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*Creative Testimony and Post-War
Dissociation: Witnessing the Shifting Body of
Trauma in Gertrude Stein's The
Autobiography of Alice B Toklas and the
Writings of Kay Sage*

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ABSTRACT

Creative Testimony and Post-War Dissociation: Witnessing the Shifting Body of Trauma in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* and the Writings of Kay Sage – Echo Meredith Callaghan

The impact of the trauma inflicted upon male soldiers during the First and Second World Wars on the writing of male members of the Surrealist movement has been well documented by literary theorists. In contrast, the impact of the trauma of the two World Wars upon the writing of female Surrealists has not received the same level of scrutiny. This dissertation utilises contemporary ideas in the fields of psychology and neuroscience, alongside research into the genres of autobiography and testimony, in order to analyse the ways in which two female Surrealist writers, Gertrude Stein and Kay Sage, responded to the trauma they witnessed in their respective post-war societies. Van Der Kolk describes the feeling of dissociation as ‘the essence of trauma’ (2014: 66) and an attempt to express the traumatic phenomenon of dissociation can be identified in the autobiographical writing of Stein and Sage. Their works testify to large-scale changes in the ways that society was conceptualising and experiencing the body as a result of the trauma of war. Society at this time lacked the understanding and medical terminology to express and explain the effects of trauma and, as a consequence, both women resort to using elements of fiction in their work to facilitate their discussions. They employ fiction to investigate and verbalise the consequences of trauma, analyse the inherent instability of memories affected by trauma, imagine literary witnesses for themselves and to therapeutically reconstruct their past. As a result, this dissertation will argue that their writing amounts to a form of creative testimony, which blurs the boundaries between fictional and testimonial writing and asks fundamental questions about the nature of fiction and its position as a therapeutic tool.

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Introduction

Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* has long been recognised as an outlier within studies of autobiographical texts as a result of its experimentation with narrative voice. Despite Stein's position as a post-war writer, hardly any research addresses the relationship between Stein's autobiographical work and the context of the First World War. Alkon expresses that in *The Autobiography* 'Wars are coldly described as announcements of change' (1975: 866) and that when Stein does discuss the war her comments are 'off-centre and unsatisfactory' (1975: 866). Here Alkon suggests that Stein engages with the war to a limited extent, discussing it as supplementary to or as explanation for the changes in her life. Similarly, Kay Sage's position as a post-Second World War writer has gone relatively unmentioned in discussion about her work, with minimal research published about her autobiography or her one-act plays. Nevertheless, Sage's and Stein's work have noticeable similarities in terms of both the content and the techniques they employ in their writing. Both women engage with Surrealist thinking about the body and the genres of autobiography, fiction and testimony and, through the lens of trauma theory, their work is revealed to deeply reflect the trauma of the wars and the effect of trauma on representations of the body. The intention of this dissertation is to investigate the ways in which trauma interrupts the connection between the self and the body and how this is reflected in the works of post-Surrealist women whose work bears witness to both the wider trauma of war and their personal experiences of trauma.

The scale of the trauma that the First World War wreaked on the population of Europe can be hard to fathom from contemporary perspective, particularly in France where, as Amy Lyford describes:

In proportion to its population, France suffered the worst casualties of the war. Some 3.2 million men were killed or wounded – roughly half the number of men mobilized during the war and just over 13 percent of the male population recorded in 1913...The high mortality rate produced by modern artillery and chemical weapons had consequences other than widespread death and commonplace maiming of male soldiers. Demographic figures reveal that the ratio of women to men in France jumped significantly after the war, disrupting the numerical equilibrium between the sexes. (1963: 3)

Here, Lyford makes it clear that the trauma of the First World War, enacted on the bodies of French men, resulted in the deaths of millions and the visible disfigurement of many more men and that the scale of such trauma had significant social consequences for post-war France. Furthermore, she highlights how the experience of the war was highly gendered and disrupted the previously held social order. Perhaps understandably, most of the academic work on the topic of trauma in post-war Europe has focused on the experiences of men and male soldiers as they came to terms with the horrific ramifications of the war and the scale of their injuries. However, Lyford's comments reveal that, whilst women may not have been active participants in the conflict, in the post-war environment they too found themselves affected by the far-reaching social consequences of the war. The position of women as outsiders to the conflict and yet deeply affected by the aftermath, places them in a unique position to observe changes in the social landscape that occurred as a result of the war. In his text *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, first published in 1941, psychiatrist Abram Kardiner states that:

One of the certainties with which a warring nation must contend is that at the termination of the conflict there will be a considerable number of problems dealing with those soldiers who return more or less damaged. One of the forms this damage takes is the persistent traumatic neurosis. The victims of this neurosis become not merely a medical problem – a pressing one, to be sure – but, owing to the peculiar circumstances that surround its onset and the strange phenomena associated with its course, a pressing social problem as well. (1941: 233)

He further observes that 'Until the war of 1914-18 this neurosis received little attention' (Kardiner 1941: v) and, writing from 1941, he argues that the onset of the Second World War:

... has again brought to the foreground the problem of the neuroses incidental to it. This time however, the problem is much more urgent because, owing to the widespread aerial bombardment of urban centres, the traumatic neurosis is now no longer likely to be confined to combatants. (Kardiner 1941: v)

There are several important points that Kardiner makes: not only does he acknowledge the wide-spread psychological impact of the First and Second World Wars on combatants, he also states that there are significant social consequences stemming from the presence of so many traumatised soldiers returning to their communities. Furthermore, Kardiner also

highlights the possibility of this psychological condition being experienced by non-combatants.

In his book on trauma, *The Body Keeps the Score*, Van Der Kolk asserts that the condition that Kardiner describes above is what ‘today we call posttraumatic stress disorder – PTSD’ (2014: 11). Kardiner may not have had the modern label for the condition, which only entered medical parlance in the 1980s (Van Der Kolk 2014: 19), but nevertheless his work documents the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress in veterans of the First and Second World Wars. Van Der Kolk also describes how documentaries about veterans from the First and Second World Wars are very revealing, stating that ‘While the World War I soldiers flail, have facial tics, and collapse with paralyzed bodies, the following generation talks and cringes. Their bodies still keep the score...But the trauma did not just affect their bodies’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 187). Here it is clear that PTSD affected soldiers who had participated in both World Wars, despite the difference in their external symptoms. Van Der Kolk maintains that the disturbance of the relationship between the body and the self is central to the condition of PTSD, stating that patients who have experienced trauma imagine themselves as ‘heads separated from their bodies by an impenetrable fog’ (2014: 132) and this experience of ‘trauma makes people feel like either *some body else*, or like *no body*’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 247).

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio expands on this idea of traumatic separation from the body in his book *The Feeling of What Happens*, arguing that:

We use part of the mind as a screen to prevent another part of it from seeing what goes on elsewhere...One of the things the screen hides most effectively is the body...Like a veil thrown over the skin to secure its modesty, but not too well, the screen partially removes from the mind the inner states of the body, those that constitute the flow of life...It tends to prevent us from sensing the possible origin and nature of what we call the self. (2000: 28)

Damasio describes the condition of being separated from one’s body as a separation from the self, an idea that Van Der Kolk expands on, arguing that this separation stems from ‘the phenomena of dissociation, which is manifested in feeling lost, overwhelmed, abandoned, and disconnected from the world and in seeing oneself as unloved, empty, helpless, trapped, and weighed down’ (2014: 121). What is clear here is that the experience of trauma, such as that of the First and Second World Wars, can result in an altered psychological state which is

characterised by a feeling of dissociation, a feeling that you are somehow separate from your body, that you are somehow ‘*no body*’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 247) and that this experience of dissociation and lack of connection to your body results in a lack of connection with the self.

This has significant consequences for academics studying the post-war period; the presence of so many traumatised people as a result of both World Wars had the potential to cause a significant shift in the ways in which people viewed themselves and their bodies. This shift in the perception of the body and the self is the central focus of this dissertation which will argue that the traumatic experience of dissociation is central to the writings of Kay Sage and Gertrude Stein. Their writing bears witness to a cultural shift that occurred as a result of the First and Second World Wars and reveals a struggle to verbalise the psychological effects of trauma on the experience of embodiment. Despite the fact that neither of these women were combatants during the war they were still affected by the trauma that their society experienced during this period, for, as Kardiner has discussed, the presence of so many traumatised soldiers after the war was also a social issue, affecting more than just the male soldiers themselves. Dinshtein et al state that ‘Clinical observations and empirical studies indicate that the consequences of traumatic events are not limited to the victim but often affect significant others in the victim’s environment’ (2011: 109-110). Determining who is a victim of the First and Second World Wars may appear easy with so many wounded soldiers bearing the physical scars of war, however, as a consequence of the scale of the conflict and the ripple effect of its traumatic impact on those who came into contact with traumatised soldiers, it becomes difficult to define who is *not* a victim of the war in some capacity. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to consider the experiences of women in relation to the trauma of the war, regardless of their proximity to the actual conflict. The objective is not to diagnose these women with post-traumatic stress but rather to use the idea of dissociation in order to illustrate how Sage and Stein attempt to articulate the psychological effects of trauma on themselves and those around them.

Academic work on post-war literature and the representation of the body often engages with Surrealism as a result of the movement’s interest in undercutting attempts to sweep the trauma of the war under the carpet. As Lyford describes, the French post-war government perpetuated ‘images promoting traditional social roles for men and women: images of robust manhood and female maternity’ (1963: 4) to encourage post-war reconstruction, in contrast to the signs of ‘violence and destruction on so many men’s bodies’

(1963: 4). For Lusty, the Surrealist movement was a response to this disconnect between the lived experience of the war and the government's depictions of male bodies, she argues that:

...a great deal of Surrealist work responded to the fragmentation and destruction of the male body and psyche in the wake of the Great War, but above all it opposed efforts to make of that body and of that experience the docile agent for state rehabilitation and conformity that underwrote French national efforts to re-masculinise soldiers. (2014: 117)

Surrealism, as a movement, responded to depictions of the male body that repressed the reality of the trauma of the war. As Chadwick states, Surrealism mobilised 'the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics' (1998: 4). However, this is also clearly a gendered engagement with the representation of the body, with Surrealism displaying an 'acute anxiety about the fragmentation and decline of masculine experience' (Lusty 1998: 103). Surrealism may have been primarily interested in the experiences of masculinity, but Lyford observes that 'the texts and images and manifestos produced by the mostly male members of the surrealist groups usually depict women' (1963: 2). Belton clarifies the position of women in the movement, arguing that Surrealism 'was not about the real experiences of women in the inter war period. Instead, it was about the relationship of the real men to the hegemonic masculinity of that time... Their images of Woman were caught up in the undertow' (1995: 13). Here, it is apparent that whether or not women feature as the subject of Surrealist work, Surrealist thinking about the body was still dominated by the male perspective and side-lined the experiences of women.

Nevertheless, female artists did find scope within Surrealism for self-expression. Chadwick illustrates this, arguing that 'Surrealism established new parameters within which women artists might begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the female body and female identity' (1998: 4). The focus of Surrealism on the body allowed female artists and writers to engage in closer discussions around their experiences of their bodies and therefore their depiction of the self. However, Chadwick describes the female Surrealists as a 'diverse group of individuals' (1998: 4), highlighting their separation from the movement and from each other. This situates the female artists in contrast with, what Colville describes as the 'very male group' (2011: 2) of Surrealists who 'maintained women in a peripheral situation... and had barely tolerated them as fellow artists and writers' (2011: 2). This distinct separation between the male collective and the individual female outsiders is detectable in the creative output of the women. Belton remarks that the work of Surrealist

women is distinct from their male counterparts, describing their work as ‘in some meaningful way post-Surrealist, rather than Surrealist proper’ (1995: 12). He makes the distinction between Surrealist and post-Surrealist work entirely based on the artist’s gender and the resulting depth of their inclusion in the movement. This is supported by Chadwick who states that the work of female Surrealists ‘appears to have no parallel in the work of male Surrealists’ (1998: 4). However, this does also suggest that the experiences of female artists as outsiders to the Surrealist movement and isolated from the core workings of the group, in this case, resulted in innovation and provided the Surrealist women with the space to engage with their own work and develop their own styles without undue influence from the male members of the group.

Kay Sage is undoubtedly one of these individual Surrealist women. In her biography of Sage, Suther states that she calls ‘Sage a Surrealist because her allegiance to the Surrealist identity lies at the heart of her self-image as an artist’ (1997: xv). Sage self-identified as a Surrealist and understood her work as contributing to the movement. However, as Suther claims ‘Like other women painters and writers associated with Surrealism, Sage managed to define her own sources of artistic empowerment – precisely because the group’s definition of the artist did not include her’ (1997: 70). Sage is therefore in dialogue with Surrealism, but her work is also post-Surrealist due to her position as a woman who was isolated from the core workings of the movement. This dissertation will examine three works by Sage – *China Eggs*, Sage’s unpublished autobiography which she wrote in 1955 (Miller 2011: 65), and two of Sage’s one-act plays – *Cote d’Azur* (1956) and *Jean Dibidou* (1960) – both of which also contain references to Sage’s real-life experiences. All three works display a sense of dissociation and disconnection with the body, as well as a desire to explore the relationship between the body and trauma.

In contrast, Gertrude Stein’s work is more difficult to categorise. Heralded as a ‘major avant-garde writer’ (Haselstein 2003: 723) who ‘produced work in all literary genres’ (Haselstein 2003: 723), her works are now ‘regarded as modernist literary classics’ (Kirsch 2012: 254). Stein’s work appears to span multiple movements. However, I would argue that Stein too, in her autobiographical work, is also in some way post-Surrealist. Her text *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* also mobilises ‘the body as a primary signifier of its cultural politics’ (Chadwick 1998: 4) which is characteristic of Surrealists of the time but, like Sage, she too moves beyond the masculinity of the movement and carves out her own perspective. However, in terms of her style of writing she is most overtly engaged with Cubism, the

fragmented nature of which aids her exploration of the relationship between trauma and the body. Much like Sage, Stein's work engages with ideas of dissociation and the shifting landscape of the body in a post-war period. Beginning in 1907 (Stein 2001: 10) and tracing her life through to 1932 (Stein 2001: 209) *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* is structured around the First World War and testifies to an increased sense of fragmentation and disconnection in thinking about the post-war body.

Both Sage and Stein are engaged with autobiography as a genre, but play with its boundaries, making it difficult to see where autobiography ends and fiction begins. Nevertheless, their work functions to witness the trauma of war and testify to a change in the ways in which people understood their bodies. The idea of testimony is a contested topic in academia. Confusingly, there appears to be little consensus around the usage of the terms autobiography and testimony, with even foundational texts on testimony, such as the works of Dori Laub and Shoshanna Felman, using the two terms almost interchangeably. Felman posits that 'testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance...events in excess of our frames of reference' (1992: 5) and, Laub further observes that for 'the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other* – in the position of one who hears' (1992a: 70). Within these definitions, testimony is the expression of something that at first glance appears impossible to sum up, and it requires someone to act as a witness to the testimony. Felman further maintains that it 'has been suggested that testimony is the literary – or discursive – mode par excellence of our times' (1992: 5). Asking:

How is the act of *writing* tied up with the act of *bearing witness* and with the experience of the trial? Is the act of *reading* literary texts itself inherently related to the act of *facing horror*? If literature is the *alignment between witnesses*, what would this alignment mean? (Felman 1992: 2)

Felman highlights the need to further analyse the relationship between literature and testimony and questions the role of both author and reader as potential witnesses to trauma. Her acknowledgement that works of literature often choose testimony as their primary subject is revealing, however she makes it clear with her questioning that the boundaries between testimonial writing and fiction are not yet fully understood. As I will discuss later, the links between autobiography and fiction are more recognised in academic work: Eakin notes that most work on autobiography 'recognizes that autobiography is necessarily in its deepest

sense a special kind of fiction' (1985: 25). As a genre, autobiography is aware of its relationship to fiction, however, the connections between testimony and fiction are more ambiguous.

Felman appears to clarify this relationship, stating that 'the essence of the testimony is historical, and that its function is to record events and report the facts of a historical occurrence' (1992: 8). This suggests that the difference between testimony and other genres stems from its historical accuracy. However, the idea of testimonial truth is complicated by Laub who describes the response of a group of historians to 'Autobiographical accounts of trauma such as the historical testimonies recorded by the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale' (1992a: 70). After watching a woman giving testimony about witnessing the collapse of four chimneys at Auschwitz, they argue that the 'testimony was not accurate... The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four' (Laub 1992a: 59). The historians take the view that Felman discusses; that testimony must be historically accurate. In contrast, Laub describes his response as a psychoanalyst and argues instead that the woman 'testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth' (1992a: 60). Laub's work reveals that not only is the line between autobiography and testimony blurred – even in an academic context he uses the terms autobiography and testimony interchangeably – but that a lack of historical fact or accuracy does not necessarily discount a text from functioning as testimony. Van Der Kolk considers how:

Traumatic memories are fundamentally different from the stories we tell about the past. They are dissociated: The different sensations that entered the brain at the time of the trauma are not properly assembled into a story, a piece of autobiography. (2014: 194)

This suggests that one of the reasons that trauma challenges historical accuracy is through its interference with the processes of memory creation and Van Der Kolk links this to an inability to create a clear autobiographical narrative. How then are witnesses to express trauma accurately if their memory is compromised? And can fiction function to fill in the gaps around the traumatic memory and create a narrative? For the survivor of Auschwitz, Laub's comments suggest that he recognises that the survivor's memory may have been affected by trauma and that the elements of inaccuracy or fiction in their statement do not undercut the power of their testimony. Caruth explains that it is only in our interactions with trauma that we 'begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer

straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)' (1991: 182). In studying trauma we necessarily go beyond direct reference and encounter an experiential history, which, like the Holocaust survivor's testimony, inherently challenges notions of accuracy, memory and testimony.

Gilmore addresses the position of fiction in testimony, arguing that 'the testimonial imperative arises in many different kinds of texts' (2011: 81). She observes that 'categories such as "personal criticism" and "creative nonfiction" indicate the appearance of the autobiographical "I" in places it has not appeared previously. These hybrid texts are more difficult to situate along the fiction-nonfiction continuum' (Gilmore 2001: 17). If, as Laub has illustrated, it can be very difficult to separate autobiography and testimony, and testimony and autobiography are impeded by traumatic memory, can we expect the existence of what we could call a creative testimony? Can testimonial texts also exist on a spectrum of alignment with historical truth and fiction? And are all testimonies also already, at least in part, fictionalised? And what role does literature play in this process? It would seem reductive to dismiss all testimonial accounts out of hand due to a lack of historical accuracy or the inclusion of elements of fiction. Van Der Kolk notes that 'Silence reinforces the godforsaken isolation of trauma' (2014: 232) and that breaking the silence is 'a sign that healing can begin' (2014: 232). Listening to trauma narratives and testimonies appears a worthwhile action, regardless of their historical accuracy, and it is clear that fiction plays a complex role in the expression of historical events in works of autobiography and testimony.

Stein's and Sage's works lie somewhere on the spectrum between autobiography, fiction and testimony, they are in some ways a creative testimony, a semi-fictional way of engaging with the incomprehensibility of trauma and the changes in thinking about and experiencing the body to which they bear witness. Their texts engage with the concept of witnessing through their depiction of the double, setting up a series of duos and pairs in their work who function to fill the space of a witness. Laub argues for the importance of a witness when giving testimony, stating that the 'absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story' (1992a: 68). In this statement Laub emphasises the importance of a witness, but it is unclear why the absence of a witness is so devastating. This question can potentially be addressed through engagement with the psychology of trauma victims. Van Der Kolk discusses the effect of 'mirror neurones' (2014: 59), explaining how:

...we pick up not only another person's movement but her emotional state and intentions as well. When people are in sync with each other, they tend to stand or sit similar ways, and their voices take on the same rhythms...trauma almost invariably involves not being seen, not being mirrored, and not being taken into account. Treatment needs to reactivate the capacity to safely mirror, and be mirrored. (Van Der Kolk 2014: 59)

He argues that the key to this experience is a sense of '*reciprocity*: being truly heard and seen by the people around us' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 79). The concept of mirroring reflects the experience of being witnessed: in both descriptions the trauma victim requires a second presence to fully support and listen to them. This suggests that in testimony, witnessing is crucial because it allows the speaker to be mirrored which fosters a sense of reciprocity and safety.

Whilst Laub's and Van Der Kolk's statements help explain the importance of witnessing, they do not discuss its *process*, how this can go awry and what people who have experienced trauma do, consciously or unconsciously, in order to replicate the feeling of being witnessed. Van Der Kolk states that 'writing about upsetting events improves physical and mental health' (2014: 241) but he does not link this to the experience of being witnessed or mirrored. Can the imagined reader or audience member of a work function as an '*addressable other*' (Laub 1992a: 68) with whom the writer can imagine being witnessed? Can the writer themselves conjure up an *other* who can witness them? This dissertation does not seek to answer all of these questions, but rather to explore the ways in which the works of Sage and Stein depict trauma and stage the presence of a witness in their texts. The works discussed here highlight the ways in which trauma affects the understanding of genres such as autobiography and testimony and enable us to consider the broader implications inherent in contemplating the capacity of fiction to reflect cultural trauma.

Chapter 1 – Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*

1.1 Gertrude Stein’s Creative Self-Making

In the following chapter, Stein’s constructions of the body in *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* are separated into three categories: her creation of a self-portrait, her depiction of soldiers and her portrayal of non-combatants. Firstly, Stein establishes her interest in the Cubist style through depiction of the process of having her portrait painted. She then constructs a hybrid body for herself, depicting herself as conjoined with Alice Toklas, a technique which functions to facilitate her testimony, allowing her to be witnessed by Toklas as she herself witnesses those around her. One of the groups that Stein bears witness to are soldiers, who she depicts before and after the First World War. In Stein’s first descriptions these men are imbued with a sense of vitality and authority, but on their return they appear fragmented and deeply dissociated. Stein depicts this transformation as emblematic of a wider social trauma which affected how bodies were being viewed and socially constructed. This wider change is visible in Stein’s representation of non-combatants such as Picasso and the women she encounters who are also depicted by Stein as experiencing a similar kind of dissociation. Stein’s engagement with Cubism and its distinctive style of dismemberment becomes a way of both illustrating and exploring the possible consequences of trauma. This engagement with trauma does not hinge upon a specific event from the war, instead, within her work, and her depiction of indicators of what we now understand to be post-traumatic stress, we can detect an attempt to verbalise and testify to the wider cultural trauma of the war and how it destabilised people’s connections with their bodies.

The question of genre is also central to Stein’s construction of *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*. Whilst the text describes itself as Toklas’s autobiography, it is quickly clear that the focus of the book is its ‘primary subject: Gertrude’ (Alkon 1975: 852). What Stein conducts therefore is an autobiography from a third-person perspective which obscures the boundaries between fictional and autobiographical writing. Lejeune, Tomarken and Tomarken discuss the use of third person pronouns in autobiography, arguing that:

It is as if, in autobiography, no combination of the personal pronouns could “fully express” the person in a satisfactory manner. Or rather, to put it less naively, all imaginable combinations reveal, with differing degrees of

clarity, the nature of the person – the tension between impossible unity and intolerable division and the fundamental schism which turns the speaker into a fugitive. (1977: 32)

Therefore, Stein's choice to write her autobiography through another person speaks to the nature of autobiography as a genre and expresses a recognition of the impossibility of the presentation of a singular self. However, if she recognises that presentation of the self is impossible, what purpose does Stein's autobiography serve? Eakin states that 'autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and, further, that the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure' (1985: 3). The purpose of autobiography is therefore not an expression of a complete self, but rather a process of self-creation which inherently requires the writer's engagement with fiction. Stein embraces the fictitiousness of the self in autobiography by disconnecting herself from its centre and replacing herself with Toklas, whose perspective she constructs the narrative around, thereby complicating the text's relationship to the reality of both Stein's and Toklas's lived experience.

This question of self-making and the impossibility of a singular self relates to Stein's understanding of the representation of the body. Stein, through Toklas, describes how 'One of the things that always worries her about painting is the difficulty that the artist feels and which sends him to painting still-lives, that after all the human being essentially is not paintable' (2001: 130). The question of self-making and the impossibility of representation, for Stein, culminates in the representation of the body and the impossibility of experiencing the body *through* representation. As Porcher-Wiart states 'the body constitutes the axis around which the relationship between reality and the representation of self in reality is examined' (2015: 405). The body, as the visible, paintable element of the self, functions as a focal point for exploration in Stein's work around the representability of the people who feature in her text, including herself. However, despite her worry that the self and body as a unit defy representation in art, Stein continues to engage in a series of written portraits throughout *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*. The written word must therefore possess a representative ability that she finds lacking in painting. Hillman and Maude depict the difficulties in representing the body in literature, stating that:

The body...is not simply as immediate a presence in literature anywhere else: rather, here, precisely in its illusory absence (and, by the same token,

its illusory presence), it is perhaps most intimately engaged with the endless aporia of corporeal presence and absence. (2015: 4)

Here Hillman and Maude make clear the dissociation that literature creates between the body and the text. The body is ghostly in its relationship to the text, both a presence and an absence and it is this quality that makes literature the ideal mode of expression to explore the dissociated body. Writing provides Stein with a ready-made framework of disconnection, a format within which the struggle to express the dissociative effects of trauma can be enacted.

This interest in dissociation is further illustrated by Stein's engagement with the Cubist movement, as DeKoven argues:

Stein's pre-World War I work is very similar to cubist painting of the same period. They share an orientation toward the linguistic or pictorial surface, a movement in and out of recognizable representation; both shatter or fragment perception and the sentence (canvas), and both render multiple perspectives. (1981: 81)

Although *The Autobiography* was written post-war, DeKoven's assertion that Stein is interested in the nature of perception and perspective holds true. She engages in repeated fragmentation when constructing portraits of others and her decision to represent her autobiography through the eyes of another illustrates her dedication to exploring multiple perspectives. Cubism as a movement, as Wilhelm discusses below, is intimately related to the First World War. He states that "The War to End All Wars" and the Cubist's assault on the art world's long durée of pictorial illusionism share more than a causal link. They each violently shifted paradigms, and they did so nearly contemporaneously' (Wilhelm 2020: 521). Furthermore 'cubism offers a surface of extraordinary violence as well as an interiority that anticipates and expresses the traumas of war' (Wilhelm 2020: 523). To engage in Cubist representation of the body is to inflict trauma upon it, to fracture it and piece it back together. Cubism offers an aesthetic which reflects the actions of the war against bodies and Stein utilises this in order to replicate and illustrate the consequences of the trauma of the war that she observes in the soldiers and non-combatants around her. Van Der Kolk emphasises that 'trauma radically changes people...they no longer are "themselves". It is excruciatingly difficult to put that feeling of no longer being yourself into words' (2014: 237). For Stein, the act of Cubist violence she commits against the body functions as a part of a process of representation and of self-creation, an attempt to express the changes to the body that trauma has caused and rediscover the self in its post-trauma state. Eakin imagines autobiography as a

vehicle for this kind of rediscovery, describing autobiographical writing as a ‘second acquisition of language, a second coming into being of self, a self-conscious self-consciousness’ (1985: 9). He argues:

...if autobiographical texts do not tell us as much about the autobiographer’s past history as earlier students of the genre wished to believe, they may nevertheless have a good deal to tell us about the autobiographer in the moment of his engagement in the act of composition.
(Eakin 1985: 22)

What we see in Stein’s autobiography are not the facts of her life or a description of her as she *was* but instead a creative process of self-making that utilises elements of fiction to describe her post-war understanding around the representation of the body at the moment of writing.

1.2 Cubist Portraiture and the Double

Stein explores the idea of dissociation and its representation through discussion of portrait painting. Whilst ‘she does not tell us how her faces are conceived by others, what the portraits look like...or in what styles they are completed’ (Barros 1999: 198), Stein repeatedly discusses portraits of herself, in particular Picasso’s portrait of her. Toklas recalls that she once ‘murmured to Picasso that I liked his portrait of Gertrude Stein. Yes, he said, everybody says she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will’ (Stein 2001: 16). Toklas recalls that ‘one day Picasso painted out the whole head. I can’t see you any longer when I look, he said irritably’ (Stein 2001: 59-60). Stein’s portrait remained faceless until ‘The day he returned from Spain Picasso sat down and out of his head painted the head in without seeing Gertrude Stein again. And when she saw it he and she were content’ (Stein 2001: 64). The idea that Picasso cannot see Stein despite looking at her implies that there is more to Stein’s portrait than physical resemblance. He requires Stein’s physical absence and destroys her image, removing her from his field of vision in order to reconstruct her from memory. Cope argues that in:

Painting her head “out of his head,” Picasso produces a portrait that is no longer engaged with direct *sight*, proximity or visual likeness. Nevertheless (or perhaps *because* of this lack of proximity or sight), with the absence,

even obliteration of the sitter, Stein, the portrait becomes a representation of *Stein* in all of its/her significances. (1994: 192)

Here Cope aligns Picasso's removal of Stein's face with her destruction, indicating the act's traumatic potential. The trauma of this destruction, Cope suggests, increases the portrait's representative power. Hillman and Maude reveal that the 'body has always been a contested site...it has often been seen as a mere auxiliary to the self, a vehicle or object that houses the mind or the soul' (2015: 1), however:

...an alternative way of understanding the body, supported by more recent discoveries in science, medicine and philosophy, is that it participates in crucial ways in thinking, feeling and the shaping of our personalities and that precisely for this reason, the body is in fact constitutive of what we call the self. (Hillman and Maude 2015: 1)

Within this understanding, the body and the self are inextricable, forming a complex body-self. However, as Damasio and Van Der Kolk have illustrated, this relationship can be interfered with by trauma, resulting in a feeling of dissociation which can make sufferers imagine their 'heads separated from their bodies by an impenetrable fog' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 132). In Stein's portrait, her face and her body reflect Van Der Kolk's description; they appear separately, their connection severed by the time that elapsed between Picasso's painting of them and the absence of Stein's body. Stein describes her approval of the portrait, despite its reliance on the removal from her actual presence, not because it looks like her but because it reflects a disconnect between her body and her self, brought about by the trauma of Picasso's Cubist destruction of her. This sequence establishes Stein's understanding of Cubism as a process of enacting trauma onto the body and reconstituting the traumatised self through memory.

Another technique that Stein utilises in *The Autobiography* to construct her observations about the post-war body is through her depiction of her partner Alice Toklas, whom she sets up as the primary voice of the text, despite the reader's knowledge that Stein is the author. This has a strange doubling effect on the narrative voice, resulting in a text which combines the lives and voices of Stein and Toklas together into one being, one body, but with two pairs of eyes, making the text an 'autobiography-by-*Doppelgänger*' (Bloom 1978: 82). In the final lines of the text this strange system is made clear, Stein/Toklas states that:

For some time now many people, and publishers, have been asking Gertrude Stein to write her autobiography and she had always replied, not possibly. She began to tease me and say that I should write my autobiography... 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'm going to do. I am going to write it for you...And she did and this is it. (Stein 2001: 271-272)

Here the nature of the book is revealed to the reader – Stein, having been asked to write her own autobiography, chooses to write it through Toklas's eyes. Stein's apparent lack of desire to write an autobiography from her own perspective and yet her willing engagement with writing what is clearly a depiction of herself in *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* appears somewhat contradictory, but it suggests that instead of being about her, the text serves a wider purpose for Stein.

Alkon describes the effect of the Stein/Toklas double:

...the viewpoint is either outside seeing Gertrude from wherever the camera was located, or else regarding her from a simultaneous outside and inside viewpoint as the reader struggles to see her through Alice's eyes while realising (or trying to realise and keep remembering) that it is really Gertrude pretending to be Alice and thereby contemplating herself and compelling readers to contemplate her through the eyes of an imagined (but not fictitious) other. (1975: 862)

The reader is engaged in an act of trying to separate the images of Stein and Toklas from each other just as Stein is engaged in merging them. What therefore is the purpose of Toklas's presence in the text if it confuses the reader? This becomes clear when we return to the concept of witnessing. As Laub has argued, for testimony to occur, there must be the 'total presence of an *other* – in the position of one who hears' (1992a: 70); this witness to the trauma:

...has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and witness to himself. It is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of these inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony. (Laub 1992a: 58)

Here we can observe a complex process of witnessing whereby testimony can only be given in the presence of a second, a double who acts as a conduit for the narrative. Arguably this is the position that Toklas occupies in Stein's text, Stein conjures up the fictional Toklas to bear

witness to the discussion of trauma that she filters through her. Not only is Stein witnessing the consequences of the trauma of the First World War, but she is able to express this as a result of being witnessed herself. Laub continues his description of the witness, claiming that the role of ‘the listener is to be *unobtrusively present*, throughout the testimony; even when and if at moments the narrator becomes absent, reaches an almost detached state’ (1992a: 71). Stein occupies the ‘detached state’ (Laub 1992a: 71) that Laub describes throughout the course of *The Autobiography*, inhabiting the position of direct witness to the consequences of trauma when she later discusses the war’s impact on the bodies of soldiers. However as a consequence of Stein’s detachment, Toklas must fill the position of the narrator in order to facilitate the testimony. Laub does not explain why the witness must be inconspicuous and Toklas’s presence in the text is perhaps more intrusive than Stein’s. The text moves beyond the boundaries of Laub’s description of witnessing, creating a literary witness who witnesses Stein herself, enabling Stein to construct a testimony.

The physical and psychological importance of a second presence when attempting to access and examine the body also plays a part in Stein’s decision to centre Toklas in the text. Merleau-Ponty makes several relevant observations in relation to studying the body. He states that:

I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, inspect them, and walk around them. But when it comes to my body, I never observe it itself. I would need a second body to be able to do so, which would itself be unobservable. (Merleau-Ponty 2011: 93)

Merleau-Ponty discusses the notion of detachment from the body, arguing that the body is unobservable from the inside. *The Autobiography* reveals very little about Toklas herself other than the chronology of her life, instead Toklas functions as the unobservable body through which Stein is able to conduct an observation of herself; she therefore allows Stein to trace the repercussions of trauma on her body and the bodies of others. As Bloom argues ‘Alice B Tokas functions throughout the *Autobiography*, if not as the ventriloquist’s dummy, then certainly as the ventriloquist’s smart-ie, but as the ventriloquist’s versatile tool nevertheless’ (1978: 82). Toklas is Stein’s tool, offering a second pair of eyes through which Stein can observe her body.

Merleau-Ponty continues his discussion around sensing the body:

When I touch my right hand with my left hand, the object “right hand” also has this strange property, itself, of sensing. As we have just seen, the two

hands are never simultaneously both touched and touching. So when I press my two hands together, it is not a question of two sensations that I could feel together...but rather of an ambiguous organisation where the two hands can alternate between the functions of “touching” and “touched”. (Merleau-Ponty 2011: 95)

This again highlights the confusing nature of observing your own body. Because the body withdraws from one's touch, it is therefore never really possible to experience the body as a whole. To come into contact with someone else, whose presence is undeniable, removes this problem; there is no switching between senses, instead the touch is grounding. In *The Body Keeps the Score* Van Der Kolk interviews a bodywork practitioner, Licia Sky, who states that through ‘reassuring touch’ (Sky qtd in Van Der Kolk 2014: 217) traumatised people discover that ‘they don’t constantly have to wonder who and where they are. They discover their body is solid’ (Sky qtd in Van Der Kolk 2014: 217). To come into contact with another person counteracts the dissociation present in the act of trying to sense one's own body and breaches the ‘veil’ (Damasio 2000: 28) that separates someone from their body. Touch allows people to feel connected with others and therefore themselves. Stein creates for herself a double, with whom she is in constant contact, someone to witness and mirror her as she engages in an analysis of her body. Van Der Kolk argues that treatment for trauma must ‘reactivate the capacity to safely mirror and be mirrored’ (2014: 59). For Van Der Kolk this position is occupied by a therapist, but Stein is able to create her own textual mirror, a literary double with whom she is always in contact. Stein takes a creative approach in establishing a complex double-narrator relationship with Toklas in order to facilitate her later discussion of embodied trauma and utilises her literary form to play out the roles of testimony giver and witness within the narrative.

1.3 Post-war Visions: The Trauma of the Soldier

The depth of the importance of the First World War to Stein's depiction of trauma becomes clear as she describes the after-effects of the war on men of her acquaintance whose descriptions change significantly as a result of their experiences as soldiers. This shift is clearly observable in her descriptions of Guillaume Apollinaire. The first description Stein gives of Apollinaire states that he ‘was very attractive and very interesting. He had a head

like one of the late roman emperors' (2001: 66). In this description, Stein likens Apollinaire to a figure of male power and strength, the suggested similarity between a Roman Emperor and Apollinaire also positions him as a leader of men. In the next description, Stein states that:

...he had come back to Paris from the war. He had been badly wounded in the head and had had a piece of his skull removed. He looked very wonderful with his bleu horizon and his bandaged head...his heavy head nodded. (2001: 67)

Apollinaire's body is again substituted for another image, however this time Apollinaire appears as his blue horizon soldier's uniform. Stein depicts Apollinaire as 'heavy' (2001: 67) and, as Van Der Kolk argues, this sense of being 'weighed down' (2014: 121) is symptomatic of a feeling of dissociation brought about by traumatic experiences. His injury and the damage done to his skull are also symptomatic of an internalised change. The trauma of the war manifests not only in the fracturing of his body but has also affected his self; instead of the powerful, statuesque ruling figure that Stein describes in their previous encounters, Apollinaire is diminished, he has lost his individuality, defined solely by his uniform and his injuries. The context of the war has restructured the ways in which Stein is observing Apollinaire and the bodies of other men.

As Lyford has discussed, in France during the First World War '3.2 million men were killed or wounded – roughly half the number of men mobilized during the war and over 13 percent of the male population recorded in 1913' (1963: 3). The scale of the damage done to male bodies during the war was enormous, suddenly soldiers like Apollinaire who returned to France irreparably changed were populating the streets and Stein traces this shift throughout *The Autobiography*. After the text notes the end of the war, Stein states that 'It was a changed Paris. Guillaume Apollinaire was dead' (2001: 207). Here Paris and Apollinaire are inextricably linked, the damage done to him and his body is representative of the damage that Paris now has to come to terms with during the period of post-war reconstruction. Stein later reiterates that 'Guillaume Apollinaire was dead' (2001: 209). Barros argues that names 'reveal the essence of a person in a place as each reappearance recalls an earlier encounter, the names increasing in significance as they pass through different and successive contexts' (1999: 189). Apollinaire is inextricably connected to the context of the war and to Paris, his name recalls the damaged, uniformed bodies of thousands of traumatised soldiers like him. He is reduced from an individual to one of many, the characteristics and personality that

constitute Stein's attempt to depict his self are removed from the description, instead we are left with a body that functions only as a symbol of trauma.

Kissane argues that 'The onset of the Great War... made abstraction unpalatable... Trench warfare and the destruction of the human body on an unprecedented scale led to a widespread return to figuration... and rejection of abstraction' (2013: 64). However, in Stein's work *Apollinaire* remains a fractured image. While, as Kissane describes, for some the fragmented aesthetic of Cubism was too close a relative to the bodies of wounded men that populated France at the time, Stein experiments with her literary style in order to express the dissociation and dislocation to which she is a witness. The shift observable in Stein's changing view of *Apollinaire* and the way in which his experience is linked to a change across Paris, bears witness to the changing visual landscape of France. Here Stein attempts to confront the presence of so many injured soldiers and witness the ways in which the trauma of the war has affected their relationship to their bodies.

This sense of a shift in the way Stein observes post-war bodies is also apparent in her description of Hemingway. Stein first describes Hemingway as 'twenty-three, rather foreign looking, with passionately interested, rather than interesting eyes' (Stein 2001: 230). The way that Hemingway observes the world is central to Stein's understanding of him as a novelist. His 'passionately interested' (Stein 2001: 230) eyes are the central focus of Stein's observations, depicting his writerly talent for observation as embodied within him. However, this picture of Hemingway as a great novelist in the making is also altered by the course of the war. Toklas recounts a conversation with one of Stein's servants, stating that:

...he had been worn by the war... Hélène says all men are, fragile. Recently a robust friend of his said to Gertrude Stein, Ernest is very fragile, whenever he does anything sporting something breaks, his arm, his leg, or his head...
(Stein 2001: 235)

Here, we can detect a change in the way that Hemingway's body is being viewed by the people around him. Instead of a promising writer, he is cast as delicate and damaged. Much like *Apollinaire*, Hemingway comes to be defined by his experiences of the war and is depicted as having lost something central about him – his characteristic vitality has drained away, leaving him forever changed. He also appears fractured, his body is recalled only in individual pieces, this too evokes the trauma of the war and a sense of dismemberment. The statement that 'all men are fragile' (Stein 2001: 235) illustrates how this experience is not

exclusive to Hemingway. Hélène's comment alludes to a wider social change in how post-war male bodies are being conceptualised. Lyford describes how:

...by 1920 the heroic male body was central to the visual rhetoric of post-war reconstruction; instead of Marianne, the revolutionary-era heroine, muscular young men would rebuild France... Yet the streets were populated with wounded veterans, and the state was working hard to counter anxiety about a weakened male citizenry. (1963: 48)

Here, Lyford makes clear the contrasting ways in which male bodies were being considered during the post-war reconstruction period; on the one hand, the state perpetuated an image of men as vital and powerful, and on the other, the presence of damaged and wounded men is a regular sight. The juxtaposition of these two constructions of male bodies is clear in Stein's work – the Roman Emperor and the great writer, the wounded foot soldier and the fragile body. Stein's men are the blueprint for the dislocation and fragmentation which is so present in her work and she strives to depict the extent of this damage on their physical bodies and the resulting damage to their self.

Stein overtly addresses her position as witness to a transformation in thinking about men's bodies. Prior to the war, Toklas compares the demographic of visitors to galleries in America to those in Paris, stating that in America she had:

...been accustomed to see women at picture shows and some men, but here there were men, men, men, sometimes women with them but more often three or four men with one woman, sometimes five or six men with two women. (Stein 2001: 24)

Stein, via Toklas, emphasises the male-dominated nature of the arts in Paris before the war and, whilst Toklas is surprised at the number of men present at these occasions, her comments suggest a scarcity of women. In contrast, on a trip to Spain during the war, Toklas states that:

It was extraordinary to see so many men on the streets. I did not imagine there could be so many men left in the world. One's eyes had become so habituated to menless streets...that to see quantities of men walking up and down the Ramblas was bewildering. (Stein 2001: 176)

This comment directly contrasts with her description of Paris as full of men before the war. Some of Toklas's surprise stems from the realisation that in other countries male bodies have remained untouched by war, this illustrates how deeply her perspective was affected by the

war. It is not until Toklas is confronted with the presence of so many men that she becomes aware of their previous absence in her visual field and the extent of her change in perspective. Stein uses Toklas's vision to analyse the ways in which even the casual observer has borne witness to a change in the perception of male bodies as a result of the war, whether or not they are cognisant of this shift. Her text testifies not only to the destruction of the male bodies around her, but to a wider 'breakage of a framework' (Laub 1992a: 60) in terms of how people are viewing the bodies around them.

1.4 Revisiting Trauma: Beyond the Soldier

Stein's discussion of dissociation and the fractured post-war body is not exclusive to her depiction of male soldiers. She dedicates a large proportion of the text to describing the bodies of her friends and acquaintances and in doing so we glimpse her attempts to reconstitute people and reanalyse them after the impact of the war. However, in non-combatant descriptions she more deeply questions the nature of the loss and disconnection that in her depiction of soldiers appears so overwhelming. Through Cubism, Stein both illustrates and enacts a process of trauma and fragmentation upon the bodies of non-combatants in order to expose this sense of loss and to interrogate the form that this loss takes. Ultimately, her enaction of trauma onto the bodies of those she describes results in a sense of disconnection between the body and the self. In this way, Stein depicts the trauma of the war as affecting a wider proportion of the population than merely those involved in direct combat.

One of the most significant recurring characters throughout *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* is Pablo Picasso, who is depicted as Stein's close friend. She describes Picasso repeatedly, often redescribing the same body parts in order to add to her portrait of him. She describes Picasso as 'small quick moving but not restless, his eyes having a strange faculty of opening wide and drinking in what he wished to see' (2001: 16). Stein continues describing him as 'thin dark, alive with big pools of eyes and a violent but not a rough way' (2001: 52) with 'hands so dark and delicate and alert' (2001: 27). Picasso appears in the text as a fractured individual, a patchwork of body parts. The emphasis Stein puts on the description of his eyes and hands defines Picasso by the tools of his trade as an artist. They are almost imbued with their own subjectivity, creating an image of Picasso's talents as embodied within

him. Kissane describes how, in Cubist artwork ‘The image to be conveyed was reduced to geometric forms. It was then fractured and seen from multiple viewpoints’ (2013: 62). Stein describes Picasso with the characteristic hallmarks of a Cubist. Picasso is reduced to his essential elements – his eyes, his hands and feet – and appears as a fractured form. Lefebvre illustrates how Cubist portraiture is imbued with violence, arguing that ‘Picasso’s cruelty toward the body...which he tortures in a thousand ways and caricatures without mercy, is dictated by the dominant form of space, by the eye and by the phallus - in short, by violence’ (1991: 302). Stein’s use of a Cubist perspective re-enacts this trauma against Picasso, reflecting the style that he himself used to create her portrait.

However, rather than clarifying how we see Picasso, Stein’s use of multiple perspectives ensures that he remains a mystery to the reader. As Alkon states, ‘the book is indeed composed of different pieces of different pictures which finally do prevent us from trying only to imagine what the models really looked like’ (1975: 881). The trauma inflicted on Picasso’s body by Stein, rather than creating an image of him, emphasises his dislocation - to imagine him from these descriptions would be to imagine his eyes or his hands all as separate items. Furthermore, the description by Stein of Picasso as ‘quick moving’ (2001: 16), ‘alive’ (2001: 52) and as having a ‘violent but not a rough way’ (2001: 52) denotes a kind of dynamism and energy. This is located within his body and, in creating this image of him, Stein displays a desire to locate Picasso’s self, the core of his artistic talent, within his body. However, his moving parts somehow confuse the image further. As Brooks describes ‘we tend to think of the physical body as precultural and prelinguistic: sensations of pleasure and especially of pain, for instance, are generally held to be experiences outside language’ (1993: 7). Movement too is understood as a prelinguistic state. Words to describe movement often either describe the quality or speed of the movement rather than the act of moving in itself which is somehow beyond language. In describing Picasso in such an energetic way Stein reaches the limits of linguistic representation. Her traumatic fracturing of his body creates a dissociative effect, separating out his body from his self in the text. Not only does the fracturing of the body through Cubism reflect the dismemberment of the soldiers that Stein describes, but it has similar consequences. Stein’s soldiers return from war with the characteristics that, to Stein, comprise their individuality or their self, missing from their damaged bodies. Stein’s Cubist fracturing of Picasso replicates a milder form of this effect, traumatically separating his body and his self.

This technique of fracturing the body through Cubism produces similar results throughout *The Autobiography*. Stein describes a conversation with Picasso's mistress Fernande about their meeting with Alice Princet, calling Alice 'rather a Madonna like creature, with large lovely eyes and charming hair. Fernande afterwards explained that she was the daughter of a workingman and had the brutal thumbs that of course were a characteristic of workingmen' (Stein 2001: 29). Alice is both depicted as a beauty and a reflection of her working-class father's brutality. The result of these two opposing images is that the reader is left to wonder how her thumbs and her face, both depicted as elements of other people, can be connected. To the reader, the body of Alice is again a confused patchwork of separate features. Stein, through Toklas, goes on to state that she 'always liked Alice... She had a certain wild quality that perhaps had to do with her brutal thumbs and was curiously in accord with her madonna face' (Stein 2001: 29). Alice is a body of contradictions, but Stein claims that these two sides of Alice sit comfortably side-by-side.

Similarly to Picasso, Alice's hands are given their own subjectivity. The description of the body is a vessel through which Stein can describe what she perceives to be the core of Alice's personality. Her hands and thumbs, as her main tool for interacting with the world, are symbolic of her interactions with the environment in which she is placed. The description of her face illustrates her external beauty and the wildness and brutality of her hands represents the wildness of her personality, or her self. Consequently Alice appears fragmented, depicted as a disconnected face and hands. Alice undergoes the same process of Cubist-style dismemberment as Picasso, this illustrates the ways in which, for Stein, this experience of dissociation as a result of trauma was wider societal issue, not exclusively affecting male bodies. Furthermore, this description of Alice is mediated by Toklas and Fernande. Although Alice does not feature so heavily again in the text, Stein deems it important to describe Alice and to capture the other women observing her. Her description is as much Fernande's as Stein's and, in this sense, Stein is studying not only Alice's connection to her own body but how the act of looking upon bodies itself includes a process of fragmentation. Stein utilises the trauma of a Cubist-style dismemberment to illustrate and create a dissociative effect, whilst also testifying to a wider shift in thinking about bodies and fragmentation which she observes in the people around her.

This is not the only instance where Stein appears to be analysing the ways that other people view bodies in *The Autobiography*. In Stein's description of Toklas's first meeting with her friend Constance, Stein must reassert the reality of Constance's physical appearance

after she is either mistaken for someone else or misattributed as having certain characteristics. Toklas describes how:

Constance Fletcher came a day or so after we arrived and I went to the station to meet her. Mabel Dodge had described her to me as a very large woman who would wear a purple robe and who was deaf. As a matter of fact she was dressed in green and was not deaf but very short sighted. (Stein 2001: 141)

Here Constance is reduced to two physical characteristics, which turn out to be inaccurate. In this description her body disappears and has to be reasserted by Stein through Toklas's new description. However, something of Constance's appearance is lost in this process. What we get is a strange double – purple, deaf Constance as seen by Mabel and green and short-sighted Constance as seen by Toklas and the effect is to destabilise both descriptions. Krauss and Livingston discuss the effect of the double, arguing that:

...nothing creates this sense of the linguistic hold on the real more than the photographic strategy of doubling. For it is doubling that produces the formal rhythm of spacing – the two-step that banishes simultaneity. And it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added its copy. The double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original. It comes after the first, and in this following it can only exist as figure, or image. But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. (1985: 28)

In Stein's case the inaccurate double comes before Toklas's description and the strange purple deaf double that Mabel describes calls into question the trustworthiness and accuracy of Toklas's description. Its presence raises questions about the reliability of the observer or witness.

The destabilisation that the symbol of the double creates also casts a shadow over the Stein/Toklas relationship and their position as the double-narrator. Eakin addresses the construction of multiple voices in autobiographies such as Stein's, stating that 'such a narrative, with its double view – singular and plural - of the self and its history, poses the question whether the very idea of autobiography is not in its deepest sense a fiction' (1985: 36). Here, we see that the construction of a double narrator questions the accuracy of the narrative, calling attention to the elements of fiction involved in its creation. However, Langer states that:

It is not surprising to hear witnesses in oral testimonies confess that sometimes they do not believe their own stories. Their effort to recapture through memory what, because of the impossibility of its content, has already (for us) fallen outside memory, risks estranging the audience they seek to inform. (1991: 40)

The destabilisation of the narrative that Stein conducts through the double reflects the anxiety of the witness. The effect of trauma upon memory, and the absence of a terminology or a verbal framework within which victims can express their experiences, causes witnesses of trauma to be afraid that their narrative is always on the brink of collapsing into fiction. Stein too struggles to understand where her text lies on the spectrum of testimony, autobiography and fiction and questions her own memory and ability to act as witness to the consequences of trauma which she tries to illustrate throughout the text.

This raises the question as to whether or not the purpose of the text is to be accurate and depict scenarios truthfully. Gilmore recognises that:

There is something discreditable about both autobiography and ghosts – those figures of absence and haunting - and despite the presumed truthfulness of one (autobiography) and unlikeliness of the other (ghosts), one finds recurring assertions that they either do or do not really exist, as if the meaning of that existence were insistently and precisely in question. (2001: 121)

Despite her recognition of the perceived instability of autobiography, Gilmore also discusses how innovative autobiographies can combine ‘the testimonial and witnessing dimensions of autobiography’ (2011: 78) in order to construct ‘an imaginative and transformative project associated more typically with fiction than nonfiction’ (2011: 78). Gilmore proposes that the grey area between fiction, autobiography and testimony has the potential for a transformative impact which strict historical fact may lack. Truth therefore, is not necessarily the purpose of texts that engage in discussions around trauma, instead, in the same way that certain kinds of therapy allow ‘people to rescript their inner experience’ (Van Der Kolk 305) through utilising ‘the extraordinary power of the imagination to transform the inner narratives that drive and confine our functioning in the world’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 305), elements of fiction have a transformative power to allow writers to restructure internal narratives and express concepts for which there is not currently the language. As Van Der Kolk references, mentally we engage in narrativisation as a way to understand the world around us and, as a result, ‘fictions and the fiction-making process are a central constituent of the truth of any life as it is lived’

(Eakin 1985: 5). Fiction is a constituent part of understanding ourselves and our experiences and therefore plays a key role in the creation of any form of autobiographical narrative, including the testimonial process. *The Autobiography* lies on a spectrum between autobiography, testimony and fiction, but here the fiction helps to construct a narrative from ‘bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding’ (Felman 1992: 5). Without the terminology to express the trauma to which she is a witness, Stein conducts an observation and deconstruction of the body and its changed landscape after the war. Fiction allows Stein to verbalise and narrate this change, testifying to a ‘breakage of the framework’ (Laub 1992a: 60) in thinking about the body. Gilmore argues that ‘Literary witness challenges current formations of which stories have currency’ (2011: 78). Testimonial works, like *The Autobiography*, which engage with testimony, witnessing and autobiography in a literary context, not only defy the requirement of testimony to adhere to historical fact but challenge the very desire for factuality through their focus on an individual history which is ‘no longer straightforwardly referential’ (Caruth 1991: 182).

Chapter 2 - Kay Sage and the Internal Landscapes of Trauma

2.1 *China Eggs*: The Unidentified Witness

Kay Sage, perhaps better known for her paintings, wrote a series of texts in her later years, including *China Eggs*, an autobiography she wrote in 1955 (Miller 2011: 65) but which was never published, and three Surrealist one-act plays called *Cote D’Azur* (1956), *Failure to Discover* (1956) and *Jean Dibidou* (1960), there is no record of these plays being published or translated into English prior to Miller’s publication of *Kay Sage: The Autobiographical Chronology and Four Surrealist One-Act Plays* in 2011. These were not Sage’s first Surrealist one-act plays, but they do share significant themes and contribute a significant portion of her output during the later years of her life. Earlier in her life, Sage wrote play called *Chateau de Chemillieu* (1939), in which she depicts some of the most influential Surrealists of the time discussing the work of Gertrude Stein over dinner:

Jaqueline: In any case, Gertrude Stein says what she thinks.

Kay: And thinks what she says.

...

Jaqueline: What has she written, anyway? Have you read
anything?

Kay: Yes, she has written very important things.

(Sage 2011: 83-84)

While Sage's later works differ significantly from this play, it is important to note that two of the three lines that Sage gives herself in the play are about Stein. Sage declares her appreciation of Stein's work within her own writing and continues to engage with significant themes from Stein's oeuvre. Much like Stein, Sage is actively engaged with thinking around depictions of the body and how the understanding of the body has been shaped by the trauma of the early twentieth century. However, Sage, whilst in dialogue with Stein's earlier post-World War One works, is writing with the added perspective of having lived through the Second World War and experiences of personal trauma, such as the death of her husband in 1955 (Miller 2011: 65). The social significance of the First World War is not diminished by other experiences of trauma, but these experiences do alter Sage's perspective. In her work, Stein is keen to trace large-scale social changes in how people around her are viewing and imagining bodies and she uses Cubism to illustrate the impact of trauma upon the bodies of others. In contrast, Sage's approach is more personal. There is a switch from the grand project of Stein to the individual, personal narratives of embodied grief and illness that Sage portrays in her writing.

As previously discussed, this shift is reflective of the different ways soldiers experienced the trauma of the Second World War in contrast to the First World War. Van Der Kolk argues that Second World War veterans displayed a more internalised expression of trauma because the 'trauma did not just affect their bodies' (2014: 187). He attributes this change to post-Second World War society's refusal to acknowledge the trauma that soldiers had experienced, with governments across Europe viewing those soldiers who displayed symptoms of mental distress as 'undisciplined and unwilling' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 185) at best and as displaying a 'character defect' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 185) at worst. If, as Stein testifies, the First World War had a significant impact on the experience of embodiment and the relationship between the body and self, this is compounded by a lack of recognition for the trauma that people had already experienced and the new-found trauma of the Second World War. Given the level of shame associated with the struggles that veterans experienced

it is no wonder that by the Second World War the manifestation of trauma had become increasingly internalised, with soldiers forced to keep a ‘much tighter lid’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 187) on their emotions than previous generations. This shift towards introspection and an internalised expression of trauma is reflected in Sage’s work. She continues to take influence from Stein, applying many of the same techniques, including a repeated use of doubling, however Sage’s work is often less interested in observing large-scale changes occurring around her. Her texts are not overtly as autobiographical but, through analysis, they are revealed to intimately reflect Sage’s personal relationship with her body and bear witness to the internal dislocation that she experiences within herself. This chapter will analyse the nature of the body in Sage’s autobiography *China Eggs*, which narrates the period of her life up until she meets her husband, a meeting which coincides with the onset of the Second World War in 1939 (Miller 2011: 31), as well as two of her one-act plays – *Cote D’Azur* and *Jean Dibidou* – both of which have significant autobiographical themes and engage with the idea of dissociation. Like Stein, the depth of Sage’s engagement with the war and its effect on the body is not immediately apparent, however in *Jean Dibidou* Sage clearly associates the trauma of war with the experience of dissociation and a struggle to reconceptualise the self.

In *China Eggs* Sage narrates her autobiography with the assistance of a second voice. However, unlike in *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, Sage does not name the second narrator, instead they remain a mystery to the reader. This other voice functions to challenge Sage and question the accuracy of Sage’s account of her life. This relationship is first established by Sage in the introduction to the autobiography:

“My mother was a morphine addict. My father was an upright citizen. I wish somebody would write about what happened to me.”

“Why don’t you write about it yourself? You must know about it.”

“I don’t know about it. Besides I don’t know how to write.”

“You don’t have to know how to write. You only have to know how to think.”

“But you’ve been telling me not to think – not to think about anything at all.”

“Oh, be quiet.” (AAA n.d.: 1-2)

This introductory sequence sets up the relationship between the two voices. The first voice is presumably Sage because it divulges personal information about her parents and their respective positions in society and expresses a desire to see their lives written about. The other voice encourages them, but the relationship is also to some extent antagonistic with the second voice repeatedly contradicting the first. As Colvile describes ‘Sage structured the book as a dialogue between herself and a skeptical double’ (2011: 4). This idea of doubling, and the creation of an autobiography using several perspectives, closely reflects Stein’s use of Toklas as narrator in her autobiography. However, unlike Stein’s overt use of her partner as the voice of the autobiography, Sage is more ambiguous on the question of who the second voice might be. Gilmore describes how the ‘expected claims about names in autobiography emphasize their stabilising function: a name identifies a person, a family, a history, and focuses attention on the solid corporeality to which it refers’ (2001: 129). By this rationale, the absence of a name destabilises an autobiographical work by deliberately disconnecting the work from the reality it aims to depict. Much like Stein, Sage experiments with the limits of autobiography, playing with elements of fiction, and in doing so revealing ‘those limits in ways that conventional autobiographies obscure’ (Gilmore 2001: 13). In her analysis of an exhibition of Sage’s artwork in which Sage also appears to be addressing a mystery second person, Sherman argues that ‘Sage’s opponent...is left unidentified, leaving the role to be filled in a variety of ways’ (2011: 129). Sage’s second voice can therefore be seen as a way of incorporating a multitude of desires, presences and influences in her life. Her experimentation with the genre of autobiography and creation of a mystery character opens up possibilities for her self-expression and allows her to represent a multiplicity of influences on her life.

However, Sherman also discusses who these multiple presences could be in Sage’s artwork, firstly noting that, ‘clearly, Sage’s opponent was Tanguy. Her husband who had played opposite her for much of her adult life, had died. His absence left a void’ (2011: 129). She also argues that the second presence could represent Sage’s ‘uncontrollable surroundings. By calling out to no one in particular, she calls out to everyone who encounters her words, readers she cannot and will not ever know’ (Sherman 2011: 129). Unlike Stein whose relationship with Alice Toklas grounds her, Sage is left alone, calling out to someone to witness her. Maddrell discusses what she calls the ‘paradox of absence-presence experienced through bereavement’ (2013: 503), describing how ‘whatever or whomever is absent is so strongly missed, their very absence is *tangible* (i.e. it becomes a presence)’ (2013: 504-505).

Sage's witness is similarly absent and present, constructing Sage's loss of not only her husband but, more figuratively, the loss of someone to mirror and witness her, as a form of bereavement. Laub describes that after the Holocaust 'No observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity – a wholeness and a separateness – that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing' (1992b: 81). Here he suggests that the impact of the Second World War was too significant for there to be anyone left sufficiently unaffected by the trauma who could act as witness to its victims. Sage's half-present, half-absent, argumentative second voice engages with this concept. She creates a witness for herself, but the presence of the witness is plagued with anxieties around the truthfulness of the account and even around the possibility of expressing her experiences. Through the loss of her husband she experiences the realisation that there is nobody left to bear witness to her life. However, as Sherman argues, the presence of the voice speaks of a desire for that position to be filled by anyone who encounters her writing. The mystery voice that Sage constructs also functions as a placeholder for future readers, a way of imagining how her work will be interacted with and questioned by those who encounter it. However, Sage's reader is not an '*addressable other*' (Laub 1992a: 68) but a mysterious *un-addressable* other who's presence is always in doubt. Felman asks 'If literature is the *alignment between witnesses*, what would this alignment mean?' (1992: 2) and Sage appears to ask the same question, using the half-absent presence of the voice to call out for a reader to witness her through the text whilst recognising her anxiety that she cannot see or guarantee the presence of such a witness.

In the post-script to *China Eggs*, referred to only as 'Extra', Sage even more overtly questions the nature of autobiography and the position of the second voice. Reflecting on having finished writing *China Eggs*, the mystery voice states that:

"...there isn't a word of truth in it."

"What do you mean by that? You mean that none of these things
ever happened to me?"

"Yes, I mean exactly that. You only think they happened to you."

"Then, in that case, I wasn't there. You mean it was somebody
else?"

"Yes, it was somebody else."

“And all the other people were other people?”

“Yes, all of them, including yourself, existed only in your
imagination.”

“Then who am I?”

“I don’t know.” (AAA n.d.: ‘Extra’)

The second voice argues that the autobiography is a creation of Sage’s imagination and Sage accepts this, asking the second voice to identify who she really is. This moment most clearly expresses Sage’s desire to be recognised by another, to be mirrored and to have her life-story witnessed. However, the voice is unable to do this for Sage, and instead informs her that she is in fact so cut off from the version of herself that experienced the events of *China Eggs* that she has become an entirely different person. Furthermore, the voice questions Sage’s ability to recall events, claiming that they are acts of imagination rather than memory, destabilising the foundation of Sage’s autobiography. Gilmore discusses the limits of autobiography, stating:

When self-representation and the representation of trauma coincide, the conflicting demands potentially make autobiography theoretically impossible: How can the exploration of trauma and the burden it imposes on memory be representative? . . . How can one tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when facts, truth and memory combine in the representation of trauma to undermine rather than strengthen representativeness? (2001: 19).

These questions are reflected by Sage’s second voice. Like Stein, Sage’s second voice is designed to function as a witness to Sage’s life story and to her discussion around the changing nature of her relationship to her body and her self. However, Sage’s second voice denies its ability to act as witness for her, and in doing so questions whether it is possible to bear witness to another and whether Sage’s memory is accurate or if the narrative is entirely fictional. As Sherman explains, ‘Sage conveys clearly in this text that she is disinterested in constructing an objectively linear narrative of her life...Sage examines the inconsistencies intrinsic in memory and the problems with defining one’s own identity in singular or authoritative terms’ (2011: 123). Sage displays anxiety around the connection between fiction and memory, reflecting Gilmore’s suggestion that trauma destabilises memory and thereby complicating the preconceived notion of autobiography as based on an accurate depiction of events.

Furthermore, Colvile discusses how, for the female Surrealists who fled Europe during the Second World War, the ‘relative freedom they experienced in the Americas encouraged these artists to write themselves into existence by exploiting their tendency towards self-representation’ (2011: 3). This post-war tendency towards self-expression is clear in Sage’s post-war works and her desire to be witnessed reflects Colvile’s suggestion that these authors wrote in order to prove their existence. However, despite the fact that the war was the catalyst for the movement’s relocation to America, Colvile does not attribute this desire to prove their existence to the experience of trauma. As we have previously explored in reference to Stein’s work, the desire to be seen, to be mirrored and to be touched by the presence of another stems from the ability of trauma to make people feel like ‘*no body*’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 247). Trauma also has the power to transform someone, they ‘no longer are “themselves”’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 237) and become a new person who must be recognised and reconstituted through being written ‘into existence’ (Colvile 2011: 3). Through her engagement with her second voice, Sage demonstrates an extreme disconnect with her life prior to the trauma of the war and the loss of her husband, to such an extent that her life prior to these traumas is understood as having been experienced by ‘somebody else’ (AAA n.d.: ‘Extra’). Her autobiography attempts to reconnect with that other person but ultimately, as the second voice suggests, she is too changed to be considered that person still.

Sage further discusses the relationship between the body and memory, suggesting in the passage below, that her writing is, at least in part, an embodied process. Her second voice states that they should:

“...talk about writing”

“It is not at all the same as painting. Both are forms of exhibitionism but while the writer stands naked before the public, the painter dresses in a provocative manner.”

(AAA n.d.: 48)

Here, Sage likens painting to fancy dress and writing to bearing her naked body. Although this functions as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the writer, it also relates to the circumstances around Sage’s own move towards writing and away from painting as a form of expression. As Sherman describes, in Sage’s later life ‘because of her failing eyesight, Sage turned away from her critically successful paintings...Needing further creative outlets, Sage also became a more prolific poet, an art form she had experimented with for decades’ (2011:

121-122). Sherman makes it clear that Sage's engagement with writing relates to her relationship to her own body and her ailing health, which Miller describes as a cause of 'great anxiety' (2011: 67) for Sage. Writing became not just *an* outlet but *the* outlet through which Sage could express herself. Furthermore, Smith and Watson argue that 'We locate memory and specific practices of remembering, in our own bodies and in specific objects or our experiential histories' (2002: 9). If, as Smith and Watson discuss, memory is located within our bodies, then the genres of autobiography and testimony are deeply engaged with the body through their reliance on memory to determine their narratives. Unlike painting, which Sage describes as a disguising of the body, she understands writing to be rooted in embodied memory and to involve an element of exposing these memories. Van Der Kolk asserts that 'Our sense of self depends on being able to organize our memories into a coherent whole. This requires well-functioning connections between the conscious brain and the self-system of the body – connections that are often damaged by trauma' (2014: 247). He then suggests that to 'overcome trauma, you need help to get back in touch with *your body*, with *your self*' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 247). This suggests, firstly, that being able to connect your memories into a coherent narrative is a part of creating or rediscovering a post-trauma self and, secondly, that reconnection with memory damaged by trauma requires reconnection with the body. Sage's understanding of her writing as a kind of exhibitionism, a bearing of her body, engages with ideas around rediscovering and reconnection with her body through writing. This suggests that for Sage autobiography facilitates reconnection with her body and thereby allows her to renegotiate and reconceptualise the memories she has of her past and helps her to construct her post-trauma self.

Sage displays further awareness that her memory is located within her body, stating that:

I knew I had a good figure and beautiful legs and feet. I knew I was attractive. I thought I was clever and witty. I hoped I was intelligent. But I had absolutely no idea, so help me God, that I was the devastating provocative creature I apparently was. If you don't believe me, you have only to look at the photographs of me at the time. (AAA n.d.: 84).

Whilst Sage does not offer her readers a glimpse of what her body looks like now, the phrase 'If you don't believe me' (AAA n.d.: 84) implies that at the time of writing Sage's body has changed radically enough for the description of her beauty to have become implausible. This way of framing the discussion around her body asks significant questions about the role of

memory in creating images of the body. Rather than accurately depicting who Sage was or felt like at that particular time in her life, Sage's comments draw attention to the fact that her perspective has changed since she was that age and we become aware that Sage's memory is more deeply associated with her older self than it is with the young, beautiful self that Sage depicts. Although Sage suggests that now she is older she is able to see her younger self more accurately, the description creates a strange doubling effect, with the young, beautiful Sage on one hand and the older, wiser Sage on the other. As with Stein, the presence of a double destabilises the representation of both characters and calls into question the nature of memory and thereby autobiography, suggesting that the 'past is not a static repository of experience but always engaged from a present moment, itself ever-changing' (Smith and Watson 2002: 9). As Sage seeks reconnection with her younger self she finds herself invariably changed and removed from who she was, illustrating a level of disconnect between post-trauma Sage and her young, pre-trauma self. Through the process of autobiography and the renegotiation of her past memories that it facilitates, Sage realises the extent of this disconnect. Van Der Kolk argues that trauma radically transforms people from who they were and that 'It is excruciatingly difficult to put that feeling of no longer being yourself into words' (2014: 237). Through her writing and the strange double-narrator technique that she utilises, Sage is able to verbalise this feeling and express the full extent of her disconnect from her pre-trauma self.

2.2 Jean Dibidou: Illness, Disconnection and Landscape

Sage also addresses similar questions about the relationship between the body and self in her less overtly autobiographical works. She wrote *Jean Dibidou* in 1960, not long after having only partially successful surgery to remove her cataracts (Miller 2011: 73). Although none of the characters in *Jean Dibidou* overtly reflect Sage, her illness provides context for the play and the ways that Sage was thinking about embodiment and we can observe 'Traces of autobiography' (Gilmore 2001: 121) in the strong thematic links with the reality of Sage's illness. Sherman states that at this point in Sage's life 'Failed surgeries and a distrust of doctors prevented her from finding a successful solution' (2011: 121) to the problem of her eyesight. However, instead of directly addressing her own experiences of illness, Sage's affliction increases her awareness of the body and she discusses the relationship of the self to

the body more generally, clearly tracing the root of the disturbance in this relationship back to the experience of war. Much like Stein's analysis of male soldier's bodies, Sage's *Jean Dibidou* is representative of a wider social phenomenon of dissociation to which Sage's work bears witness.

In this play, Sage depicts the body as deeply fractured and fragmented, with very little connection portrayed between each individual body part. The play is primarily constructed around the interactions between an irritable doctor and his patient, known as Jean Dibidou or Jean D. Sage depicts Jean D as experiencing pain 'Everywhere' (Sage 2011: 102) for which the Doctor gives him a 'little capsule' (Sage 2011: 103) with a 'WIRELESS FM TRANSMITTER' (Sage 2011: 103) inside. This capsule, the Doctor describes, 'takes a cruise throughout your body, stopping at every harbour. At each stop, it discovers your pains, and then, it delivers your stories to the oscilloscope' (Sage 2011: 103). The capsule appears to either be sentient or contain a tiny person, only referred to as 'he' (Sage 2011: 105) or 'the odd one' (Sage 2011: 109), who describes the internal organs of Jean D to the Doctor through the radio transmitter. Through the eyes of this mystery character Jean D's body is transformed, it becomes a vast open space filled with theme-park-like attractions. For example, the Doctor recounts the descriptions offered by the capsule character of Jean's stomach:

Doctor: He says it's a mess; that nothing is going well at all. The
sauerkraut is fighting with the camembert. It says it's full
of blood...

Jean D: (Quivering) Full of blood! Oh, God! I knew that I had an
ulcer!

Doctor: Silence! Ah...yes...well...I was wrong. It's not blood: it's
wine... (Sage 2011: 105)

The scale of the body is transformed through the eyes of the tiny capsule character, instead of resembling a familiar, fleshy organism, the body is metamorphosed into a kind of battle ground where the mystery observer witnesses fighting between Jean D's stomach contents. Jean D is depicted as deeply disconnected from his internal landscape. The capsule character briefly mistakes wine for blood, to which Jean D's response is to affirm that he knew all along that he was bleeding internally. When this is revealed to have been a mistake, Jean D is

depicted as equally ignorant about the state of his internal organs as the people around him. He is so disconnected from his body that the body described by the capsule resembles an entirely separate organism. Here Sage creates an extreme sense of dissociation, the 'veil' (Damasio 2000: 28) in Jean D's mind appears to have cut him off from his body completely. He experiences pain 'Everywhere' (Sage 2011: 102) but his stomach appears to hold none of the answers and he is rendered clueless by the disconnect between his mind and body.

Much like his stomach, Jean D's heart is depicted as having experienced damage and Jean D's is unable to fathom why or how the damage occurred as a result of his disconnection. The doctor describes Jean D's heart:

Doctor: He says that your heart has been broken – into pieces – but
that it has been patched up again. He says that the pieces
were not put back together the right way.

Jean D: Who's the son of a gun who did this job?

Doctor: Don't know. (Sage 2011: 106)

Jean's heart is described as fragmented and shattered, almost brittle in its ability to break into shards. Sage's portrayal of his heart deliberately avoids realistic depiction of the organ, instead her description more closely resembles the metaphorical idea of a broken heart. This suggests that whilst Jean D experiences pain in his body, it is more deeply related to his internal, psychological state. Van Der Kolk describes how some types of trauma can produce alexithymia, a condition where people 'cannot describe what they are feeling because they cannot identify what their physical sensations mean' (2014: 98). He describes a patient with this condition whose 'body felt the sadness that her mind couldn't register' (Van Der Kolk 2014: 98). Sage describes Jean D in much the same way; his inability to recognise his emotional suffering results in his emotional pain manifesting itself as physical pain within his body.

Why Jean D experiences his mind and body in this way is not entirely clear, however in the discussion around Jean D's liver below, Sage provides context to the fragmentation that she depicts. When receiving information from the capsule about the liver, the doctor shouts:

Doctor: Silence! He says he's observing the liver...from afar.

Jean D: Why from afar? He doesn't like my liver?

Doctor: He says it looks like a war monument – he says the
landscape is awful – it depresses him. (Sage 2011: 107)

Here Jean's liver is likened to a war monument and his body is portrayed as a vast expanse of land. This, combined with references to Jean D's stomach as a battleground, suggests that Sage understands the context of the war to relate to Jean D's experience of his body. In his discussion of architectural space, Chapman considers how:

...interiors of escape, voyeurism and implication are at the heart of creative practices in the period immediately following the First World War where the massive cultural and political upheavals triggered a period of reflective introspection. The interior and architecture adopted new roles no longer positioned as context or backdrop but suddenly underwritten with psychological and emotional values of shelter, protection and domesticity. The "inside" was no longer a literal dialectic, but a problematic and complicated social construct. (2008: 73)

He maintains that, as a result of the war 'Interiors are transformed into exteriors, reconfiguring the complex spatial structure of art and dismantling the inherited values of architectural space' (Chapman 2008: 73). This illustrates the role of war in reconfiguring the spatial environment. Sage's description of the liver as resembling a war monument ties this idea of introspection and reconfigured space to the impact of the two World Wars on the social construction of bodies. The body is transformed into a 'landscape' (Sage 2011: 107) evoking not only a sense of vastness but converting the body into an exterior space. As Chapman explains 'This fascination with interiority can be read as a kind of "homesickness", lamenting the traumatic collapse of familiarity in a landscape of immense violence and social upheaval' (2008: 69). The trauma the body has experienced also renders it unfamiliar in the wake of the two World Wars, its internal environment is reconfigured and it becomes a site of trauma and dislocation.

Belton considers Sage's relationship to architectural space in her painting *Le Passage*, stating that:

For Sage, architecture offers no shelter but serves as a reminder that the material world, whether transformed by parapraxis or not, offers no security. Staring across the barren plain, this figure – the only one of its kind in her generally deserted *oeuvre* – has more in common with the religious yearning after the inexpressible and the profound alienation of women in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. (1995: 265)

The character in *Le Passage* reflects the position of the capsule character in *Jean Dibidou*; alone, looking out over an unforgiving landscape. Here again the suggestion of an architectural structure does not create any kind of comfort but, instead, increases the isolation of the image. The sense of profound alienation and disconnection here is not exclusive to the capsule character's attempts to understand Jean D's body or Jean D's attempts to understand himself, it is inherent in the act of looking at bodies that Sage depicts. She sees the body as an indescribable and estranged structure which she interrogates through her writing but from which she ultimately remains disconnected. This amounts to an attempt to express a 'breakage of a framework' (Laub 1992a: 60) in the way that the body is being conceptualised. The traumatic context of war and the upheaval that the First and Second World Wars wreaked on the social understanding of spaces and bodies informs Sage's depiction of the body as fragmented and dissociated. Her play may be primarily a work of fiction, but it testifies to a traumatic reconfiguration of the body, in much the same way that Chapman understands the war to have changed the conceptualisation of architectural space.

2.3 *Cote D'Azur* and the Catharsis of Re-enactment

Around 1956, the time that Sage first began to show signs of double cataracts (Miller 2011: 67), she wrote two one-act plays. One of these plays, titled *Cote D'Azur*, depicts a 'magnificent blonde' (Sage 2011: 85) artist named Vera who is harassed by a man identified only as a 'Famous Painter' (Sage 2011: 85), or FP for short. Towards the end of the play, Mrs X, the woman who Vera lives with, explains to FP that Vera is:

Mrs X: ...a painter – and for some strange reason, even well
appreciated in her country. Since she has a show at the
Museum of Modern Art, she thinks she can do whatever
she wants.

FP: My goodness! And what kind of painting does she so?

Mrs X: Oh, a follower of followers. Imitation of the imitators of
Picasso. You know the type. (Sage 2011: 90)

Here we can see some suggestion that Vera is inspired by Sage herself; both women are painters in the Avant-Garde who have had their work displayed in the Museum of Modern

Art (Miller 2011: 74). This allows us to make connections between the ways in which Vera discusses the body and the ways Sage herself relates her body to her work. This play may not be explicitly autobiographical, but it weaves elements of fiction and autobiography together, resulting in yet another work that is hard to place along the ‘fiction-nonfiction continuum’ (Gilmore 2001: 17).

Firstly, Sage reflects on the gendering of the body and the ways in which this gendering is reflective of trauma. The Famous Painter declares that he has come to Vera to beg to paint her portrait, stating that:

FP: I become crazy when I look at you – your eyes, blue like the sea, (Vera starts reading again), your hair, the colour of honey, your beautiful young body, flexible and so pale...your tiny feet...I think I’m in love with you! (Sage 2011: 89).

FP declares his love for Vera, but in doing so he describes her as a collection of constituent body parts, thereby dissecting her into fragments and imagining her as a disconnected and sexualised body. This fragmentation closely reflects the kinds of verbal dismemberment that we observe not only in Sage’s discussion around the male body, but also in Stein’s Cubist depiction of bodies. Irigaray describes this process, arguing that often ‘Woman herself is never at issue in these statements: the feminine is defined as the necessary complement to the operation of male sexuality, and, more often, as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an unfailingly phallic self-representation’ (1985: 70). Here, male sexual desire is predicated on a kind of dismemberment which is enacted against the female body by the male. The effect is another kind of absent-presence, even as the woman in question’s body is being evoked it is supplanted by a male fantasy.

In response to FP’s dismemberment of her, Vera states:

Vera: I don’t care about poetry and poets. All men are poets in their own way. And it’s always the same way...my eyes, my hair, my body...as poetic as they are, they don’t often praise my talents. (Sage 2011: 89)

By invoking her body, fragmenting her and imbuing her body with his sexual desire, Sage depicts FP as rendering Vera absent from the description. Vera recognises the poetic nature

of the words but denies their ability to represent her, cutting through any apparent romance and in doing so reclaiming her body from FP's fragmentation. As Lyford has suggested, the 'texts and images and manifestos produced by the mostly male members of the surrealist groups usually depict women' (1963: 2) and she questions whether 'surrealist artist's and writer's disturbing images of them have a connection to the literally deformed bodies of the men who inherited Paris and Berlin' (1963: 2). Furthermore, she declares that the male Surrealist 'brand of revolution depended heavily on displacing anxiety about male emasculation onto the female body' (Lyford 1963: 186). Lyford implies that Surrealist writing and artwork post-World War One was engaged in thinking about male bodies as fragmented and in displacing this physical representation of male emasculation onto women's bodies. Writing post-World War Two, Sage appears to analyse this relationship and the ways of representing women's bodies that are visible around her. This reveals less about Sage's understanding of femininity and more about her conception of masculinity amongst the male-dominated group of painters who she worked and, in the case of her husband, lived alongside. As Colvile describes, for the Surrealists 'World War II and the subsequent exile generally had different implications according to gender...The male European surrealist refugees in New York settled into a close-knit group for material reasons and consequently became more democratic toward the women' (2011: 2). For the Surrealist movement, the move to the Americas initiated the relaxing of the grip of the male members of the group, coupled with the death of Sage's husband, Sage was then able to experience the freedom to question and criticise the male Surrealist engagement with ideas of gender. Although, it is important to note that 'our own interest in women's rights, for example, must not be projected backwards and attributed to the female post-Surrealists' (Belton 1995: 258), for Sage, engaging with Surrealism was still a mode for expressing her observations and criticisms around the ways in which the body was being conceptualised by artists around her, this included observing the body through a gendered lens. Sage highlights the ways in which the fragmentation of women's bodies and the overt sexualisation of their form stems from an act of male imagination which reflects both male desire and post-war anxieties around bodily fragmentation. Her text deconstructs the process of transplanting trauma onto the female body and, in doing so, evaluates the wider impact of the trauma of the war upon how bodies are understood and represented.

The substitution of the body continues as a theme throughout the play. In a similar vein to *Jean D'ibidou, Cote D'Azur* examines themes of sickness and illness as well as

engaging with the concept of the double. During a conversation with Vera, FP recalls meeting her before:

FP: Don't you remember the delicious evening when I met you?

We were a whole group – first at the beach, and then at the
café eating fish and drinking that good little white wine...

Vera: It wasn't me! I don't go to the beach. Sand makes me sick. I

don't eat fish – it poisons me. I don't hang out with groups –
that poisons me too, and when it comes to drinking, I hate
white wine. I drink whisky. I don't know who you are, but
you are really bothering me. Leave me alone!

(Sage 2011: 86)

FP insists that he has previously met Vera, but her insistence that she was absent from the meeting and use of her ill health as proof of that absence, is equally vehement. Much like Stein's green/purple woman, Sage constructs a case of mistaken identity with a double. Vera's double threatens her autonomy by suggesting her engagement in activities she dislikes, forcing Vera to reassert her control. Through illness, the body, as the locus for memory, is evoked in order to correct the case of mistaken identity and thus remove the threat of the double. Sage depicts illness as a way of reasserting the body and therefore the very presence of the person in question. This ties in with Sage's own turn towards writing as a result of illness, as Frank reflects, 'The stories that ill people tell come out of their bodies. The body sets in motion the need for new stories when its disease disrupts the old stories' (1995: 2). For Sage, the sick body has driven her to new mediums and the creation of new narratives, this reflects Colville's suggestion that female Surrealists attempted to 'write themselves into existence' (2011: 3) through their works after their traumatic relocation to America as a consequence of the Second World War. Sage, her failing eyesight having denied her self-expression through painting, embraces writing in order to prevent her disappearance from the art world around her. Her writing, inspired by her illness, therefore reflects a similar process of reconnection with the body and self-assertion that she depicts in character of Vera.

The form that Sage's last two works take is an important element of her writing. *Jean Dibidou* and *Cote D'Azur* are both one-act plays and, while the plays have significant

autobiographical themes, their form is different from *China Eggs* which alters the ways in which Sage engages with their content. Psychological research recognises the significant health benefits that theatre can offer, particularly in relation to the experiences of trauma, as a study by Munjuluri et al demonstrates. This study analysed the potential of theatre where trauma victims re-enacted traumatic moments from their lives and discovered that theatre ‘fosters greater personal insight, narrative coherency, and interconnectedness, all of which may reduce symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress’ (Munjuluri et al 2020: 7). Van Der Kolk also recognises the benefits of theatre, describing how ‘theatre is about embodying emotions, giving voice to them, becoming rhythmically engaged, taking on and embodying different roles’ (2014: 335). The narrative of a play is communicated and channelled through the bodies of actors and therefore allows them to reconnect with their bodies. Sage’s decision to write in this format may account for elements of catharsis that are visible in *Cote D’Azur*. In contrast to Stein, who merely observes and recreates the trauma of the First World War on bodies, Sage depicts Vera as engaged in a reclaiming of her body and a denial of her fragmentation which she imagines physically acted out on stage. Despite the fact that there is no record of her plays being performed, the physical element of theatre allows Sage to externalise her experiences and imagine a solution to her disconnection and dislocation, an act that can allow trauma sufferers to ‘rescript their inner experience’ (Van Der Kolk 2014: 305). Again Sage challenges the genres of autobiography and testimony through her engagement with the theatre and her use of fiction throughout *Jean Dibidou* and *Cote D’Azur*, however this creative approach to addressing themes from her life allows her to reconceptualise her experiences to therapeutic effect.

Conclusion

In the same ways that the manifestation of trauma reflects the socio-cultural conditions of the time (Van Der Kolk 2014: 187), the cultural artefacts that we have access to, such as Stein’s and Sage’s works, reflect the trauma of the society around them. The experience of war and the resulting increased prevalence of visibly injured and traumatised soldiers had a significant effect upon the social fabric of Europe and brought new awareness to the centrality of the body to the experience of trauma. Felman argues that testimony is an attempt to express ‘occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts

that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference' (1992: 5). As we have seen, after the First and Second World Wars society lacked the medical terminology to discuss trauma and its impact, with the development of diagnoses such as PTSD yet to be established. This positions trauma and its consequences as beyond comprehension in the manner that Felman describes. Read through the lens of trauma theory, we can observe in the work of Stein and Sage attempts to express the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress and its effect on the connection between the body and self. These texts testify to a radical change in how bodies are being experienced, socially constructed and viewed, which, through their representation of male bodies, these writers trace back to the physical and psychological trauma inflicted upon men during the two World Wars. For Stein, her engagement with the Cubist movement provides a process of dismemberment and reconstitution which she inflicts on the bodies of the characters in her text, allowing her to both illustrate and explore the dissociative effects of the trauma that she observes around her. Sage's discussion of the experience of dissociation and disconnection differs from Stein's, her narratives are more personal and she expands on the ways in which trauma may have been transferred from male bodies to women through male Surrealist representations of the female body as fragmented. Both writers engage repeatedly with the image of the double. Constructing for themselves a second presence who functions as a witness to facilitate their testimonies. However, the use of the two-voiced narrative also destabilises the connection of both autobiography and testimony to the real events that they describe. While the connection between autobiography and fiction is recognised as part of the genre's ability to facilitate the process of self-creation, the links between testimony and fiction are less well understood. The ability to give testimony about traumatic events in a historically accurate manner is compromised by the effect of trauma on memory. Furthermore, through engagement with psychology, fiction is revealed to be a crucial element of how we understand ourselves and our experiences. Fiction is therefore a constituent part of any personal narrative and could enable trauma victims to fill in gaps or create a cohesive narrative from memories affected by trauma. Consequently, the incorporation of fiction into Stein's and Sage's work does not undermine their text's ability to testify to trauma, instead their works amount to a form of creative testimony and include elements of fiction to provide room for self-exploration and the creation of new scenarios, allowing Stein and Sage to use literature to witness and mirror themselves and others. The therapeutic effect of writing and the effects of being witnessed and mirrored are recognised in psychology but the links between these concepts have not been fully explored. In the work of Stein and Sage these

links are more apparent, for them writing is a way to recreate the experience of being mirrored and witnessed. For Sage, the potential therapeutic effect of writing is even more prevalent. Not only does she call out to her readers to act as witness to her but, through her engagement with theatre, she is able to imagine the reclamation of the body from dissociation. Instead of depicting specific traumatic events from the two World Wars, their work amounts to an attempt to testify to a 'breakage of a framework' (Laub 1992a: 60) in thinking about the body and how trauma, or proximity to trauma, affects people psychologically and reshapes their ability to connect with themselves. Texts such as these produce a version of history which is 'no longer straightforwardly referential' (Caruth 1991: 182), no longer tied to historical accuracy, but instead attempts to describe events for which there is no clear mode of expression, producing a history that is experiential rather than referential.

Through analysis of the works of Stein and Sage we can observe trends in post-trauma narratives which may inform our understanding of crucial aspects of the post-trauma experience in the aftermath of other traumatic events. A number of studies have analysed the way in which symptoms of PTSD have been on the rise as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Di Crosta et al discovered in their research that 'more than one-third of the respondents reported PTSD symptoms during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic' (2020: 7). Blekas et al also observe that in their study that 'women met the criteria to a significantly larger extent than did men' (2020: 814) and ask 'Is a pandemic such a traumatic experience? Is it like war?' (2020: 812). The likening of the Covid-19 pandemic to wartime and the increase in the number of people displaying symptoms of post-traumatic stress, suggests that contemporary society is already being conceptualised as reflecting society after the Second and First World Wars. Given that women are also more likely to have experienced PTSD symptoms as a result of the pandemic, the work of Stein and Sage, which discusses the effects of trauma and how its impact was perceived by women, has entered a new period of relevancy. Experiences of trauma are not exclusive to war and research that deconstructs historical female experiences of trauma can provide context for contemporary traumatic experiences and potentially inform future study on post-pandemic understandings of the body. For Sage and Stein writing helps initiate the healing process, providing opportunities for them to create new narratives, reconnect with their bodies and potentially be witnessed by their readers or by the characters they gather around their literary selves. Whether future writing about the post-pandemic environment will reflect the post-war experiences of Sage and Stein is yet to

be determined, particularly in light of the development of new medical terminology to express post-trauma responses. Nevertheless, there is potential in the work of these writers to provide a framework for the understanding of other creative testimonies which attempt to reconnect with the post-trauma body and thereby kick-start the process of healing.

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