

American Literature, 1865–1910

Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (written 1905–06; published 1909)

Paper proposal and annotated bibliography

- ⊗ Purpose: To organize the results of your research, to articulate your main argument regarding a topic of your choice, to receive feedback from your instructor, to get ready to write the research paper.
- ⊗ Content: A preliminary version of your main argument (Abstract), three research questions + a list of the primary as well as (at least four) secondary sources.
- ⊗ Form: Title, a full paragraph or a detailed outline (200–300 words), an annotated list of sources using a recognised style guide (MLA, Chicago, MHRA [the last available here: <http://www.mhra.org.uk/pdf/MHRA-Style-Guide-3rd-Edn.pdf>].)
- ⊗ Bring this to our last class. Check access to Homework Vault on our course page on is.muni.cz.
- ⊗ Submission deadline: 31 January
Submit online in Homework Vault
Length: 2,000 words

Abstract

- ⊗ Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* (1982) is protest writing, but not as we know it. It is the only Beckett play dedicated to a political prisoner, thus going against the grain of his efforts both as writer and director to avoid “explicitation” of his work. Because of this, the play remains at the centre of critical debate on the politics of his writing. This article examines the context of *Catastrophe*'s composition and early productions, drawing on evidence from manuscripts as well as correspondence between Beckett and Havel, while also considering Havel's dramatic response to Beckett's play, *Chyba* [*Mistake*] (1983), as the kind of representational account of prison brutality that Beckett's writing avoids.

First Paragraph

In the spring of 1983, Samuel Beckett received a handwritten letter from playwright Václav Havel, whose prison sentence for “subversive activities” against the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had ended earlier that year:

Dear Samuel Beckett,

During the dark fifties when I was 16 or 18 of age, in a country where there were virtually no cultural or other contacts with the outside world, luckily I had the opportunity to read “Waiting for Godot.”

Beckett had been a key figure in inspiring Havel to start writing for the theatre. In one of his prison letters, Havel names Beckett and Eugène Ionesco as two of the playwrights “who stimulated me to try to communicate everything I wanted to say through drama.” Havel had worked as unofficial dramaturge on the 1964 national premiere of *Godot* in Prague’s Divadlo Na zábradlí [The Theatre on the Balustrade] and the association of Beckett’s drama with dissidents like Havel had led to the suppression of the Irishman’s work by the communist authorities. Therefore, Beckett’s positive response to a request from the International Association for the Defence of Artists that he write a play for performance in Avignon at “Une nuit pour Vaclav Havel” was both artistically and politically important to the future Czechoslovak president.

Secondary sources

- ⊗ Havel to Beckett, 17 April 1983, Václav Havel Library, Prague, ID 5852.
- ⊗ 'Folder entitled Havel, Vaclav', Reading University Library, UoR MS JEK A/2/123
- ⊗ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (1996; London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 680-81.
- ⊗ Václav Havel, *Letters to Olga: June 1979-September 1982*, trans. Paul Wilson (London: Faber, 1988).
- ⊗ Ondřej Pilný, "Irish Drama in the Czech Lands, c. 1900-2013," *Ireland and the Czech Lands: Contacts and Comparisons in History and Culture*, eds Gerald Power and Ondřej Pilný (2013; Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).

⦿ Discuss class and nationality in *Daisy Miller*.

- ⦿ Discuss nationality in *Daisy Miller*.
- ⦿ What are the conflicts between different nationalities in the text?
- ⦿ What modes of nationality were relevant at the time?
- ⦿ What was James's own experience of modes of nationality?



Interview with Gertrude Stein (1934)



- ‘Tied and untied and that is all there is about it. And as tied and as beside, and as tied and as beside. Tied and untied and beside and as beside and as untied and as tied and as untied and as beside. As beside as by and as beside.’
- ‘Van or Twenty Years After: A Second Portrait of Carl Van Vechten’ (1923)



Interview with Gertrude Stein (1934)



- Look here. Being intelligible is not what it seems. You mean by understanding that you can talk about it in the way that you have a habit of talking, putting it in other words. But I mean by understanding, enjoyment. **If you enjoy it you understand it. And lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it.** [...] But after all you must enjoy my writing and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you do not enjoy it why do you make a fuss about it. There is the real answer.



Free Indirect Discourse

⊗ whereby an apparently objective narrative voice is shaped and coloured by the world view and diction of the character being talked about. (Barry McCrea)

⊗ ‘She’d leave here tomorrow’

vs.

⊗ ‘She decided to leave that place the next day’

- ⊗ The tradesmen of Bridgepoint learned to dread the sound of "Miss Mathilda", for with that name the good Anna always conquered.
- ⊗ Herman Kreder was very well content now and he always lived very regular and peaceful, and with every day just like the next one, always alone now with his three good, gentle children.

- Melanctha Herbert who was Rose Johnson's friend, did everything that any woman could. She tended Rose, and she was patient, submissive, soothing, and untiring, while the sullen, childish, cowardly, black Rosie grumbled and fussed and howled and made herself to be an abomination and like a simple beast.
- Lena was patient, gentle, sweet and german.

- ⊗ Some of the boarders were hearty good south german fellows and Anna always made them go to mass. One boarder was a lusty german student who was studying in Bridgepoint to be a doctor. He was Anna's special favourite and she scolded him as she used to her old doctor so that he always would be good. Then, too, this cheery fellow always sang when he was washing, and that was what Miss Mathilda always used to do. Anna's heart grew warm again with this young fellow who seemed to bring back to her everything she needed.
- ⊗ Rose was hard headed, she was decent, and she always knew what it was she needed. Rose needed Melanctha to be with her, she liked to have her help her, the quick, good Melanctha to do for the slow, lazy, selfish, black girl, but Rose could have Melanctha to do for her and she did not need her to live with her.
- ⊗ And so they began all four to live in the Kreder house together, and Lena began soon with it to look careless and a little dirty, and to be more lifeless with it, and nobody ever noticed much what Lena wanted, and she never really knew herself what she needed.

'Melanctha'

- ⊗ Melanctha Herbert had always been old in all her ways and she knew very early how to use her power as a woman, and yet Melanctha with all her inborn intense wisdom was really very ignorant of evil. Melanctha had not yet come to understand what they meant, the things she so often heard around her, and which were just beginning to stir strongly in her.
- ⊗ [...] When the excitement was all over, Melanctha began to know her power, the power she had so often felt stirring within her and which she now knew she could use to make her stronger.

- ⊗ Often she was alone, sometimes she was with a fellow seeker, and she strayed and stood, sometimes by railroad yards, sometimes on the docks or around new buildings where many men were working. Then when the darkness covered everything all over, she would begin to learn to know this man or that. She would advance, they would respond, and then she would withdraw a little, dimly, and always she did not know what it was that really held her. Sometimes she would almost go over, and then the strength in her of not really knowing, would stop the average man in his endeavor. It was a strange experience of ignorance and power and desire. Melanctha did not know what it was that she so badly wanted. She was afraid, and yet she did not understand that here she really was a coward.
- ⊗ Jeff Campbell had never talked to any one of what had been going on inside him. Jeff Campbell liked to talk and he was honest, but it never came out from him, anything he was ever really feeling, it only came out from him, what it was that he was always thinking. Jeff Campbell always was very proud to hide what he was really feeling. Always he blushed hot to think things he had been feeling. Only to Melanctha Herbert, had it ever come to him, to tell what it was that he was feeling.

- ⊗ Melanctha Herbert was sixteen when she first met Jane Harden. Jane was a negress, but she was so white that hardly any one could guess it. Jane had had a good deal of education. She had been two years at a colored college. She had had to leave because of her bad conduct. She taught Melanctha many things. She taught her how to go the ways that lead to wisdom.

- ⊗ Dr. Campbell had taken care of Jane Harden in some of her bad trouble. Jane sometimes had abused Melanctha to him. What right had that Melanctha Herbert who owed everything to her, Jane Harden, what right had a girl like that to go away to other men and leave her, but Melanctha Herbert never had any sense of how to act to anybody. Melanctha had a good mind, Jane never denied her that, but she never used it to do anything decent with it. But what could you expect when Melanctha had such a brute of a black nigger father, and Melanctha was always abusing her father and yet she was just like him, and really she admired him so much and he never had any sense of what he owed to anybody, and Melanctha was just like him and she was proud of it too, and it made Jane so tired to hear Melanctha talk all the time as if she wasn't. Jane Harden hated people who had good minds and didn't use them, and Melanctha always had that weakness, and wanting to keep in with people, and never really saying that she wanted to be like her father, and it was so silly of Melanctha to abuse her father, when she was so much like him and she really liked it. No, Jane Harden had no use for Melanctha. Oh yes, Melanctha always came around to be good to her. Melanctha was always sure to do that. She never really went away and left one. She didn't use her mind enough to do things straight out like that. Melanctha Herbert had a good mind, Jane never denied that to her, but she never wanted to see or hear about Melanctha Herbert any more, and she wished Melanctha wouldn't come in any more to see her. She didn't hate her, but she didn't want to hear about her father and all that talk Melanctha always made, and that just meant nothing to her. Jane Harden was very tired of all that now. She didn't have any use now any more for Melanctha, and if Dr. Campbell saw her he better tell her Jane didn't want to see her, and she could take her talk to somebody else, who was ready to believe her. And then Jane Harden would drop away and forget Melanctha and all her life before, and then she would begin to drink and so she would cover everything all over.

- ⊗ "Yes I certainly do see that very clear Dr. Campbell," said Melanctha, "I see that's certainly what it is always made me not know right about you and that's certainly what it is that makes you really mean what you was always saying. You certainly are just too scared Dr. Campbell to really feel things way down in you. All you are always wanting Dr. Campbell, is just to talk about being good, and to play with people just to have a good time, and yet always to certainly keep yourself out of trouble. It don't seem to me Dr. Campbell that I admire that way to do things very much. It certainly ain't really to me being very good. It certainly ain't any more to me Dr. Campbell, but that you certainly are awful scared about really feeling things way down in you, and that's certainly the only way Dr. Campbell I can see that you can mean, by what it is that you are always saying to me."

- ⊗ What was it that now really happened to them? What was it that Melanctha did, that made everything get all ugly for them? What was it that Melanctha felt then, that made Jeff remember all the feeling he had had in him when Jane Harden told him how Melanctha had learned to be so very understanding? Jeff did not know how it was that it had happened to him. It was all green, and warm, and very lovely to him, and now Melanctha somehow had made it all so ugly for him. What was it Melanctha was now doing with him? What was it he used to be thinking was the right way for him and all the colored people to be always trying to make it right, the way they should be always living? Why was Melanctha Herbert now all so ugly for him?

⊕ Always now he liked it better when he was detained when he had to go and see her. Always now he never liked to go to be with her, although he never wanted really, not to be always with her. Always now he never felt really at ease with her, even when they were good friends together. Always now he felt, with her, he could not be really honest to her. And Jeff never could be happy with her when he could not feel strong to tell all his feeling to her. Always now every day he found it harder to make the time pass, with her, and not let his feeling come so that he would quarrel with her.

Melantha Herbert was beginning now to come less and less to the house to be with Rose Johnson. This was because Rose seemed always less and less now to want her, and Rose would not let Melantha now do things for her. Melantha was always humble to her and Melantha always wanted in every way she could to do things for her. Rose said no, she guessed she do that herself like she likes to have it better.

Melantha is real good to stay so long to help her, but Rose guessed perhaps Melantha better go home now, Rose don't need nobody to help her now, she is feeling real strong, not like just after she had all that trouble with the baby, and then Sam, when he comes home for his dinner he likes it when Rose is all alone there just to give him his dinner. Sam always is so tired now, like he always is in the summer, so many people always on the steamer, and they make so much work so Sam is real tired now, and he likes just to eat his dinner and never have people in the house to be a trouble to him.

Mathilda Haydon, the simple, fat, blonde, older daughter felt very badly that she had to say that this was her cousin Lena, this Lena who was little better for her than a nigger. Mathilda was an overgrown, slow, flabby, blonde, stupid, fat girl, just beginning as a woman; thick in her speech and dull and simple in her mind, and very jealous of all her family and of other girls, and proud that she could have good dresses and new hats and learn music, and hating very badly to have a cousin who was a common servant. And then Mathilda remembered very strongly that dirty nasty place that Lena came from and that Mathilda had so turned up her nose at, and where she had been made so angry because her mother scolded her and liked all those rough cow-smelly people.

Lena did not care much to get married. She liked her life very well where she was working. She did not think much about Herman Kreder. She thought he was a good man and she always found him very quiet. Neither of them ever spoke much to the other. Lena did not care much just then about getting married. [...]

Herman Kreder knew more what it meant to be married and he did not like it very well. He did not like to see girls and he did not want to have to have one always near him. Herman always did everything that his father and his mother wanted and now they wanted that he should be married.

Herman hadn't ought to really give his father so much trouble and make him pay out all that money, to come all the way to New York just to find him, and they both lose all that time from their working, when all Herman had to do was just to stand up, for an hour, and then he would be all right married, and it would be all over for him, and then everything at home would never be any different to him.

It was a new feeling Herman now had inside him that made him feel he was strong to make a struggle. It was new for Herman Kreder really to be wanting something, but Herman wanted strongly now to be a father, and he wanted badly that his baby should be a boy and healthy, Herman never had cared really very much about his father and his mother, though always, all his life, he had done everything just as they wanted, and he had never really cared much about his wife, Lena, though he always had been very good to her, and had always tried to keep his mother off her, with the awful way she always scolded, but to be really a father of a little baby, that feeling took hold of Herman very deeply. He was almost ready, so as to save his baby from all trouble, to really make a strong struggle with his mother and with his father, too, if he would not help him to control his mother.

- ⊗ What is the importance of narrative perspective in *Three Lives*?
- ⊗ What is the role of desire in one or more of the stories?
- ⊗ Write on a topic of your choice.