more, this physical and symbolically invested substance is linked to ink and to the very act of writing:

It takes her seconds less to break the needle off its body in attempt to collect the loss directly from the wound. Stain begins to absorb the material spilled on. She pushes hard the cotton square against the mark. Stain begins to absorb the material spilled on. *Something from the ink that resembles the stain from the interior emptied onto emptied into emptied upon this boundary this surface.* More. Others. When possible ever possible to puncture to scratch *to imprint.* Expel. Ne te cache pas. Révèle toi. Sang. Encre. Of its *body's extention* [sic] of its containment. (*D* 65, emphasis added)

⁸⁶ For further discussion, see Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).

⁸⁷ For further information, see Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Mills's *Discourse* (1997).

The quotation provides a glimpse of a woman whose blood is sampled. My reading of this passage is that the small sample of blood, from which it is possible to read the body's condition, parallels that of Cha's text, and thus serves to connect art and reality. The reader is presented with mere fragments, samples of texts that nevertheless enable an analysis of an overall situation of suffering expressed in *Dictee*, which is seen to manifest itself in the body (of the reader too as an effect of the act of reading), and consequently in the body of texts presented: "The meaning is the instrument, memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure, that rests as record, as document" (*D* 32). Like the blood extracted from the protagonist, the sample of fragments signals the essential experience of the female condition of textual reduction and direct physical oppression. This arguably pinpoints the extent to which women's lives have been reduced by the label truth, in line with a larger textual tradition. In *Dictee*, writing becomes an act of entering History.⁸⁸ Notably, the artistically autobiographical and overtly metafictional frame of Cha's text places *Dictee*'s take on history narration in diametrical opposition to traditional historiography, which operates in such a way as to "erase textual elements that would 'situate' (historians and novelists) in their texts" so as to universalize their historical accounts (Hutcheon 64). In fact, it could be argued that *Dictee*'s multiple perspectives and rewritings, its juxtaposition of myths and historical events, and self-reflexive illumination of representational strategies collapses the distinctions – or in the very least illustrates the

⁸⁸ Cha's apparent project thus resonates in part with Cixous's 1975 manifesto, "The Laugh of the Medusa", where she appeals to women to "write!" (876), to "return from afar" (877) as the liberated New Woman and "change the rules of the old game" through a "feminine practice of writing" (883): "write your self Your body must be heard. [...] Inscribe the breath of the whole woman" (880) to counter-balance the reproduction of the "the classic representations of women" found in the highly exclusionary canon (878), which, Cixous states, "has been run by a libidinal and cultural, hence political, typically masculine – economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden [...] woman has never had *her* turn to speak" (879). Cixous sees writing as "precisely *the very possibility of change*, [...] a springboard for the subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879). My adaption of Cixous's text is highly selective: it skips the emphasis on sexuality. Cha possibly claims that woman may "signify with her body" (881) but nowhere does she seem to claim that "women are body" (886). However, the writing of women into the canon and the beginning of a new history deserves to be mentioned in this context, and so does Cixous's point about "writing with the body" since it arguably accords, to some extent, with *Dictee*, although here this notion takes the metaphorical form of *blood* and not *milk*, as Cixous would have it, since to her woman is always also "mother" (881), see footnote 111. Cixous and Cha's texts were written in 1975 and 1982, respectively, and so these notions ought to be received with a view to second-wave feminisms. For a different conclusion on the comparison of Cha and Cixous, see Lee 77-8.

parallels – between history writing and the writing of fiction through its emphasis on the author’s act of meaning-making in the narrativizing of events.⁸⁹

As previously discussed, the historical character Yu Guan Soon is placed upfront by Cha in the actual March First Movement as a central organizer of Korean nationalist resistance against the Japanese. What is to be observed is Cha’s positioning of Queen Min in the course of the events:

In Guan Soon’s 16th year, 1919, the conspiracy by the Japanese to overthrow the Korean Government is *achieved with the assassination of the ruling Queen Min* and her royal family. In the aftermath of this incident, Guan Soon forms a resistant group with fellow students and actively begins her revolutionary work. There is already a nationally organized movement, who do not accept her seriousness, her place as a young woman [...]. (D 30, emphasis added)

Min’s role in Cha’s narration of the events seemingly extends her actual rule in history due to rhetorical omissions (Lee 85). In fact, Queen Min ruled from 1873 until 1895, when she was assassinated by the Japanese as the “suspected master-mind behind the [Korean government’s] anti-Japanese stance”, towards the Japanese hegemony succeeding Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894 (Korea, britannica.com). Nevertheless, the royal death conventionally connected to The March First Movement is that of King Kojong, Min’s husband, who was mourned by demonstrators as “the supreme symbol of Korean independence” (britannica.com). Notably, Cha’s narrative does not provide the exact date of Queen Min’s assassination, which took place twenty-four years previously, nor is there any mention of her husband’s death. Instead, *Dictee* emphasizes Queen Min’s actual political participation extending its effects in such a way as to place the queen at the front as the symbol of Korean independence (Lee 86), bracketing the king’s central role in conventional narratives: nameless, he takes up women’s normative position in the accessory phrase “and the royal family”. Min’s nationalist engagements may indeed have been Yu Guan Soon’s real inspiration despite the fact that Min’s death by burning preceded her own martyrdom by nearly a quarter of a century.⁹⁰ The point is that Cha’s apparent reshuffling of causality produces alternative facts that also spring from historically verifiable events: the rhetoric re-contextualization reinstates Queen Min as nationalist symbol, implicitly illustrating how other historical perspectives depreciate her symbolic power in favour of her husband. Lee adds that:

⁸⁹ Cf. Hutcheon’s statement about the postmodern “revisionist historical novel”, which “revises and reinterprets official historical record and transforms the conventions of historical fiction [...] de-naturalizing of the conventions of representing the past in narrative – historical and fictional – that is done in such a way that the politics of the act of representing are made manifest” (56).

⁹⁰ The fact that she was burnt with kerosene (Lee 85) is only traceable in the many and only indirectly linked fire images, which may also be associated with Joan of Arc’s execution. Cf. *Dictee* 88, 46, 111, 129.

“according to [Japanese colonialist historians], the Queen invited her death and the downfall of the [Choson] dynasty because she had rejected the guidance of the royal patriarch, her father-in-law [...] Thus colonialism and patriarchy went hand in hand” (85).

Frequently in *Dictee*, all traces of contextualizing information are left out – to the point of frustration.⁹¹ However, Lee writes that the image on page thirty-nine signals “three Korean peasants who, having pulled up the railroad track to protest against the Japanese seizure of their lands, were being executed by a Japanese firing squad circa 1905” (84), and further that the reprint of a photograph on page 122 signals the fact that “Cha resurrects women’s role in the first nationalist demonstration in Seoul by reprinting, of all the photos of the March First demonstrations, one which features many women demonstrators in front of the Monument Shelter” (87).⁹² Provided that Lee has got her facts right, these events *did* take place but significantly do not form part of our reality perceptions unless explicitly stated through the implementation of explanatory paradigms. The female March First demonstrators did participate, but, as Kim points out in her reflections, the Korean cultural nationalist movement was premised on a patriarchal ideology: canonical selections largely stress men’s participation (5-6). This leads me to another important point: the distinct absence of information, the many episodes of less explicit, but equally confusing ellipses, makes the reader aware of the productive effects of narrative mechanisms in structuring our perceptions. Arguably, this rhetoric of emphasizing the largely silenced stories of women, of rendering explicit the fact of female absence in history narration operates more effectively than if Cha simply provided the information herself.

Thus, through the absence of conventional narrative mechanisms Cha’s meaning-disrupting structure brings absence and silence into play. This in turn exposes our readerly expectations and drive towards coherence and causality in making sense of experiences. For the sake of argument, one could, therefore, claim that Cha’s text, in effect, highlights the fictive characteristics involved in history writing through her *avoidance* of those very meaning-making structures produced in causality-oriented representations of past events. If one accepts this rhetorical appropriation of Hayden White’s theory, it follows that *Dictee* (despite its autobiographical; i.e., supposedly factual, frame) would paradoxically be labelled

⁹¹ For further discussion, see Cheng, who also notes that the reader is “left with the problem of how to read this evidence as decontextualization itself” (121).

⁹² See also Cheng 121-3, where she points to how the presented, decontextualized images further illustrate the gap between reality and the representations of “reality”. Even photographs are mere dead signs that must be invested with subjective meaning, and are no more autonomous self-portraits than that of the textual traces of lived or imagined life. As Cha writes, “even the image would not be the entire” (*D* 88).

fictional by theorists, such as Philippe Lejeune, due to its *lack* of those very artistic structures that *construct* factual narratives in the first place.⁹³

Notably, this second level of Cha's rhetoric of absence does not mean that the author denies the reality of history in her narrativizing of events in *Dictee*, quite the reverse, as her object may be to illustrate its very *real* impact on subjectivity. Rather, I propose that the function of challenging conventional representational forms is that of awareness-raising concerning general text-internal narrative mechanisms and their relation to texts' social and discursive contexts. Cha's obvious reinstating of women in history points to the traditional near-disappearance of women's experiences in textual constructions of reality.

2.5 Coda: the implied autobiographer and the politics of authorship

Inarguably, Cha's text jars with traditional autobiographical projects in complex, typically postmodern ways. There is no trace of the humanist stable and autonomous autobiographic subject to be found in this subversive text – not even between the lines. True to postmodern destabilized notions of subjectivity, Cha presents narrators that are shown to be products of their cultural situatedness. Notably, this view of society and texts as productive in relation to subjectivity is the very reason why consciousness-raising writing is a crucial agency-ensuring factor. Resulting from this self-reflexive textual attitude is the pervasive attentiveness to the text-internal author-function and to the more general underlying politics of authorship. The fragmentary and at times contradictory self-impressions inferred from the text cannot be said to exhibit a verifiable autobiographical author-portrait. In its cross-generic and experimentalist fashion, *Dictee* arguably resists the very idea of coherent elaboration on, or explanation of, autobiographical subjectivity. Yet, this is not a classic example of the postmodernist decentred sense of self or of a usurping of authorial authority à la Barthes – not quite. And the autobiographical significance of Cha's rhetoric of absence is to be found where *Dictee* differs from the aforementioned view on authorship. As with Stein's more experimental works, this too is a case of composition as explanation: the implied author makes herself known as the expressive agency behind *Dictee* as a textual construct. On account of its metafictionality, which issues the most subversive elements by flaunting the text's status as artefact, the artist herself is indirectly figured in the foreground as she who holds the pen, and thereby artistically constructs this particular aesthetic outlook on reality in general, and in particular, on the reality of textuality and its implications (J. Kim 172). In

⁹³ See the general introduction.

other words, here too, attentiveness to the textual choreography is essential if one is to detect the author-figure. In actual fact, it could be argued that where the apparent autobiographical absence rings loudest – in Cha’s refocus and re-figuration of History and canonized myths – the authorial function is the most transparent. The author’s rewritings and incidents of re- and/or decontextualization deconstruct normative foundational texts. This is central to my exploration of *Dictee*’s representations of authorship because Cha’s text significantly both moderates and adds to traditional conceptions of authorship.

First, *Dictee*’s juxtaposition of history and myths, that is, supposed distinctively factual and fictional narratives, illustrates that the two modes of narration are not diametrically opposed since they operate in similar ways, both text-internally and in their relation to dominant cultural discourses. Cha’s text acts to problematize the notion of objective truth in textual representation by pointing to narrativizing mechanisms in explanatory paradigms: the construction of facts out of events necessitates strategies associated with fiction writing. *Dictee* suggests, therefore, that there is an unavoidable subjective filter in the structuring of all kinds of representations: a text representing reality is an authored construct, not the “real thing”. This implies that the author cannot take credit for transcribing all-encompassing and objective truth since truth is a matter of perspective, a matter which is intricately tied to dominant and productive cultural discourses to which the author has to relate. As such, Cha might be said to collapse the traditional distinctions between subjective and objective, personal and political narratives altogether by demonstrating that even supposedly objective narratives are indirectly expressive of the author’s subjective positioning. In a sense, this signals that all texts have an underlying autobiographical dimension. Second, Cha’s behind-the-scenes focus, which reveals the productive author pulling the strings, invests the author-figure with meaning-making powers. If one adopts the view that we are discursively conditioned, it follows that texts are instrumental sites for truth competitions. Thus, canonized texts have *real* effects that reach beyond the discourses of the individual author and the borders of specific texts (Anderson 14-5). Literary texts too engage in knowledge- reproduction and have the potential to contest naturalized views, as Cha’s rewritings serve to show. Hence, Cha’s implied agenda seems to be to reveal the extent of authorial import in order to make the reader aware of the politics of authorship, and their significance in representations of “reality”. In sum, *Dictee* demonstrates alternative perspectives to the knowledge-producing pillars of canonized history and literature, thereby partly elevating the role of the author in general as she effectively

underlines the author's *creative* and potentially subversive powers. By extension, *Dictee* highlights the importance of representational plurality in canonization to ensure wider, more inclusive representation.

Naturally, this has implications for the autobiographical writer too: when truth as an absolute is replaced by the question of perspectives, the autobiographer also becomes a performer of selected versions of self. Furthermore, the deconstructed part played by authors in relation to meaning-making generally, poses questions concerning the notion of authorial responsibility, as well as positioning the individual author in relation to the larger discourses on authorship. To conclude, then, Cha's destabilizing genre strategies, her rhetoric of apparent autobiographical absence, involves questioning the canonization of history and literature on a general level by placing the author, the author-function, and the act of writing on stage.

3 The Elusive Subject as Seen From the Outside: A Comparative Analysis

In the preceding chapters, I have provided an analysis of the implied author-figure and the text-internal reflections on authorship and the author-function as derived from Gertrude Stein and Theresa Cha's experiments with form. What follows is a comparison of the respective texts, with an added emphasis on certain aspects of autobiography theory that will help illustrate ways in which the texts operate in terms of their creative tension between autobiographical elusiveness and authorial visibility. *The Autobiography* was published almost fifty years prior to Cha's text, and the intervening years saw significant theoretical developments within the field of life-writing. The most notable, with a view to the trope of displacement, include the emerging field of women's studies resulting from the second wave feminism, and Roland Barthes's seminal essay "The Death of the Author" and its academic reverberations. Despite important distinctions between the two texts, however, my argument is that Stein's modernist experiment with genre may be regarded as a forerunner to the kind of postmodernist author-figuration exemplified in *Dictee*.

Both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*, then, present elusive images of the author through the trope of autobiographical displacement, which in both cases involves the inclusion of fictionalizing elements into the expected contractual equation of author, narrator, and protagonist. Stein and Cha thus have in common that they construct a different space for authorial self-expression, and, as I have argued, their exploration of boundary dissolution ultimately results in an elevation of the author-figure, albeit to seemingly opposing ends: self-promotion and feminist inscription into history, respectively. Often characterized as a "mock-autobiography", Stein's autobiographical displacement presents a case of *pretended* displacement of authorship (Saunders 353), as signalled by the title: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, but does in effect take the form of a playful, identity-evasive multiplication of perspectives, merged in the construction of Toklas-the-narrator's voice. Cha's challenge of the singularity of the traditional autobiographical "I" takes a rather more complicated route in that *Dictee*'s displacement involves the oft-occurring structural dissociation between the implied autobiographer and the text's multiple protagonists, whereby the seemingly autobiographical narrator instead largely directs attention to subjects other than herself. Contradistinctively, as Stein positions herself as the observed object through "the ventriloquized voice of her companion" (Lokke 15), the self-focus is intensified in *The*

Autobiography: the evident gap between narrator and protagonist enables an unparalleled genius-figuration, which Stein employs for the purposes of witty and authoritarian self-promotion. This displacement causes Carolyn A. Barros to characterize Stein's game as a "major shift to modernist autobiography" as it "eschew[es] the romantic conception of the autobiographical subject – a self of feeling and internal motifs – to construct herself as a modernist work of art comprised of multiple voices and portraits, which destroy what Stein herself called 'associational emotion'" (qtd. in Saunders 367-6). Thus, where Stein's protagonist nevertheless is the implied Stein, who chiefly performs the role of her real-life self, Cha's self-accentuation finds a less egotistical expression by appearing to disappear in favour of a plurality of less obviously related Others.

Consequently, Cha's postmodern metafictionalized autobiographical text takes Stein's innovative doubling of voice further by, for the most part, exhibiting what Sue J. Kim calls an "interweaving of communal voices" (169), and which Trinh T. Minh-ha explains as "a voice-resurrection of the past" of "sacrificial figures" (42, 40). Cha's explicitly democratic departure from the traditional generic univocality of the "I" problematizes the autobiographical assumption in the scholarly discussion of *Dictée*:

analyses of the text have gone hand in hand with efforts to theorize poststructuralist subjectivity and postnationalism in the critical turn against unified subjectivity and reactionary nationalisms, and towards fragmented, heterogeneous, multiple subject-formations. But despite critics' theoretical orientation towards heterogeneity and the impossibility of final articulation, readers of *Dictée* nearly unanimously speak of a narrator/or acting subject, and moreover, identify that narrator as Cha. (J. Kim 163)

The statement is qualified through a number of representative critical commentaries, among them a statement by Lisa Lowe which invites an autobiographical reading, namely that the narrator is "'translated' as a namesake of Saint Thérèse", and that the language exercises signify those "performed during the narrator's childhood" (qtd. in J. Kim 164). Kim further stresses the fact that Cha's name is not explicitly connected to the narrator in *Dictée*, and that there is no singular narrator directly identifiable with the author, but that the numerous "references to Cha's life as well as her mother's lead some to call it a postmodern autobiography" (164). Kim opts instead for Susan Lanser's term "equivocal". To paraphrase, though there is a certain singularity of voice which invites identification, or "attachment", between the implied author and narrator, the other textual voices present (oftentimes through their absence; e.g., the unidentifiable Laura Claxton) complicate this expected and desired attachment by opening up the voice so that it is simultaneously individual and collective,

singular and plural (J. Kim 169-73).⁹⁴ Hence, if Cha's text is autobiographical, with its many passages inviting attachment, then the supposed autobiographer also re-performs past textual selves – including those of mythical figures and total strangers – in the inscription of her own self. *Dictee* must, therefore, be labelled a decentred self-representation as it interweaves personal, interpersonal and collective memories, always elaborating on female fates in its destabilization of the autonomous self of most male autobiographies of the past.

When accessing autobiographical texts, we are faced with the following questions: “what is the truth status of autobiographical discourse? How do we know whether and when a narrator is telling the truth? And what difference would that make?” (Smith and Watson *Reading Autobiography* 15). Notably, the question of truth is all the more significant and difficult to answer when the text at hand obviously experiments with genre traits, and to that end replaces conventional formal and readerly assumptions with a great degree of indeterminacy. In short, if the text self-reflexively flaunts its unreliability, as my examples do, then the resulting uncertainty naturally informs the text's realization, the reading-process. Although *The Autobiography* is more explicitly verifiable in terms of biographical detail than *Dictee*, the pamphlet “Testimony against Gertrude Stein”, too, indicates the subjective nature even of autobiographical truth. Indeed, it could be argued that in appropriating Toklas's voice, which allows her to appear both more *and* less responsible for *The Autobiography*'s assertions, Stein thematizes the subjective nature of truth in its playful sabotage of the expected laws of the autobiographical genre: the author reveals what appears to be Toklas's truth about herself, and exploits this formal strategy so that the audience-directed representation of Stein and Toklas's reality largely remains an abstraction even in its autobiographical truthfulness.

Interestingly, the problematizing of how to categorize *Dictee* also calls attention to the reader's drive towards autobiographical attachment, and further to how a *reading for*

⁹⁴ Kim discusses *Dictee* as a text in which “notable similarities abound between the narrator and the author” and states that “the narrator's ‘values and perceptions’ seem compatible with those of the author”, which invites attachment (J. Kim 165). Interestingly, Lanser notes that the tendency for readerly “attachment” is stronger in texts by women writers “even when a textual ‘I’ has differed from the author in name, the convergence of the author's known identity with that of the narrating character has promoted attachment” (qtd. in J. Kim 166).

autobiography partakes in the production of what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson term the “intersubjective truth of autobiography”:⁹⁵

If we approach such self-referential writing as an intersubjective process that occurs within a dialogic exchange between writer and reader/viewer rather than as a story to be proved or falsified, the emphasis of reading shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing processes of what we call ‘truth’: autobiographical writing cannot be read solely as either factual truth or simple fact. As an intersubjective mode, it resides outside a logical or juridical model of truth and falsehood, as models of the paradoxical status of self-reference have suggested, from Epimenides of Crete to contemporary language philosophers. (Smith and Watson *Reading* 17)

Arguably, Cha’s text demonstrates the relativity and readerly interdependence of autobiographical truth on several levels, in that its fragmented and response-inviting structure will “speak” to readers in very different ways. As an aesthetically challenging text, *Dictee* arguably illustrates Stanley Fish’s reader-response theory on how the text will be perceived according to the reader’s individual adherence to various interpretive communities. That is, different readers will read *Dictee* differently, according to his or her predispositions to make sense of the signifiers in the text, and the various “pre-reading decisions” (Fish 355) realized in the act of reading, or “writing” a text.⁹⁶

On that score, Sue J. Kim rightly points out that the text’s aesthetics arguably appeal to two interpretive communities in particular (which helps explain the text’s inaccessibility to others): those who read with a view to postmodern art, and the more ideologically-oriented group of readers who focus on *Dictee*’s “Asian/Korean American feminist context”, as the text requires both a “familiarity with avant-garde aesthetic practices” and a certain degree of historical knowledge (167) – an observation which finds support in the text’s reception history. Before I return to comparable text-internal issues, I would like to remark that Elaine H. Kim advocates the importance of a critical emphasis on *Dictee*’s Korean American aspects, by providing the example of a Korean immigrant in her class whose reading of *Dictee* “made it possible for him to be ‘of’ instead of merely ‘in’ America by giving him something from

⁹⁵ Notably, J. Kim warns against the (often well intended) tendency of critics to read texts by marginalized authors as representative for an entire group (167-8). “When Wong writes, ‘*Dictee* is not a representative text’, she means both that the aesthetics of the text reject the representational logic of multiculturalism, and the text’s divergence from earlier Asian American literary conventions led to its being ignored by scholars for the first decade after its publication. Such problematic logics of representation are also what render *Dictee* an equivocal, rather than attached, text” (J. Kim 168).

⁹⁶ Because Fish understands the reading process to be a meaning-making activity, rather than a process of extracting inherent meanings from the text, he states that readers “write” the text (356-7). For a discussion of the connective and agency-ensuring aspects of reading *Dictee*, see Juliana Spahr 119-52.

American literature to call his own” (23-4).⁹⁷ H. Kim thereby invokes the text’s *real* effects and its capacity to enable the reader to imagine him or herself into the lives of others. This critical account of the readerly tendency towards identification, and subsequent empowerment, leads me to note that *Dictee* has predominantly received attention and positive criticism *because* the nerve of the text is rooted in the author’s actual cultural background. Furthermore, the list of the surnames of critics who write on *Dictee* seems to indicate that several have a similar cultural positioning as that of the author herself. My study of the text’s reception history also reveals that there is a remarkable absence of negative criticism, and that what little critique there is concerns *Dictee*’s inaccessibility. It does *not* question the credibility of the author, whose many rewritings seem instead to be regarded an aesthetic emphasis of an authorized ideology-critical foundation. Thus, an underlying acceptance of Cha’s experiential and moral/political authority may be surmised from the text’s reception, which arguably testifies to the relevance of authorship to critical reception and, implicitly, the reader’s meaning-making processes. In other words, the critical reception largely accredits the text with authority in matters Korean-American due to its experiential authenticity and the historical author’s positionality. This indicates, perhaps, that Barthes’s theoretical murder of the author does not quite hold in practice even as the text’s reception simultaneously testifies to the birth of the reader, which incidentally may resonate with Cha’s own conception that “the artist’s path is that of a medium” (Cha qtd. in Minh-ha 45).⁹⁸

3.1 Seen from the outside: autobiographical objectification as formal devise

The turns of postmodern linguistics within autobiography theory posit a view that arguably shakes the foundations of Lejeune’s contractual approach to autobiography. To echo Gilmore:

[the] autobiographical I is a linguistic ‘shifter’ that does not properly refer [...] The autobiographical code, in contrast, deploys the illusion that there is a single I, sufficiently distinct from the I it narrates to know it as well as to see it from the vantage point of experience and still, more polemically, to be that I. All of this depends on not looking too closely at the profound shakiness caused by these Is. [...] While Lejeune’s autobiographical pact seeks to corral an unruly rhetorical instability, poststructuralist critics have become interested in the internally eroding and re-inventing structures of identity in autobiography, in the irresistibility and impossibility of autobiography’s privileged relation to truth. (59-69)

⁹⁷ H. Kim states that “to discuss *Dictee* without ever referring to a Korean American writer is to depoliticize the text and thereby obliterate or at least drastically reduce its oppositional potential and its empowering possibilities” (qtd. in J. Kim 167). Though, one could ask whether the consciousness-raising aspects of *Dictee* might in part be lost to the audience at large, that is, whether the text might be too academic, or elitist, for the immediate realization of the average reader.

⁹⁸ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a theoretical discussion of the notion of authenticity and of autobiographical believability. For further discussion, see Smith and Watson’s *Reading Autobiography* 15-9.

Interestingly, several critics suggest that Stein's third-person autobiography anticipates the divided poststructuralist subject. Among them is Merrill, who states that: "Stein's narrative trick is to reveal that the autobiographical 'I' – the represented image, the narrative voice – is always another" since Stein's is "a self that is simultaneously observer and observed, illuminated and concealed" (16, 11).⁹⁹ Thus, her modernist autobiographical construction might be said to dramatize the always operating distance between what Smith and Watson label the *Is* of "the observing subject and the object of investigation" (1). In writing "Toklas" observing "Stein", the author enacts Rimbaud's adage "Je est un autre [I is an Other]" (Scobie 130). Put differently, the author playfully occupies both voices of the explicitly textual subjects in such a way as to self-reflexively mark the "I" as a linguistic function divorced from her own interior self, her "human mind". Stein "undercuts the referentiality" and "plays upon the devices of fiction: Toklas is a character in her own 'autobiography'; the 'real' writer is a character in Toklas's autobiography. Stein is also a ghost writer, an invisible hand, who capitalizes the role-playing available within the subject of autobiography" (Gilmore 65, 62). The impossibility of the mediation of "the human mind" is another factor in Stein's elusory autobiography, as she states that: "there are no witnesses to the autobiography of any one that has a human mind" (qtd. in Merrill 16). According to Stein's philosophy, the reason why is that the authentic inner self is characterized by immediacy, which is made impossible by the autobiographical premise of self-examination as it involves making coherent the various stages of self. Since a person's essence, or "bottom nature", can be captured only in its immediacy, it follows that developmentalist self-narration can only ever signal "human nature". What is more, forty years prior to the publication of *Barthes by Barthes*, Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937) presents an innovative meditation on the limited referential value of the traditional autobiographical "I":

It is funny this knowing being a genius, everything is funny. And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so very well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right. You are of course never yourself. (qtd. in Smith and Watson *Reading* 21)

⁹⁹ Merrill connects Stein's autobiographical self-division in *The Autobiography* to the Lacanian mirror stage, and Gilmore argues the following point: "the subject position represented through this signature destabilizes the unified, solitary subject whose ability to assure self-identity is the premise of the 'autobiographical pact,' and reacts the problem of (self-)representation in the lesbian relationship" (61-2).

In *The Autobiography* too, the “I” is characterized by its non-identification with the author as the narrator is manifestly a construct, whereby Stein avoids and thematizes the (con)fusion of “Is”: the author thus “make[s] the ways in which the genre fights itself into her book’s energizing principles” (Breslin 913). By extension, then, one could argue that Stein’s “fictional mask” (Saunders 366) in effect demonstrates the fictionalization involved in all autobiography, for, as Merrill concludes: “she creates a fiction to reveal a fiction: she exposes the self-division concealed within the autobiographical ‘I’” (14).

In this context, it is also remarkable that several of Linda Hutcheon’s theoretical points concerning postmodern literature, which as I have argued correlates with *Dictee*, are also compatible with Stein’s modernist experiment. Consider, for example, how the analysis in Chapter One may certify the claim that *The Autobiography* too “ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge” (Hutcheon 1-2). In other words, the text subverts normative notions of autobiography and authorship, the very concepts around which it evolves, self-consciously and critically underlining its own dual consciousness (and duality of voice) in the process. It, too, presents a case of saying something while destabilizing that very statement, and like *Dictee*, though on a smaller scale, *The Autobiography* also displays the limits of its own representation, as in the following: “(I wish I could convey something of the simple affection and confidence with which he always pronounced her name and with which she always said, Pablo [...])” (A 20). However, *The Autobiography* problematizes the representation of reality “without lamenting the insufficiency of either reality or of literary fictions” (Breslin 911).

Significantly, then, Stein’s avoidance of identity causes her to implement a strategy which, to a certain degree, resonates with Barthes’s formal autobiographical strategies, which involve a fragmented textuality and the avoidance of any “simple identification” through the dispersion of “the autobiographical subject between positions or pronouns” (Anderson 70, 67). However, a crucial distinction needs to be made. Where Barthes’s deconstructive genre approach is expressive of his imperative to “fragment the subject and expose its illusions of unity” (Anderson 71), in tune with his figurative coup of the Author’s authority, Stein’s play with autobiographical referentiality arguably achieves the diametrically opposed end. Her object is that of authorial authenticity and authority – the very authorial conceptions challenged in “The Death of the Author”. Thus, in contrast to Barthes, Stein does not signal an anti-essentialist conception of subjectivity, even though she too thwarts reductive self-definition. Nevertheless, it is my view that Stein’s positing of an unsettled “I” has the reverse

effect of making the Gertrude Stein of *The Autobiography* appear all the more monumental due to the author's semi-poststructuralist subversion of the first-person singular.

In Chapter One, I argued that Stein's concept of "entity" may have informed her rhetoric of narrating "the inside as seen from the outside" (A 170), as it allows her to omit the confessional mode. In this respect it is noteworthy that Cha, who according to Belle Randall learned much of her technique through filmmaking (157), also applies similar surface-based narrative strategies in her meditations on the various women's lives. As Minh-ha notes:

In dealing with the intimate and the autobiographical, Cha does not need to claim the insider's position of truth, for she is She. [...] Rather than making use of the internal psychological voice that remains the norm in autobiographical narratives, Cha looks at her mother/self from the outside – the way a camera gazes at its subject. Pain and suffering are evoked only through what the camera can catch as displayed in a *mise-en-scène*. The distance of such a formal device heightens rather than diminishes the emotion, for it is a(n Audience) Distance Relative – intimate, intense, and yet not sentimental. (49)

Through the filmic focalization in the textual depiction of St. Thérèse in "Erato Love Poetry", for example, Cha records only that which "can be 'objectively' *seen from the outside*" (Minh-ha 48, emphasis added). Consequently Cha, like Stein, emphasizes the subjective approach involved in the objectivizing of autobiographical truth, and the always censoring effect of mediation.

What is more, Stein's preoccupation with defamiliarizing language finds an echo in Cha's highly language-oriented text on several levels. First, in terms of contrast, it is remarkable that Stein's language revitalization (about which "Toklas" elaborates in *The Autobiography*) concerns the effect of poetic language, and does *not* question the ability of language to express meaning, which, in part, is Cha's concern. Rather, Stein holds that automatic language subdues language's *real* referential value.¹⁰⁰ For example, when asked for the significance of her famous line "a rose is a rose is a rose" after giving her lecture, Stein, characteristically, answered as follows:

¹⁰⁰ Cf. "Arthur A Grammar" in *How to Write*, where Stein writes: "Authority is afternoon and after grammar. Grammar is in our power" (qtd. in Spahr 40). See also *The Autobiography* 226.

Now listen. Can't you see that when language was new – as it was with Chaucer and Homer – the poet could use the name of a thing and the thing was really there. He could say “O moon”, “O sea”, “O love”, and the moon and the sea and love were really there. And can't you see that after hundreds of years had gone by and thousands of poems had been written, he could call on those words and find that they were just wornout literary words. [...] Now the poet has to work in the excitingness of pure being; he has to get back that intensity into language. [...] you have to put some strangeness, as something unexpected, into the structure of the sentence in order to bring back vitality to the noun. [...] But I notice that you all know it; you make fun of it, but you know it. [...] I know that in daily life we don't go around saying “...is a ... is a ... is a...” Yes, I'm no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years. (Stein qtd. in Meyerowitz 7)

Although critics, such as Ulla E. Dydo, make a point of how *The Autobiography* differs from Stein's more experimental word compositions, I find that Stein's unorthodox syntax in her autobiographical prose text has a similar effect in terms of making the reader attentive to the constructedness of the genre, and the “worn-out” or, automatized language usage of normative textuality. In her discussion of Stein's poetry, Juliana Spahr argues that Stein explodes literary conventions in her use of “nonstandard English as a reply to grammar's authorities” and in her challenge of the “mastery of fluency” through “nonstandard punctuation” and “duplicate words and restricted vocabulary” (23, 46, 27, 29).¹⁰¹ In short, Spahr's argument is that Stein challenges authoritarian language practices and reading strategies “through deliberate alternate usage”, and as such offers a de-authoritative, “connective” textuality (29, 23). It is my view that Spahr's arguments about Stein's anti-patriarchal language experiments may be extended to cover certain aspects of *The Autobiography* too, as the following examples arguably cohere with her observations concerning Stein's poetry: “Some years later when Gertrude Stein and her brother were just beginning knowing Matisse and Picasso [...]” and: “He it was who was the first to commercialize the douanier Rousseau's pictures” (A 88, 105).¹⁰² In other words, though at first seemingly exclusively self-promoting, Stein's text operates in such a way as to challenge not only the underlying mechanisms behind autobiographical narration and the politics of literary publication and circulation, but also the way we relate to language on a general level by disrupting conventional language patterns.

¹⁰¹ Cf. “Gertrude Stein said commas were unnecessary, the sense should be intrinsic and not have to be explained by commas and otherwise commas were only a sign that one should pause and take breath but one should know of oneself when one wanted to pause and take breath. However, as she liked Haweis very much and he had given her a delightful painting for a fan, she gave him two commas. It must however be added that on re-reading the manuscript she took the commas out” (A 144).

¹⁰² However, Spahr's reading of *The Autobiography* differs markedly from mine, as she argues that Stein's autobiographical prose texts “are written to deny the name of the author and her identity as singular” (37). Her emphasis is on how Stein's language experiments results in a reader-liberating, connective textuality.

As is evident in the many quotations presented in Chapter Two, Cha frequently implements techniques that provide a sense of claustrophobic, or at least surreal, space where the simultaneous stillness and motion is caused by what may be called a Stein-like repetition of phrases and sounds with often minimal variations and nonstandard punctuation. Minh-ha explains how Cha's voice is one which

slowly repeats, slowly modifies itself, slowly disintegrates, and then slowly begins anew. Multiplication of periods and pauses. Words decomposed, repeated, sometimes misspelled, sometimes mispronounced, isolated and incomplete. [...] A voice that serves as site for rich resonance and metamorphoses generated in the endless possible combinations that language offers. (47)

It is my argument that Stein's innovative convention-disruptive rhythm is mirrored in Cha's poetic life-narrative, in its insistence on how words, when released from automatic every-day language, may have a physical effect in the hearer or speaker – how words may be “more naked than flesh, / stronger than bone, more resilient than / sinew, sensitive than nerve” (*D* unnumbered).

On accessing *Dictee* too, then, the reader is forced to relax her or his grasp on acquired reading strategies and rather let the powerful narrative affect the senses, to feel the power of controlled, defamiliarized, poetic language. Cha's phrases are stripped of embellishments, and the brutality portrayed is only half-expressed in fragmentary, raw, carefully controlled outpourings that refuse to be captured. Indeed, *Dictee* escapes complete definition due to its insistence on a “now” in motion that incorporates past, present and future selves, as brought about by the displacements of narrative voice. Crucially, Cha's “complex temporality” (Anderson 58) is not altogether unlike that of the fluctuating quality of “Toklas's” narration, which results from Stein's characteristic narrative technique of the continuous present. In other words, just as the style and structure of *The Autobiography* may be characterized by movement and immediacy (Spahr 37), movement and motion combined are central characteristics of Cha's intense narrative too.¹⁰³

In sum, both texts avoid the expected fixity of the genre in their structural and linguistic play with autobiographical objectification. By remaining on the “outside” and in constant movement, while at the same time making the reader receptive to words and word compositions – the implied autobiographers are intensely present even as they avoid being pinned down as readable personalities. Indeed, Stein's third-personality could be read as

¹⁰³ Randall suggests that Cha's is a “modernist sense of structure” that it is “so strong that one feels the book was composed more than written” (157).

“mocking the cult of personality” (Spahr 35) altogether. Significantly, one might also ask whether Stein and Cha’s textual positionings mark a clear breach not only with Lejeune’s paradigm but also with a patriarchal tradition that has reduced female textual selves in its repetition of the male-authored myth of Woman through literary objectification in that past.

In comparing the texts’ style and their shared trope of displacement, it is remarkable that Cha with her many deliberate mistakes, such as the misnaming of Euterpe for Elitere, writes: “You think you have seen it before. Somewhere else. In *Gertrude*” (D 108). The passage in which Cha’s misspelling of Dreyer’s *Gertrud* occurs is in “Erato Love Poetry”, which juxtaposes scenes from Dreyer’s cinematic abstraction of unrequited love to St. Therese of Lisieux’s self-sacrificial love for Jesus. In light of the above observations, in addition to *Dictee*’s countless intertextual references and the author’s study of modernist writers, however, I believe that the intentionally added -e in *Gertrude* invites the interpretation that it may read as a tribute to Gertrude Stein, the foremother of language poetry whose modernist experiments arguably find an echo in Cha’s own work.

3.2 The problem of identity: the role of language, and the elusive subject

Significantly, Stein and Cha appear to share the view that the fixity involved in identification is a problematic concept. However, while Stein’s wish to stay free of identity is largely artistically motivated, Cha’s struggles seem more explicitly ideologically grounded, tied to her preoccupation with language as the means for self-expression. That is, though they share a preoccupation with linguistic meaning reinvestment, the former’s attentiveness to language does not appear to share the latter’s rather more overt concern with the power mechanisms involved in identity politics. Yet the result in terms of author-signification is remarkably similar since both solve the problem of identity through fusing fact and fiction, thereby constructing the autobiographical subject as an abstract entity through the employment of the views and voices of Others. In short, Stein and Cha’s authorial acts of fictionalization destabilize the reading *for* autobiographical identification.

Having previously discussed Stein’s philosophy, I will briefly explore Cha’s postmodernist engagement with the ideology imbricated in subject-formation and the subject’s subsequent sense of identity. In this respect, I propose that the fragmented cultural identification discussed in Chapter Two further finds an expression in the author’s elaboration

on the concept of dictation.¹⁰⁴ A constant in Cha's fragmented text is the sensitivity to the structures of language, the physical aspects of speech and language's limitations on the self: *Dictee* questions the very constructions of subjectivity in literature, and beyond, by focusing on the defining role of language. It arguably highlights the very foundations for self-expression. As such, Cha's is a self-conscious autobiographical text aware of the unavoidable difficulties involved in writing the self, while, as previously noted, advocating the fundamental importance of voice. If we accept the idea that we cannot conceive of the world outside of language, it follows that language imposes restrictions on our conceptions of reality. Thus, as a complex defining structure language both defines us and allows us to define, it enables the individual's definition of reality and imposes definitions upon the subject that partakes in social discourse. Hence, it is my argument that Cha's autobiographical text makes visible this duality of language in relation to the subject, that the text, in fact, mirrors the linguistic dictation of self and simultaneous self-performance through language.

Central to the examination of the construction of self is the text's title: *Dictee*. A French word, it signifies the didactic language exercise of *dictation*, which involves copying down as accurately as possible the words of someone else, most often a teacher. Dictation values perfect repetition in the transcription of speech, and variation in the textual pattern signals incorrectness that must be set right. Dictation, therefore, may be an exercise in de-individuation, an act of simply following forced examples of linguistic performance. *Dictee*'s first page illustrates this exercise of orthography and punctuation: it mimics the speech of a language authority first in French followed by an "unfaithful" textual construction in English.¹⁰⁵ Arguably, the transcribed literal dictation can be interpreted both as a metaphor for the role of language as producing subjectivity, and, by extension, the mechanisms of language in relation to ideological interpellation of the individual. If one accepts the idea that the self is a product of external factors, it follows that the construction of self involves a figurative

¹⁰⁴ The next three pages present reworked arguments from my unpublished ENG4434 paper on *Dictee*. It should also be noted that J. Kim (174-6) and Lowe (35-63) too discuss the theme of dictation from an Althusserian approach, and as such my arguments resemble theirs.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the subject's subversion of dictation, see Lowe's "Unfaithful to the Original".

dictation from without, that is, that the self is a social construct, a product of society which, again, is accessible to the individual, to a great extent, by way of language.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the explicit examples of copying other people's speech might also illustrate Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which holds that we perform a set of conventional acts that through repetition construct our sense of identity.¹⁰⁷ In other words, we perform our self in relation to the predefined expectations of the society at large, and this dictation, and consequent internalization of societal roles are made to seem natural, essential (Loxley 118-125). As such, Butler reverses the argument of a pre-existing core of self by stating that we take on, and continually repeat, external assumptions of personal character traits. My claim, then, is that language is the tool that enables us to perceive and thereby enact those very roles discussed in *Gender Trouble* (1990), and that *Dictee* thereby deconstructs the structures of selfhood on an even more primary level. Put differently, Cha unsettles the reader's presumptions about language as a self-expressive tool, and questions even the premise for analysing the constructions of our cultured sense of self. If this interpretive perspective is in tune with the possible implied authorial intention, this experimental and deconstructive self-expression adds another layer to Butler's stripping down of the assumed stable category of autonomous selfhood. Thus, *Dictee* explores the inherent difficulties of gaining a voice, of commanding language, in the tangle of surrounding expectations to the correct performance of self in its illustration of how language is not instinctual but learned, a cultural construction to be mastered in order to analyse other cultural constructs. If one accepts this line of thought, it follows that Cha's female-focused text turns dictation against

¹⁰⁶From Louis Althusser's interpretive perspective, we are always within ideology, which is an "illusion" that "alludes" to reality. We are "hailed" by ideology in several ways. For further information, see Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* 106-120. I believe it is possible to interpret language itself as a material manifestation of ideology since it is through language that we construct representations of our "reality". Through language-acquisition, we access a particular mode of representation, and we take on pre-existing ideologies encoded in the reality-expressing, culture-specific systems of signs and signification. Cf. "*She would take on their punctuation. She waits to service this. Theirs. Punctuation. She would become, herself, demarcations*" (D 4). Notably, Lowe writes: "*Dictee* expands on the Althusserian model of ideological subject-formation by exploring multiple and even contradictory 'hailings'" illustrating how "one site of interpellation may provide the means or instruments with which to disrupt other apparatuses" (qtd. in J. Kim 146-7).

¹⁰⁷In *Undoing Gender*, Butler states that the subjugated may achieve emancipation by way of narration, i.e. through linguistic self-definition. This theory of self-affirmation is a development of J. L. Austin's concept of speech acts: performative utterances do *in* saying, and thereby constitute a linguistic force that has actual consequences (Loxley 18-21). Hence, if an illocutionary act is an actual force, it follows that self-assertive utterances allow an enactment of identity through language (Loxley 18-21). In other words, through stating the self, one *does* or *performs* the self, which in turn enables the objectified to regain agency.

itself in *Dictee* by dictating her own self in an unconventional manner, and by making transparent defining discourses that have subjugated women in the past.¹⁰⁸

In view of the above, then, it is my argument that Stein and Cha's aesthetic reconstructions of experience, their display of the structures of remembering in relation to life-writing, highlight the foundations of autobiographical writing and at the same time destabilize those very foundations through a particular emphasis on mediation, the role of language, and the self-affirmative possibility of formal experimentation in the construction of the autobiographical self. It is my view, therefore, that these texts, in their nonconformist post/modern cross-generic fashion, question the notion of textual subjectivity from a highly language-oriented perspective: they present liberating departures from Lejeune's claim that "*identity is the real starting point of autobiography*" (24). As such, I propose that *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*, which might be regarded meditations on representation itself, deconstruct the very idea of the autobiographical novel by underlining the impossibility of complete expression through language, while simultaneously illustrating the essential role of language (and, in Cha's case, ideology) in the construction and dictation of identity in general, and of the female autobiographical self in particular.

In view of this, it could be argued that Stein's dynamic text, too, opposes dictation in that the author refuses to adapt to genre conventions. At once teasingly suggestive and audience-guarded, *The Autobiography* arguably implements Stein's expressed scepticism of identity-expressions. For, as Barbara Will writes, "the particular power of this work is at once to solicit the desiring gaze of the reader in seeking historical 'truth' and at the same time to deny the trajectory of this gaze" (144). Possibly, the text as such indicates that the author was more than aware of the reality-defining power involved in circulated textual expressions. If so, then *The Autobiography* might contribute to the construction of the public Gertrude Stein through, in part, countering preceding conceptions. Or, perhaps *The Autobiography* presents a case of self-mythology, not altogether unlike the Romantic poets, by alluding to what the audience wants to know only to deny them the satisfaction of self-confessed identity-expressive facts?

Either way, neither Stein nor Cha penned standard identity-locating life-narratives, on the contrary: they resist the fixity of identity (Cha even makes transparent the ideological

¹⁰⁸ The main body of text succeeds the heading of page three: DISEUSE, and is an elaboration of the concept of linguistic enactment in various ways, constantly focusing on the performance of speech, which might be said to directly relate to the notion of speech acts. The word "disease" is French, (the added -e marks it as feminine) and means "teller" or "storyteller", or as defined by the OED: "a female artiste who specializes in monologue".

mechanisms of identity formation), which normatively functions as the premise for autobiography. Consequently, both escape complete definition due to their distinct, yet arguably related, rhetorical self-objectification. Notably, Stein and Cha negotiate their adherence to marginalized or multiply marked cultural positionings in relation to textual representation. Thus, in terms of power relations and subject-formation in general, and canonization in particular, the trope of authorial displacement as the expression of the autobiographical “I” spurs a number of (unanswerable) questions. Is this trope applied as a reaction to existing norms? Might these autobiografictions be examples of writing for the margins? Perhaps the authors’ marked positions have generated a particular rhetoric marked by a wish to counterbalance patriarchal textuality? Do these formal subversions spring from a wish to resist reductive readings and marginal categorization?

3.3 Relational autobiography and feminist aspects

As both authors construct an autobiographical image through destabilizing the authorial subject the question now becomes: how may the trope indicate a possible politics of authorship, and more generally, in Seán Burke’s phrase: “is authorship an issue of gender?” Burke remarks that “authorship involves the appropriation of cultural space and serves to underpin the principle of the literary canon which – on feminist thought – has been defined in terms of patriarchal prejudice”, and that the hierarchical mechanisms of canonization has “traditionally placed women ‘writers’ in the second and devalued category” (145). He includes the following list, which serves “to characterise three phases of the movement which are – respectively – sponsorial, revisionist and theoretical in regard of the author-question:”

1. the assertion by the female author of the right of belonging to the state and estate of authorship;
2. the attempt to redefine authorship over and against the patriarchal model and to promote a counter-canon of female authors
3. the recognition that authorship and canonicity are inherently and inalienably patriarchal institutions which feminist thought should pass beyond. (145)

Interestingly, Stein does not appear to emphasize her position as a *woman* writer, (which thus accords to the first phase), nor does she seem to address a particularly gendered audience. In fact, when confronted with contemporary feminist issues by her friend Marion Walker, who wanted Stein to continue her studies at Johns Hopkins Medical School, she quite

plainly points out that the cause of women “does not happen to be her business” (A 92).¹⁰⁹ Significantly, Stein “was the child of the first great wave of feminism, not its mother” and because of those women’s efforts, Stein’s talents did not go to waste for she was privileged with a room of her own and enough money to live on: she could afford to be different (Sector 29, 28). It should be noted that Stein’s feminism has always been a subject of “controversy and doubt” (Spahr 46). Thus, what may be labelled feminist in *The Autobiography* is the implied refusal of the author to compromise her art according to normative “female” behavioural patterns. As discussed in Chapter One, Stein’s self-acclaimed status as genius signals a literary confidence as great as that of her male compatriots. It is all the more remarkable that Stein holds her ground in her highly individualist approach to the “human mind” and “human nature” given that she was a triply marginalized writer, a homosexual Jewish woman, in the first three decades of twentieth-century Europe. To quote Cynthia Sector:

She was interested in character and in the functioning of the mind, and was truly radical in her belief that gender is meaningless: “I think nothing about men and women because that has nothing to do with anything. Anybody who is an American can know anything about this thing” [*The Geographical History of America*, 1936]. This conviction that the human mind is without gender, combined with her historical sense that the twentieth century is a period of confusion, gave her the supreme confidence to create her art over the period of some forty years during which she was ignored or trivialized by the professional literary establishment. (30)

In addition to Stein’s unparalleled and highly productive confidence, her love for Toklas (and their at the time unconventional living arrangements) implicitly presented a liberating alternative to the heterosexual norm. Further, though not directly engaging in feminist matters, Stein arguably refrains from reproducing patriarchal conceptions in her work through experimental textuality.¹¹⁰ “By refusing to engage in plots, by treating types rather than genders, by writing metaphysical rather than dramatic poetry, and by doing portraits and theatre rather than narrative; Stein escaped stylistically the net of gender”, asserts Sector, who concludes that: “the voice that emerges is authorial without being masculine, and the patterns of mind traced owes nothing to patriarchal myth” (32, 33). Where Stein’s implied feminism

¹⁰⁹ Cf. “Gertrude Gertrude remember the cause of women, and Gertrude Stein said, you don’t know what it is to be bored”, and: “Not as Gertrude Stein explained [...] that she at all minds the cause of women” (A 91-2).

¹¹⁰ Several critics have argued that Stein takes on traditionally so-called masculine character traits affirming traditional gender roles in her segregation of artists and their wives: “The geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with me” (A 95). Irrespective of her sex, Stein cannot be blamed for not finding Fernande’s three topics of conversation— hats, perfumes and furs (A 31) – artistically stimulating. Also, the text offers a variety of descriptions of female artists in their capacity as artists. In short, Stein’s favoured company seems not to have had anything to do with biology and everything to do with personality, which indicates that she was no gender essentialist and that her preoccupation with a subject’s “bottom nature” was genderless.

lies in the text's disregard, its effectual deletion, of limiting gender- role determinacy and its replacement with self-affirmative individualism (expressed through the author's claim to genius), Cha's authorial approach to women's situation signifies certain second wave feminist traits in its explicitly female-focused rewritings of patriarchal texts. Thus, her textual turn arguably involves taking up pen against the myths sidestepped by Stein.

In order to underscore the arguments presented in Chapter Two concerning *Dictee's* feminist aspects and experimental form, I would like to draw attention to the final textual fragment, as it might also read as a formal implementation of Cha's conception that "the artist's path is that of a medium" (qtd. in Minh-ha 45):

Lift me up mom to the window the child looking above too high above her view the glass between some image a blur now darks and greys mere shadows lingering above her vision her head tilted back as far as it can go. Lift me up to the window the white frame and the glass between [...]Trees adhere to silence in attendance to the view to come. If to occur. In vigilance of lifting the immobile silence. Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the ropes tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound of ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break stillness bells fall a peal to sky. (*D* 179)

When read in light of *Dictee's* formal and thematic emphasis on states of remembering and positions of observation, this excerpt may present another version of the author's multiplying the frames of reference, detecting the various (conventionally concealed) perspectives and processes involved in the narrative act in general, and in the act of self-narration in particular. Provided that one understands the positioning of the child to be one of observation on two levels – both literally and figuratively – I propose that this metafictionalizing autobiographical move makes the end mark a possible introduction to the always thematically circular narrative. That is, the child's supposedly literal "view to come" of "an endless path turning the corner behind the last house" turns into figurative, or perhaps mnemonic, images of chiming bells and the unleashing of ropes "lifting the immobile silence", which resonates well with the themes of release from suffering and past censoring silence. Thus, the narrative gains force in this image of movement from passivity and non-voice to agency and transcendence of suffering, as symbolized by the reverberating, awakening sound of bells that stirs the audience. Unless such a reading stretches belief, its function would be to underline the interconnectedness of *Dictee's* fragments under the (second wave) banner of consciousness-raising textuality – presented by way of genre subversive equivocation. As the sound retrospectively signals the text's overall empowering movement to voice, and as it is figuratively contained within the transformative view of the child, it is possible to argue that "the view to come" is the narrative beginning again, playing on a loop, in which case *Dictee*

demonstrates the postmodern “suspicion of closure” on all narrative levels (Hutcheon 66). In positioning the child at the close, Cha not only thwarts the chronology of canonical life-narratives, she also offers a text that reads like “a circle within a circle, a series of concentric circles” (*D* 173, 174).

Moreover, this interpretation of *Dictee*'s structure might also lend final credence to the readings of the text's (metafictional) passages that thematize the many layers of representation and perception. Recurring and gradually elaborated glimpses of memories and their association with symbolically obscuring material structures of glass panes, rain, photographic objectives, mist, and the like, serve to illustrate how one's consciousness is always in a state of flux. Thus, *Dictee*'s deferral of explanatory information signals the inherent impossibility of complete definition – the answer is always apprehensively just out of reach, present only in its absence or perceivable only from a distance: “You look through the window and the music fills and breaks the entire screen from somewhere. Else. From else where” (*D*108). It is also noteworthy that the culminating scene presents a remarkable repetition of the motif of female solidarity and mother-daughter bonds, as the “mom” implicitly lifts the girl “to the window”. In terms of *Dictee*'s discernible autobiographical elements, the last fragment might also be invested with authorial significance: if one accepts that the child's view equals the unfolding of the other fragments, and further that these fragments have an autobiographical undertone, it follows that the child too may be an image of the implied autobiographer, the child Cha, whose view thus becomes the matured musings that cover the preceding pages representing traces of her already lived life, captured in the narrating present.¹¹¹ If so, then Cha's is another version of the postmodern mode of signalling the inherent split of the autobiographical “I”, discussed above. Incidentally, though written at a different point in time, *The Autobiography* too resists closure as it invites the reader to reread it in light of the knowledge of its true author. It too “circles back on itself as if it were an autonomous verbal reality. Yet book's ending is also open. The end of the book closes off and frames a life at the same time that it breaks out of its frame, it's artificial closure, to affirm the ongoing process of the author's life” (Breslin 912).

¹¹¹ Again, a Cixous reading could potentially illuminate the mechanisms of the text, as Cixous sees the mother as a metaphor for the valuable self-love and embrace of the feminine, which always includes “the locus of the other” (881). If one accepts Cixous's mother metaphor (that the mother and child are one) in the reading of *Dictee*, it follows that the female solidarity becomes an expression of self-affirmation and a furthering of the woman's voice for women's sake: the mother-daughter love becomes an alternative signifier of the same project. In terms of autobiography, the author writes her child self from a grown woman's point of view, which signals a related sense of identification.

In terms of a plausible politics of authorship, Cha's radical text might be regarded a contribution to the debates concerning the representation of women in literature, and the role of women writers in light of the larger discourses on female textual selfhood by writing back, revising past inscriptions of women, thereby offering female self-expressions that oppose normative representations. What is more, Cha implicitly posits the view that the woman writer alone can transfer women to paper. In this respect, I propose that Cha strategically upsets the expected relationship between fact and fiction concerning women in literature on a more general level, and that this in turn reveals the dominant portraits of women as products of male myth-making.

In addition to expressing authorial courage and claim to textual authority, the consequence of the shared trope of displacement is one which has been characterized as typical of female-authored autobiographical texts, namely that of signalling a mode of relationality. Despite Stein's overt disregard of gender-identification/division, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck hold that *The Autobiography*, with its double-voice and expressed real interdependence of Stein and Toklas, exemplifies a representatively "female" mode of narration in that it "ultimately replaces singularity with alterity in a way that is dramatically female, provides a mode of resisting reification and essentialism, and most important, allows for more radical experimentation in autobiographical form" (qtd. in Gilmore 60-1).¹¹² The statement testifies to early feminist theories of difference (corresponding to Burke's second phase), and in this respect it is noteworthy that both *The Autobiography* and *Dictée* may be characterized as typically "female" by Estelle C. Jelinek in that they "emphasise personal connections to other people", and have a fragmentary and multidimensional form (Smith and Watson *Women* 9). The life-narratives arguably, to a certain extent, also exemplify Mary G. Mason and Susan Stanford Friedman's point about relationality: of women autobiographers' identification with an Other. While the texts might be said to express a certain "feminine" mode of writing autobiography, however, they also employ "masculine" characteristics.¹¹³ In her eclipse of the expected ingredients of normative autobiography, Stein demonstrates aggrandisement which outshines that of most men, even in its destabilizing and playful irony. Further, in both cases, it could be argued that the trope of displacement and multiplication of perspectives inserts a distance between the author-figure and autobiographical subject matter,

¹¹² Cf. the passage where Stein has Toklas attend an interview with the officer in command of the commissary department in her place in order to get gasoline for "Auntie" during the war: "All this time of course he called me Mademoiselle Stein because Gertrude Stein's name was on all the papers that I presented to him. [...] I am not Mademoiselle Stein, I said. What, he shouted, not Mademoiselle Stein. Then who are you" (A 193).

¹¹³ I use terms "feminine" and "masculine" to signify gendered qualities and not gender qualities.

which according to Jelinek's logic is a "masculine" mode of self-narration. If asked whether her autobiographical text is particularly female in style, Stein would undoubtedly not answer in the affirmative, as she regarded artistic creation an androgynous process, an expression of the "human mind".

In contrast to Stein, Cha's communal voice would seem to have more to do with the above theoretical notion of female relationality. Yet, I find that Cha's theme of "coming to voice" demonstrates how a female-focus and a collective outlook need not amount to an essentialist portrayal of women (Smith and Watson *Women* 31). As a "collectivized life narrative" (Smith and Watson *Reading* 259), Cha's postmodern self-translation to paper involves the strategy of writing other selves in place of her own self, and yet Cha balances the equivocality in such a way as to avoid "any kind of uniformity of representation" (J. Kim 169): the text retains a dynamic quality where the emerging voices are simultaneously personal and collective. *Dictee's* textual democracy, its delegation of representational space to those other than the autobiographer, might in fact bring to mind Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of the novel's non-fixity and its possible incorporation of a multitude of voices, whose harmonious polyphony may transcend the possible monolithic dictation of an author/ity. Although this notion formed part of the essentializing logic of "difference" in the late seventies and early eighties (Smith and Watson *Women* 30), a Bakhtinian reading need not accentuate a universal female voice – rather, it might stress the multiplicity of female voices and thus underscore the text's palimpsest structure.¹¹⁴ Indeed, it is my claim that *Dictee's* chorus of female voices does not necessarily express an essentialist conception of what it means to be a woman – or, in Butler's phrasing: to *do* a woman. Seeing as Cha's deconstruction of identity invites the reading of Woman to be a culture specific notion, the text arguably implies the reverse: that the similarities of the women presented arise from the fact of their suffering caused by patriarchy, not as expressive of an inherent female nature. In other words, Cha's impressions exemplify Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex* 301).

The historical Stein's artistic autonomy aside: the accessible impression of the author-figure is arguably premised on a self-reflexively relational aesthetic. Yet, the relational

¹¹⁴ For further information, see Smith and Watson's *Women* 12, 30-1, and Françoise Lionnet's theory of *métissage*: "to articulate how marginalized subjects voice their lives. Lionnet argued that historically silenced subjects, women and colonized peoples create 'braided' texts of many voices that speak their cultural locations dialogically", as a multi-voiced act (Smith and Watson *Women* 12).

identity surmised, comes down to structure, and, in effect, functions as a shield against identification in general by revealing instead an elusive subject who utterly disregards normative gender roles. The implied Stein *is* what she *does* in the moment of action, as observed by her companion in the continuous present, and thus avoids textual identification of the kind discussed by Mason, Jelinek and Friedman. While *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* invite the interpretation of the autobiographical subject based in relationality, the relational narrative foundation is arguably constructed so as to redirect attention to others in Cha's case, and, in Stein, to deflect the desire of the audience for personal elucidation.

Indeed, Smith recognizes a tendency within women's autobiography which might shed light on Stein and Cha's elusive autobiographical mode of narration, namely "the tensions between their [i.e., women's] desire for narrative authority and their concern about excessive self-exposure" (Smith and Watson *Women* 12). This statement points to the underlying argument of this study: of how Stein and Cha's tropes of autobiographical displacement may be seen to express a creative tension between authorial and autobiographical visibility on the one hand, and on the other an artistic rejection of the traditional tendency of conflating the woman writer with autobiography, the particular, or mere personality. The elusive subjects implied in *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* reflect on the politics of textual representation, and this enables an escape of reductive definition. In essence, then, both narratives eclipse the confessional, truth-claiming identity-constructive traditional form theorized by Lejeune, and present instead artful and philosophical explorations in their fusion of fact and fiction.

Conclusion

To recapitulate: this thesis has contrasted Stein and Cha's texts with formal autobiographies and their assumed identity between author, narrator and protagonist, as prescribed by Lejeune's contractual approach to the genre. I have shown how Stein's version of the trope of displacement involves appropriating Toklas's voice so as to present a fictionalized version of her verifiable self, a textual construct which enables Stein to escape the hunt for personality and offer a primer for her more experimental work. Hence, I have argued that *The Autobiography*'s subversive author-figuration pinpoints formal dilemmas of autobiographical narration in a humorous manner, and simultaneously functions as a means for an individualist self-affirmation. In sum, Chapter One suggested that the rhetoric of third-personality allows Stein to play with autobiographical referentiality, pose as author-genius through the eyes of an Other, foreground her literary authority at the expense of the expected personal unmasking, and comment on the struggle for publication and the politics of literary circulation.

Chapter Two demonstrated how Cha's language-oriented postmodern genre dissolution offers philosophical reflections on the defining role of the author. It further proposed the view that this fragmented self-expression deconstructs the autobiographical novel by dissolving the dichotomy of self and other, the particular and the universal, by allowing other voices representative space to unfold. In accentuating the importance of female representation, I find that *Dictee* also underlines the impossibility of complete expression of self. It illustrates that the particular self-expressions are fundamentally connected to universal human experiences, thus proving wrong the patriarchal equation of the female and the particular. In addition, I have argued that Cha's radical fictionalizing experiments with autobiography call into question the relationship between fact and fiction on a general level by identifying the power mechanisms involved in representation. My reading proposed that the narrative underscores the ideological and discursive practices that inform our conceptions of reality, and stresses the silencing of women's voices in the past through censorship in canonized texts. In other words, working together with certain aspects of historiographic metafiction, the text challenges the assumption that fictional and historical narratives are antithetical.

Chapter Three further explored how both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* constantly draw attention to their own status as literary artefacts by commenting on the textual production and the stylistic codes of autobiography, the argument being that their experiments

with form and their multiplications of the autobiographic formula of the first-person singular result in alternative spaces for female self-representation. The chapter argued, too, that the creative tension between self-exposure and elusiveness brings to the fore both the centrality of women writers' visibility and authorial agency, and the fact that there has been a general tendency of conflating women writers with autobiography. Thus, the texts arguably engage with the politics of textual representation on a larger scale: they point beyond the frames of their own literary portraits in the challenges they present to the underlying mechanisms of all forms of textual representation, and within autobiographical narration in particular.

I have argued that both paratextual and text-internal strategies invite autobiographical readings of *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*, and discussed the implications of the subsequent frustrations of genre expectations caused by their displacements, their acts of fictionalization. Now, it is of course impossible to conclude with any certainty as to the authorial intentions behind the subversive rhetoric of Stein and Cha's autobiographical narratives. It is undisputable, however, that the resulting tension between the presence and absence of autobiographical conventions in these aestheticized author-portraits is highly *effective*. The underlying argument of this study is that, by splitting the trinity of author, narrator, and protagonist both Stein and Cha ultimately elevate the figure of the author, and further that the portrayal of the self "as seen from the outside" has the dual function of refusing reductive readings and illustrating how self-dictated objectification can have an empowering effect. In other words, by remaining within the contours of their texts and by abstracting allusions to their private lives, the authors recast the autobiographical subject in the rhetorical exercise of agency-ensuring author-figuration. The authors' structural and linguistic play with textual objectification, their dynamic, non-normative focalization opens up a traditionally static genre (Spahr 37). Thus, my claim is that these autobiographical masquerades make visible the power of the authorial voice in that they demonstrate the writer's power of definition and, by implication, illuminate the possibility of authorial myth-making. This thesis has argued that Stein's rhetoric of double-voice and Cha's rhetoric of apparent authorial absence reinforce the focus on the figure of the author so that the autobiographical displacements in effect result in an amplified authorial presence. In essence, both *The Autobiography* and *Dictee* eclipse the confessional identity-premised formal autobiographical mode theorized by Lejeune, and present instead aesthetic and philosophical explorations of traditional conceptions of authorship and the role of the author in their fusion of fact and fiction.

I would like to conclude by pointing to ways in which the analysis may be extended. Due to the page-limit, several aspects have had to be only briefly touched upon or left out altogether. For example, it would be interesting to address the concept of authorial authority in relation to Cha's text, to look at how it has come to hold such a strong position within Asian American literary studies in the United States, and further to consider this fact in light of *Dictee*'s resistance to categorization, and the fine lines between allowing space to voices of underrepresented groups and that of merely speaking on behalf of others. This analysis has largely focused on text-internal features of *The Autobiography* and *Dictee*. Thus, an additional way to expand the project would be to open up the discussion and look at the reception of Gertrude Stein as public figure in light of Foucault's theory of the author-function and the discourse on authorship, and further how the author handled the fame brought about by the publication of *The Autobiography* by including into the discussion of her innovative trope of displacement her subsequent autobiographical prose text, *Everybody's Autobiography*. Last, the fact that scholars have not yet studied the connections between Stein and Cha's texts opens up for the possibility of taking the comparative analysis further by looking at the similarities in style between Stein's experimental poetry and Cha's expressive strategies in *Dictee* as well as those in her other works of art, which are available in the Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Archive at the Berkeley Art Museum.

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