

that Ugolin perhaps has had "too beautiful a dream. That suffices to deprive you of consolation at the definitive moment of decapitation" (p. 231). There is no answer to that conjecture, only the nothingness that typifies Ribemont-Dessaignes's philosophical fiction.² For one critic, Ribemont-Dessaignes's main theme is "the uselessness of everything." Degradation and a concentration-camp universe encircle us. Jacques Lepage asks whether all acts are "a farce that one plays out in order to escape from the vacuity of existence." He finds this question in all R-D's novels. "Even in *Céleste Ugolin*, in which after the Dadaists' break with Breton he caricatures and vilifies the surrealists, the same question imposes itself."³

For another critic: "*Céleste Ugolin*, which appears in 1926, can be considered Ribemont-Dessaignes's first great novel, the one in which he abandons himself completely to surrealist inspiration, in which he puts on stage ... some of his surrealist friends. Of an exceptional virulence, this novel resembles no other, obeys no law of genre, has nothing which permits linking it to the surrealist works of the period. . . . Strange and profuse, an unsuspected vitality traverses the narrative from one end to the other, but it is by the cruelty of the episodes, by the brutal coloration of his style, sometimes also by the burlesque quality and black humor of certain pages, that *Céleste Ugolin* will remain a kind of archetype."⁴

Ladies' Voices in Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* and Gertrude Stein's Dialogues

K. J. PHILLIPS, *University of Hawaii*

Barthelme's *The Dead Father* (1975) contains four dialogues between Julie and Emma which are completely different from the rest of the book.¹ These dialogues strikingly recall some of Stein's compositions, particularly "Every Afternoon: A Dialogue" and "Ladies' Voices (Curtain Raiser)," printed in her *Geography and Plays* (1922). I will also point out a few reminders in the Julie-Emma talks of Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1911).

The two authors share several techniques: failure to keep track of individual speakers, non-sequiturs, clichés, some very concrete and unexpected combinations of words to contrast with the clichés, lines which seem to refer self-consciously to the method of composition, lines which refer to language in general, and sexual innuendos. As a result of the juxtaposition of general and familiar banalities against

² Some other such novels by Ribemont-Dessaignes are *Frontières humaines* (Paris: Ed. du Carrefour, 1929); *Adolescence (Le Vestiaire de la personnalité)* (Paris: Emile Paul, 1930); *Monsieur Jean ou l'Amour absolu* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1934).

³ Jacques Lepage, "Présence et absence de G.R-D," *Marginales*, 152 (April 1973), 28-37; my translation from p. 33.

⁴ Albert Ayguesparse, "Hommage à G. R-D," *Marginales*, 152 (April 1973), 4; my translation.

¹ Donald Barthelme, *The Dead Father* (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), pp. 32-37, 78-82, 111-16, and 181-91. Page numbers for quotations from this edition will appear in parentheses.

each other and against specific and unexpected remarks, as in a collage, the fragments generate new meanings. Dialogue, a staple of the novel of manners, metamorphoses into a kind of poetry.

While Barthelme's "that's your opinion" is a general statement that could occur in a number of situations, "Tattering leather and balding blue velvet" (p. 182) suddenly zeroes in on a very specific milieu—which is, though, never developed beyond this brief reference. Similarly in "Every Afternoon," Stein relies almost entirely on general vocabulary ("Come again," "Nothing can pay for that," "We meant to see about it"), with a few suddenly specific words ("We will go and hear Tito Ruffo"). Especially in *Tender Buttons*, with its sections on "objects," "food," and "rooms," Stein piles up concrete common names in the unlikely juxtapositions which Barthelme occasionally adopts in his dialogues.

In *Tender Buttons* Stein either scrambles syntax, or she retains a more or less normal syntax but then fills in the slots with lexically unexpected words: "A grand clothes is searching out a candlenot that wheately not that by more than an owl and a path. A ham is proud of cocoanut."² Barthelme seems to be influenced by these possibilities, syntactic and lexical, while using them sparingly, so that they do not overwhelm the reader. Yet he does sometimes culminate a string of non-sequiturs with a quintessentially Steinian mix-up: "Mountain goats posing with their front legs together on the filing cabinets./ Feeling is what's important./ What was the room like?/ Gray and the ceiling white./ What was the room like?/ A shrug and a burst into tears./ Long gowns to the floor one yellow-white and one cooked-shrimp colored./ Something trembling in the balance./ Content to suck on a black tiptoe," (p. 183). Surely "suck on a black tiptoe" is as unlikely as a ham being proud of a cocoanut. Yet the effect of the passage is not just humor or indifference. Barthelme particularly recalls Stein here in the suggestion of parties and women, rooms and gowns. He creates emotion for this setting with the synecdochic description of the room as "A shrug and a burst into tears" and with the evocative line "Something trembling in the balance." By the time Barthelme gets to the bizarre "tiptoe" line, he has magically charged it with a decadent, impossible sexuality.

Occasionally a line or two in both Barthelme's and Stein's dialogues will suddenly flash an apparent comment on their own methods. In *The Dead Father*, the lines "Look at the parts separately./ Get an exploded view as they call it" (p. 186) invite attention to the way separate scraps of apparently different conversations crowd together in the text, with unexpected motifs exploding into consciousness. Yet this particular reflexive comment also warns the reader that whatever the temptation to look at these disjointed lines singly, they must be seen together within their unlikely contexts, where they generate composite meanings.

Barthelme's patterning and controlling hand is very much in evidence in these apparently random exchanges. That hand assures repetition, and it allows in only those lines which contribute to a few basic themes: threat, need, sex, aging, loss. This particular combination of randomness and control, free association and direction, receives its own striking reflexive comment: "Control is the motif./ That and splashes" (p. 191). These last lines spoken between the two women marvelously summarize Barthelme's whole method in their conversations. The sudden surprise of splashes (the shock of non-sequitur) and the security of recognition (supplied by the carefully controlled repetitions) together make up the two real pleasures of this sort of composition.

² Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*, in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Modern Library, 1962), p. 489. Subsequent page numbers will be noted in parentheses with the letters TB.

Stein's *Tender Buttons* also contains a few self-referential remarks.³ Stein announces her goal in writing as creating sudden "sparks" (like Barthelme's sudden "splashes"), and she signals this belief in the non-practical but still illuminating possibilities of art in the line ". . . why is the spark brighter, if it is brighter is there any result, hardly more than ever" (*TB*; p. 465). While acutely aware of the frustrating limits of language, she also claims its creative, "missionary" potential: an ambivalence that has, of course, characterized many twentieth-century authors. Stein might be defining one of her own lines out of *Tender Buttons* when she announces there, "A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certainly also a prison" (*TB*; p. 481). But if the poet depends on stumbling—random combinations of a near autonomous language—and on unconscious processes, she also insists on her own prerogative to shape and order and arrange, to be "the single mind that directs an apple," as Stein calls this world-creating artistic capacity (*TB*; p. 501).

In addition to including those lines which refer obliquely to their own methods of composition (repetition, non-sequitur, control, and free play), both Barthelme and Stein favor lines which question the reach of language in general. Barthelme's ladies remark skeptically in each of their four talks, "You must have studied English." Similarly, Stein uses the poignant line "Many words spoken to me have seemed English" in her short dialogue "Ladies' Voices."⁴ She also tinges the great majority of lines in "Every Afternoon" with skepticism about language: "I cannot understand words./ Cannot you" (*GP*; p. 255), "I do not know those words./ It is really wretched./ You do see it./ I don't see it that way./ No you wouldn't you would prefer the words well and tall" (*GP*; p. 259).

Barthelme's line about studying English occurs in different contexts that all point out the difficulty of communicating. The line first intervenes as Julie and Emma are saying: "He's not bad-looking./ Haven't made up my mind./ You must have studied English./ Take my word for it./ How did that make you feel?/ Wasn't the worst./ I queened it for a while in Yorkshire./ Did you know Lord Raglan?/ I knew Lord Raglan./ He's not bad-looking./ Handsome, clever, rich./ Yorkshire has no queen of its own I believe./ Correct./ Time to go./ Inclined to tarry for a bit. Thank you./ Two is one too many./ That's your opinion./ Nevertheless," (pp. 33-34). In this passage Barthelme echoes Stein's doubts about language itself. He also follows Stein in the sudden use of specific names (for otherwise anonymous people), such as Lord Raglan. Scene II of Stein's "Ladies' Voices" is strikingly similar: "Did you say they were different. I said it made no difference./ Where does it. Yes./ Mr. Richard Sutherland. This is a name I know./ Yes./ The Hotel Victoria./ Many words spoken to me have seemed English./ Yes we do hear one another and yet what are called voices the best decision in telling of balls./ Masked balls./ Yes masked balls./ Poor Augustine," (*GP*; p. 204). Stein's speakers here are aware of several tricks that language plays on its users. Paradoxically, according to the promiscuous way words will support more than one meaning, a "difference" can "make no difference." The answer to the question "Whom do we hear?" could be either "one another" or "voices," equating, oddly, a person with her voice. Because of the existence of words with multiple meanings, it is impossible to tell what kind of balls the ladies are discussing. Barthelme, too, has his ladies speculate on the ultimate meaning and source of the impulse to communicate: "Was there a message?/ Buzzing in the right ball" (p. 181).

³ Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 124-36.

⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Geography and Plays* (New York: Haskell House, 1967), p. 204. Further page numbers will be noted in parentheses with the letters *GP*.

The two authors share a combination of humor and sad longing. Their non-sequitur dialogues develop from the "slice of life" conversations of the 19th century: see, for example, Henry James's turn-of-the-century *The Awkward Age*. Stein's and Barthelme's apparently random but actually carefully controlled dialogues take narrative in the direction of poetry. Though nothing "happens" during the dialogues, the compositions are not static. Recurrent lines give witness to the restless movement of memory and anticipation and create new meanings in their constantly shifting contexts.

Stein once implied that a writer writes in order to "measure every daughter and to lessen every sister and to manage every mother and to sever every brother and to undertake a father." (*GP*; p. 135). Barthelme could have garnered his subject matter for *The Dead Father* from just such a list: the long burying of a father who won't stay down. And when he seems to follow Stein's style in the Julie-Emma conversations, the older author might well proclaim grandly, as she does in the first lines of "Ladies' Voices (Curtain Raiser)": "Ladies' voices give pleasure" (*GP*; p. 203).

Ironic Intertexts: Echoes of *René* in Gide's *Isabelle*

DORIS Y. KADISH, *Kent State University*

This paper considers Gide's 1911 *récit Isabelle* with an eye to catching the echoes of Chateaubriand's *René* that it contains, and to interpreting the significance of those echoes for Gide generally as a narrative writer. The evidence for identifying *René* as an intertextual model for *Isabelle* involves such elements as the use of a first-person narrator, a frame narration, and letters. In examining these elements, it will be our objective to show that Gide's intertextual relationship with Chateaubriand's novel is both ironic and self-conscious, as his literature generally and his *récits* specifically tend to be. In the conclusion, we shall elaborate upon the ramifications of Gide's ironic intertextuality for an understanding of *Isabelle's* place in Gide's development as a novelist.

We can begin our consideration of the textual evidence linking *René* and *Isabelle* by detailing the similar use in the two novels of a frame. Chateaubriand's novel begins, one will perhaps recall, with the voice of an unidentified frame narrator who, for the first page or two of the novel, presents three characters who will play a role in René's first-person account of his life: they are René himself and the two characters he addresses in the text, his two narratees, Chactas and le père Souel. It is indeed at the urging of these two narratees that René, who claims his story is too personal to be of interest to others, finally agrees to give his first-person account; we are told that "René avoit toujours donné pour motif de ses refus, le peu d'intérêt de son histoire qui se bornoit, disoit-il, à celle de ses pensées et de ses sentiments."¹

Gide's *Isabelle* displays the use of a narrative frame which is strikingly similar to the one we have just noted in *René*. The novel begins with the voice of an

¹ Chateaubriand, *René*, ed. J. M. Gautier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970), p. 30. Subsequent references are to this edition.