Rose Sings

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Introduction

A true modernist, Gertrude Stein believed in the need for reinventing language. Sullied and blunted by time and society, a language that could truly express thoughts and feelings needed to be recreated. She used various mechanisms, such as repetition, to liberate primal, instinctual expressions from the socialized English language. Stein captured this in her children’s story, The World is Round. Stein’s reinvented language, like the language of children, is a communication not mediated by words but by sounds, such as rhyme. Through sound, Stein expresses the deep themes of self and “other,” rejection and acceptance, good and evil, and childhood and development. Other modernists, such as William Carlos Williams, have exclaimed the pity that they were limited to a lower form of expression—words—as opposed to other art forms. Following this heritage of modernism, I have attempted to take Stein’s work a step further by not limiting the expression of her themes to words but enhancing the expression by adding the element of music to selections of The World is Round.
There is an unbreakable relationship between communication and sound in Gertrude Stein’s writing. Stein distinguishes between words themselves and the flux of those words. “She had observed, under laboratory conditions, the ways in which repeated rhythms of an individual’s speech identify him, indicate his attitude toward reality and his approach to experience” (Brinnin 58). One can gather from this quote that the deepest experiences and insights are expressed through the rhythms of words, not the words themselves.

Some readers express the difficulties of reading Stein’s works because they do not adhere to typical conversational forms. Stein “…ceased to worry about communication and emphasized communion…” (Stewart 69-70). That is, she cared less about lexical coherence and more about conveying a message. And if that message could traverse the breach of words into someone’s mind or heart better without following the rules of writing, then so be it. For example, in The World is Round, Rose sings, “When I sing I am in a ring, and a ring is round and there is no sound and the way is white and pepper is bright and Love my dog Love he is away alright oh dear” (Stein 112). This sentence exemplifies Stein’s lack of concern for making logical sense. To her, deeper communion is conveyed in the confusing array of words organized in this manner than in the lexical meaning of the words themselves. The reader resonates more strongly with Rose’s desperate attempt to understand the world around her through this incoherent expression, than through a simple narrative that clearly states Rose’s sadness, loneliness, and confusion during her climb up the mountain. Donald Sutherland states that Stein would
“write as if every instant of writing were complete in itself, as if in the act of writing something were continually coming true and completing itself, not as if it were leading to something” (Kostelanetz xx). Again, this description describes the lack of neat narrative form where one sentence leads to another and one part of the plot leads to a successive event. For example, Rose’s dog Love says, “Why” (Stein 42) without leading to the next sentence. This one word continually resurfaces throughout the entire story, even though it often seems to have no logical context.

Stein was highly aware that even in daily conversations, it was not the words that were largely responsible for effective communication, but the “movement” of those words. She states, “…you could hear it rise and fall and tell all there was inside them, not so much by the actual words they said or the thought they had but by the movement of their thoughts and words endlessly the same and endlessly different” (Stein, Essays). Like the movement in writing, movement is central to musical phrases. The notes themselves convey no meaning, emotion, or message, but the the movement of those notes does. J.S. Bach is famous for the progression and resolution of his chords, which William Carlos Williams compares to Stein’s writing: “Stein’s ‘They lived very gay then’ has much of the same quality of movement to be found in Bach—the composition of the words determining not the logic, not the ‘story,’ not the theme even, but the movement itself. As it happens, ‘They were both gay there’ is as good as some of Bach’s shorter figures (Williams 22).

Williams’s comparison of Bach’s musicals phrases and Stein’s literary phrases is appropriate, not only because Stein also used movement rather than “logic,” themes, or plots, but also because Stein bathed the description of her writing experiences in the
language of music, incorporating even the very tools needed for music composition: “She also liked then to set a sentence for herself as a sort of tuning fork and metronome and then write to that time and tune” (deKoven 165, from Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*). The tuning fork is an instrument that aids with pitch while the metronome is an instrument that aids with rhythm, both of which are elements of music, not writing. She also writes, “…certainly it is the idea of poetry as musical language she is pursuing here…” (deKoven 165). Stein was deliberate in her effort to fuse the elements of music in her writing. In describing the intense joy in the interchange of knower and known, Stein again uses the language of music. Steward writes, “In Gertrude Stein’s vocabulary the connection between signifier and signified is variously called a “hymn,” a “prayer,” a “song,” a “meditation,” a “masterpiece” of human experience (Steward 68). Stein borrowed from other forms and implemented different elements as widely and largely as she could through the confines of words.

One strategy Stein used to convey movement and to remove emphasis from the word itself is repetition. Stein readily admits that her writing is less accessible, but only when it is approached with a conventional mind. Perhaps, in response to some criticism, she states, “Now you have all seen hundreds of poems about roses and you know in your heart that the rose is not there…. I’m no fool I know that in daily life we don’t go around saying ‘is a… is a… is a…’ Yes, I’m no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years” (Thacher 123). Through repetition, Stein is able to recreate language and redefine words, loosening the grip of societal conventions on the words. She states, “Nobody knows what I am trying to do but I do and I know when I succeed” (Brinnin 56). In *The World is Round*, Willie repeats his
identity: “I would be Willie whatever arose, I would be Willie if Henry was my name/ I would be Willie always Willie all the same” (Stein 15). This song of Willie’s exemplifies Stein’s technique of subversion through repetition. By Willie’s constant insistence on his security, he reveals his true insecurity.

As mentioned earlier, one of Stein’s major goals was to purify language of its social contamination. “What becomes of meaning in these passages? On one level, it is obliterated” (deKoven 174). First, Stein successfully destroys the understanding derived by the conventional use of language. Repetition confuses the reader, who is not accustomed to such nonsensical writing. Eventually, the conventional meaning of the repeated word is lost. “Repetition this intense has the effect of cutting the verbal signifier loose, entirely, from lexical meaning—no longer merely submerging meaning beneath the linguistic surface, but bringing about a radical transformation of the reader’s experience of the signifier” (deKoven 174). What becomes the connecting medium of understanding for the reader is not the signifier, or the word, but sound—repetition. “Paradoxically, meaning is magnified as well as obliterated in this writing” (deKoven 175). In The World is Round, there is a description of Willie’s singing that exemplifies this paradox: “And he knew when he sang/ And he knew who/ Who was Willie/ He was Willie/ All through... Willie/ Will he” (26). The rhyming and the repetition convey Willie’s insistence on his self-assurance, not the words themselves.

According to Stein, pure language was non-lexical. She sought a “presymbolic order of language” (deKoven 175). She desired for people to “return to the pure state itself, in which words simply have no lexical meaning” (deKoven 175). An example of this type of language is a song by Rose: “If a cat is in a cage/ Does that make him rage/
If a dog is on a roof/ Does that make him aloof/ Or is there any proof/ That he is a dog and on a roof./ And so/ Oh/ How could Love know/ That wild animals were wild./ Wild animals yes wild” (Stein 40). Lexical meaning is not the cohesive factor in this song but sound, through rhyme. “...this writing uses the obliteration of meaning to enhance its primary effect, the ‘mysterious actions of the closed internal rhythms of language, the echoing reflection of sound’” (deKoven 175). The effect achieved by this obliteration of meaning produces meaning through the internal rhythms of language as opposed to the language itself. “Tellingly, children often play the game of repeating a word or a name until it becomes entirely a disembodied set of sounds. The function of this game is to reveal the wonder of the signifier, the wonder of language” (deKoven, 174). The children in The World is Round certainly speak a disembodied set of sounds, at times. Jane Walker states, “‘Repetition, not a linear sequence of discrete events linked in a chain of casuality that manifests progress, is the form and force of history in Stein’s text’” (Stewart 177). Repetition, in this quote, is correlated with roundness, as opposed to linearity.

The title, The World is Round, is significant. Roundness is “repeated in shifting meanings—now comforting, now threatening. It is an inclusive vision of circular patterning, the outer world reflected in the roundness of everything: in the shapes of the animals, in the eyes of the owl, in Rose’s mouth, in the lakes, and in objects” (Natov 104). Basically, roundness is all inclusiveness of both sides of the dualities within-- good and bad, boy and girl. While Rose questions, struggles with, and accepts the roundness of the world, Willie does not. “Willie’s stance clearly keeps him from facing himself, as he sings, ‘Once upon a time I met myself and ran’” (Natov 107). Instead of facing his fears
and the unfamiliar that threatens him, which Rose does through songs and tears, Willie
denies them by proclaiming that singing makes him more and more excited. “The round
earth bespeaks unity too, whereas flatness suggests infinite change, no return ever to an
original point, only endless novelty and diversity” (Brigmand 300). While a linear path
never returns to a previously journeyed point, Rose’s developmental path is round. She
does not shed herself of any moment of her childhood but collects them all into her being.
Each novelty is an addition to the collection, not a replacement—not “either or.”
Part II: Music Composition

New Language

Fully aware that children do not communicate on a lexical bases, Stein used many aural techniques for the children reading *The World is Round*, such as rhyme, repetition, and rhythm. Writing music to her words were not difficult because they already had an internal rhythm. This project of adding music to Stein’s writing is justified for several reasons. As mentioned, modernists, including Stein, saw an inadequacy in language. Music, a universal language without barriers and exclusiveness, can be communicated to different ages, cultures, and languages. Another reason is that music plays a pivotal role in *The World is Round*. It is fitting for music to be involved in a work in which the main character is so frequently in song. As she is singing, Rose says, “I am Rose and when I sing/ I am Rose like anything” (Stein 110-111). Thus, music enhances the meaning of the text and adds an emotional element. In addition, the music includes an extra interpretation as I have inevitably written music that expresses my personal understanding of the text. In total, I have composed eleven songs, which I will explicate individually in the following pages.
Voices

In *The World is Round*, Rose is on a personal journey of self-discovery. At first, she questions who she is and why she is, and anything that pertains to her identity in general, such as her name and her sex. She is young and has not encountered “other” in her life yet. This young Rose is given one voice. As she matures throughout the story, she encounters evil and unfamiliar scenes on the mountain. This developing Rose is given two voices. Finally, the mature Rose at the end of the story, who reaches the apex of the mountain, accepts “other” and internalized the unfamiliar, is given three voices. The reason why I did not replace a voice but added a voice at each stage of Rose’s life is that people do not delete parts of themselves as they grow older. Rather, each segment, each frame of a person’s life affects all the others. One part can complement, clash, or enhance another part, but whatever the relationship is among the parts, there is indeed a relationship. Thus, the mature Rose has three voices, each representing a different part of her life, all of which somehow define her and compose her as a person. Willie has one voice, which represents a lack of depth and personal growth. He does not question his identity, he does not search for answers about life, and therefore remains stagnant in his view of himself and the world around him. When he encounters the unfamiliar, he does not explore and struggle with accepting it, but simply denies it.
1. Introduction to Rose (Stein 9-10)

This passage was chosen because it is the first time Rose sings, and it captures the depth with which Rose questions her identity. Although she starts her song by asserting that she is a little girl and that her name is Rose, she immediately asks why she is a little girl, why her name is Rose, where she is a little girl and, and when her name is Rose. Although she answers herself with security in her identity, she ends the song with, “Which little girl named Rose?” (10), a question that reveals a confusion about herself.

I start this song with a small narration about Love, Rose’s dog, drinking his water. Love is inextricably linked with the identity of Rose-- he sings with her and he is present through her struggles-- and thus I thought it was important to include him in the music. The music conveys a difference between the narrative voice and Rose’s songs, though both have interesting chords. The musical introduction to Rose’s first song (40 s) is slightly ominous, as I have left out the third of the C chord and included a minor seventh, an arpeggio that leads to an A minor chord. For an introduction to Rose, I sought for a musical phrase that would express the mind of the young, innocent, and inquisitive Rose. This melody is to be juxtaposed with the next song, which is the introduction to Willie, Rose’s cousin.

Rose’s melodic phrase is mellifluous and feminine, its musical line long and connected. “Willie’s name establishes him as the male principle associated with will, a kind of consciousness that defines him as the guiding intellectual force of the Jungian animus. Rose, on the other hand, is all anima, instinctual feeling and song, which come
up from the unconscious” (Natov 106). This first song does not stay consistent in tempo, key, and mood. As Rose introduces herself and asserts her identity, the music belies her words. The omission of the third in the C chord causes a sense of uncertainty of whether the chord is major or minor. This musical uncertainty expresses the true uncertainty with which Rose asserts her identity, which is revealed in the following questions about herself.

There is a lack of aesthetic pleasantness in the music that accompanies Rose’s questions because the growing pains of maturity can often be unpleasant. There is a struggle within that grasps for, pines for certainty in the developing stages, but it simply is not there. Therefore, some of the chords in the music as Rose questions herself are composed of three notes with only half steps in between. This is a very dissonant chord, which expresses the dissonance within Rose.

As Rose sings, she begins to cry, which occurs frequently throughout the story. For Rose, singing is a means of reaching the deepest part of her, which is an emotional experience that leads her to cry. Singing and crying are essential to the person of Rose because these actions reveal the characteristic that defines her-- she explores herself, her feelings, and her surroundings. Thus, the climax of the song’s music develops and culminates during her crying.

2. Introduction to Willie (Stein 15-17)

Willie’s first song is in stark contrast with Rose’s first song. Because these songs introduce the characters, the music was crafted to express their essential characteristics. Unlike Rose’s flowing, inconsistent, and musically uncertain qualities, Willie’s music has
one well-defined tempo and key throughout his song. The only variation in music is found during the narrations and the songs of the owl.

Both Rose and Willie start their songs by stating their names. Unlike Rose, Willie never questions his identity, which he is aware of and even proudly acknowledges: “I am not like Rose/ I would be Willie whatever arose” (Stein 15). For this reason, Willie’s music is written in an unchanging tempo and in a secure key that does not modulate.

When Willie sings, the bass line has steady running eighth notes. Along with the rhythmical quality that reflects Willie is the fast pace of it. Unlike Rose, who contemplates deeply the things of life and the questions of identity, Willie runs without stopping. One line of The World is Round that captures the essence of Willie is “Once upon a time I met myself and ran... Run around the world just as I please/ I Willie” (Stein 29). Instead of looking inward and exploring his feelings, he runs, and not only does he run, he runs as he pleases, which signifies his headstrong boldness and insensitivity. Then, he ends with “I Willie,” a triumphant declaration of his unwavering identity. This personality is what I have tried to express through the music in his first song.

The music changes drastically in pace when the owl sings. The owl represents wisdom and his songs are slow because he asks Willie questions that ought to make him decelerate and think. Unlike Rose’s and Willie’s voices, the music given to the owl’s voice is hollow and sparse. Rose’s music is filled with intricate harmonies that capture the complexity of her thoughts and Willie’s music is filled in with typically structured chords, but the owl’s music simply has one note in the bass and the melody on top of it. There are no chords. The effect is an eerie and empty sound to reflect the message that the owl is trying to communicate to Willie-- that Willie lives a hollow existence by not
contemplating and struggling with life issues. The owl asks him questions that Rose asks herself: “Who are you who are you” (Stein 15), but in response, Willie again differentiates himself from his cousin Rose-- “singing did not make him cry it just made him more and more excited” (Stein 15). For Willie, singing is not a means of understanding but a means of denial.

While the last line of Rose’s song states, “And all this time the world just continued to be round” (10), the last line of Willie’s song is the murmur during his sleep: “Round drowned” (Stein 17). There is again a stark contrast that reflects deep differences between Rose and Willie. Rose acknowledges that the world is round-- all comprehensive, filled with both good and evil, self and other-- whether this truth is palatable to her or not. In contrast, Willie characteristically goes into denial.

3. Denial of Evil (Stein, 41)

This excerpt was chosen because it exemplifies the initial struggle that Rose has when encountering the disagreeable aspects of life, such as death and wild animals. This song includes the second voice for Rose that represents a darker part of her as she begins to come in contact with the roundness of the world. Her initial reaction to death is denial: “She began to try/ She began to deny” (Stein 41). She wants to believe that animals could lie without dying, and at this moment, she begins to sing.

The first part of this song is written in a hymn-like manner. Stein herself referred to the exchange of knower and known through art as a hymn (Steward 68). The decision about the style of this song was made in light of the supplicatory, prayer-like question Rose repeats as she desperately seeks to know.
The music in the second part of this song represents a struggle between the young and innocent Rose and the maturing Rose who encounters the unpleasantness of life. There is a conflict within Rose because part of her wants to be in denial and part of her wants to understand. Thus, there are several musical expressions of the internally divided Rose. First, one voice hums while the other sings the words. Second, the voices have two different rhythms. Rose does not sing in a unified voice. Finally, dissonance is used again to represent the dissonance within Rose. As one voice hums upward, it reaches the other voice only one half step below, causing dissonance on the word “knew.” A major theme of *The World is Round* is knowledge-- what is known and unknown-- and the quest for understanding of oneself and of the world. The dissonance in the music reveals the struggle of knowing as well as the struggle to even want to know.

Finally, the third part of this song has the two voices of Rose unified again. She asks why animals are wild six times, indicating the relentlessness with which she pursues knowledge. This ultimate pursuit of understanding is characteristic of Rose. I could have ended this song at the end of Rose’s song, but I ended it at the first line of the narration. She is crying, an act characteristic of Rose.

Personally, I appreciate this struggle Rose even attempts to endure and thus I tried imbue this song with more emotional expressiveness. As a Korean growing up in the ethnically homogeneous borough of Staten Island, I was part of other. All the teachers, students, neighbors, and grocery store cashiers were invariably Italian. I experienced estrangement more often than not. Thus, I believe Willie represents the majority of society. Rose is unique in her willingness to be alone in her quest to know, understand, and accept other.
This song represents the deep pain that can result from the “neither nor” and “either or” mentality. A modern concept is hybridity or duality, and Rose exemplifies these ideals. While society categorizes people into defined, inflexible groups—either black or white, either straight or gay, either male or female, either good or bad, either mine or not mine” (Natov 105)—modernists believed in the possibility of being both. They sought to break down the dividing wall that caused discrimination and judgmental attitudes. The “neither nor” and “either or” mentality has historically been the cause of much alienation, hatred, and suffering.

The divisive social barriers are represented in this passage through the lion that Rose wants to give to Willie. Sadly, she expresses that a lion cannot be blue: “there is no blue no lion in blue no blue in lion, neither nor, wailed Rose neither nor...” (Stein 51). There are certain limitations, Rose realizes, inherent in society, in life, in nature. She discovers that, sometimes, those limitations are unbreakable despite all efforts. As a result, she wails and laments the sadness caused by a “neither nor” reality.

In the previous song, some parts were sung by one voice and other parts, by two voices. The entirety of this song, however, is sung by two voices, which reveals that the maturing Rose is now fully immersed in a world that has darkness, to which she must somehow react. Our protagonist has a heroic response. She is not overcome by evil but retains a loving, caring, kind character. All she wants throughout this passage is to give Willie the gift of a lion.

The greatest example in this passage of Rose’s openness and willingness to accept others is her ability to selflessly traverse the lands of different minds and realities. For
example, she enters into the mind of Willie: “she began to whisper to herself as if she herself was Willie” (Stein 51). This act is evidence that Rose truly is maturing. Young children are selfish and do not have the capacity to feel sympathy. Thus, Rose’s ability to step outside herself into another’s shoes reveals mental and emotional development.

I end this song on an unexpected minor chord to emphasize the last two words, “either or.” Since these words represent negative aspects of the world, I expressed them through melancholy music. Also, I did not want to end the song on a hopeful note because in reality, social barriers are not easily uprooted, and this is a sad truth with which Rose is now familiar.

That Rose internalizes this truth is expressed musically when the developing voice of Rose separates, not only in rhythm but in words. While the voice of the young Rose continues with triplets and with the written words, the voice of the maturing Rose separates into eighth notes and repeats, “either or neither nor.” This represents both an internal harmony and dichotomy. That the maturing Rose sings this phrase reveals that she internalizes and understands the barriers of society. Yet, that she momentarily separates from the young Rose suggests an internal discord before fully adjusting and accepting.

5. Original Rose Remains (Stein 57-58)

When children become adults, the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of childhood do not vanish. Even as adults, we often have naive thoughts and childish fears. The first sentence of this passage states, “Rose was always thinking,” (Stein 57) which implies at least a certain level of cerebral capacity and maturity. However, just sentences
later, Rose reveals obvious childlike qualities, such as numbering and listing items in order to achieve a sense of control of her surroundings. This remaining childlikeness is expressed in music by having only the voice of the young Rose sing this song. Also, the music of the parts where Rose counts the birds is written in the fashion of a typical, simple children’s song.

Even in the childhood state portrayed in this passage, darkness still exists. Although Rose seems to speak only of cheerful subjects, such as flying birds and feathers, she describes a scene of fifty birds “picking down on the head of the big bird and slowly the big bird came falling down” (Stein 58). Up to this point in the song, the music conveys an initial denial of this kind of darkness. The word “down” of the last quotation is emphasized in the music, especially in the length of the note that is held. In contrast, the previous references to falling or other dark thoughts are denied in the music by releasing the note faster and switching to another note.

This song is written in the form abcbca to express the lack of rigidity in the stages of development. Each section, a, b, and c, represents some stage of Rose’s growth, yet she continually floats freely among them instead of progressing in some chronological order or linear progression. Just as the world is round, people are round in their thinking and in their feeling. Sometimes, we retreat into our past, other times, and our past slides into the present, and still other times, we exist in different times at once. The structure of this song aims to express these ideas.

6. Encounter With Devil (Stein 84)
This passage was chosen because it provides an account of Rose’s most frightening encounter with evil, manifested in the form of the devil, a symbol of the greatest evil. As a result, this song has the most unsettling music of all, especially because Rose’s second voice continuously repeats “devil.” This decision was made because Rose not only makes the effort to understand the unfamiliar, but after she denies and struggles and finally understands, she accepts and even internalizes.

The internalization does not mean evil is a part of who Rose is, but that she understands it closely and does not make it a foreign concept, distant through denial. This internalization yet separateness is expressed through the second voice of Rose. Although the voice of the young Rose and the maturing Rose sing together and in harmony—representing Rose’s internalization of evil— they are not synchronized in rhythm—representing the remaining separation of Rose and evil.

The factors that contribute to the eeriness of the music are key and repetition. The key is C minor, which has a solemn and dark sound. More importantly, there is a repetition throughout the entire song of “devil.” The discomfort that this repetition causes in the listener is intentional. I once presented this song to a class of about twenty students, and the resulting uneasiness was conveyed in several ways. The students avoided one another’s eyes by looking down at the table. Some students’ faces turned red and some of their knees began to shake nervously. This reaction reveals that the song was successful in placing the listener in the same position as Rose.

Even at this point in Rose’s development, she still has moments of denial at each new encounter with something unfamiliar. For example, she says, “There was no devil there of course there was no devil there there is no devil anywhere...” (Stein 84). More
than once, she tries to convince herself that the devil does not exist. However, as usual, Rose eventually stops denying and learns to accept: “But just there where there might be a chair and written in large writing and clear in the black there, it was written there” (Stein 84). Rose does not half-heartedly accept, but she uses words, such as “large” and “clear” to convey the extent to which she accepts.

Instead of writing the music such that the “devil” repetitions begin concomitantly with the melody, I wrote the “devil” part to start before the lyrics of the song begin. Also, after the song ends, the “devil” repetitions continue. I made this decision because evil existed before Rose’s awareness of it. Whether or not Rose encountered evil yet, it always existed. Thus, I encased the song with evil. Surrounding all people and places is evil. As Rose notices throughout the story, roundness is everywhere--the wheels of bikes, the shape of the world, lakes, eyes, mouths, etc. Thus, “devil” is sung both before the young Rose’s voice begins and after it ends to represent its constant presence.

7. Beginning of Higher Innocence (Stein 86)

This passage is pivotal in the life of Rose because her discovery that “in a Rose there was an o and an o is round” (Stein 86) symbolizes the beginning of Rose’s deeper understanding of her identity. This discovery also symbolizes the beginning of her true internalization of all things. Since an “o” is round and roundness represents all things, the moment Rose realizes her very name contains an “o” is the moment she can be intentional in her acceptance of all things to the extent that they become a part of who she is. It is fitting that there is no “o” in the name Willie because he does not internalize the world, which includes difference and “other.”
Evidence that this passage reveals a large step in Rose’s self discovery is the description of the scene-- there is no cock, no hen, no glass pen. There is only Rose. The music during the word “only” is very dramatic and drawn out to emphasize that Rose is alone at this point, which allows the essence of her being to crystallize before herself. She repeats her name four times, as if familiarizing herself with her own name that seems new to her. To express the surprise in the phrase “all of sudden,” the music builds a heightened excitement and reach a climax on the word ”round.”

I could have made this step of self discovery a celebratory one by making the music brighter. However, I do not believe Stein intended the mood to be such because she ends the passage with, “oh dear not a sound,” as if this experience were shocking, difficult, and overwhelming. I resonate with the lyrics of song, although not with the experience of Rose. There have been “all of a sudden” moments in my life when I realize there is an “o” in my identity, not in the sense that I am an open and accepting person, but in the sense that within me are evil and strange things that I never imagined. It is a sad and eye-opening realization when this happens. I believe the music of this song expresses this emotion.

8. Rose is a Rose is a Rose (Stein 91)

This song is the first with three voices for Rose. The three voices singing together represent completion and full maturity, which includes all the stages of her life. After the last song, in which Rose discovers her identity, it is fitting for the next song to be sung by a complete Rose, nearly finishing her journey to the top of the mountain of understanding and self discovery. This passage is important because of the famous line “Rose is a Rose
is a Rose” (Stein 91). This statement is the quintessential expression of security. Rose does not explain who she is or why she is. She just is. This statement contrasts rather sharply with the first song she sings, in which she questions every facet of her identity.

At first, I wanted to make the music climax at “Rose is a Rose is a Rose” (Setin 91), but then I realized that, often, people who are secure do not seek to be the center of attention. Consequently, I composed a more reticent, unassuming, and contemplative piece-- one that exudes confidence without proclaiming it. In spite of this new found confidence, a quiet song is fitting also because the passage before reveals that “Rose did not sing” (Stein 91) because hearing your own voice is frightening when you are all alone. This silent act of writing on the tree can be seen as a different form of self-expression than singing because the written word is permanent and unbound by time and space. Although singing is limited to the moment and limited to its audibleness, it is also more spontaneous and therefore a more genuine and uninhibited expression.

The repeated musical phrase-- the dotted quarter and eighth note-- represents the constant climbing that Rose persisted through in order to achieve this self-understanding and security: “she was climbing all the while climbing... a little higher everywhere” (Stein 91). Often, the journey of self-discovery is not a sprint with large rewarding lessons, but it is a painful process with small lessons that daily accumulate. The constant musical phrase in the accompaniment conveys this tedious process.

In this song, all three parts are consistently singing in harmony and in synchrony throughout the entirety of the song. At this point, there is no internal discord or dichotomy.
9. There (110-112)

The chapter that contains this song’s passage is entitled, “There.” Until this point, Rose has been aiming to be “there” and in the previous chapters, she states that she is “nearly there” (103). In *The World is Round*, “there,” which is the peak of the mountain, represents the completion of her journey, through which she has achieved understanding and an acceptance or internalization of the world, including people, such as Willie, social mindsets, such as “either or,” and evil, such as the devil. In the middle of the songs, Rose sings, “Once upon a time there was a way to stay to stay away, I did not stay away” (Stein 110-111). Rose, like Willie, had the opportunity to deny by staying away from the unfamiliar and frightening aspects of life, but she did not. And because she did not, she is “there.”

More than the previous song, this song represents the fully developed, mature Rose. While Rose asserted her identity silently by writing her name on a tree in the the previous song, this time Rose asserts her identity through song, which she declares to be the best expression of herself: “I am Rose and when I sing/ I am Rose like anything” (Stein 110-111). As a result of this statement, I decided to omit all the narrations in this passage and write music for only the parts when Rose is singing.

At this final point of Rose’s journey, she is truly comfortable and assured of who she is. Repeatedly, she sings “I am Rose” (Stein 111) and adds descriptions of herself. The music is not contemplative but has a sing-song quality. It is melodic with a clear tune that can be followed. Rose is no longer consumed by her thoughts but now is just being. The music expresses this freedom and comfort of self-security.
10. Love (116)

This song is a duet. Although Rose and Willie are not physically together, they are united through song. Some of this passage repeats lines from the previous one and so does the music, but while Rose sang the song by herself previously, this time she sings with Willie. Rose cries in this song and in the last one because Willie is not with her. She has climbed great heights and has acquired deep understanding, but she cannot be happy without sharing her life with a lover.

Although Rose and Willie sing the same lyrics, Willie sings his own melody apart from Rose. These separate parts are a musical expression of the words they are singing: “And I am here and you are there, and I am here and here is there and you are there and there is here” (Stein 116). Rose starts by saying that Rose and Willie are in two different places-- here and there-- but then she says that “here is there.” To convey this unity in music, the two subsequently sing together in rhythmical unity.

11. The End (Stein 117)

Willie and Rose are actually not cousins and they get married in the end. Expectedly, they sing together in a duet. While Willie sings the words on the last page of The World is Round, Rose sings a different song altogether. The song she sings is her first song, which conveys that Rose never stops questioning, learning, and developing. Also, singing the first song at the end demonstrates that even the fully developed Rose retains all parts of herself from the beginning.

Since the last line of the entire book is “the world just went on being round,” (Stein 117), I knew Rose had to sing this ending. As mentioned, Willie ends his first song
with a strong denial, “round drowned,” (Stein 17), while Rose does not deny and ends her first song acceptance: “the world just continued to be round” (Stein 10). Yet, since Rose has married Willie and internalized him, he had to be present at the end in some manner. Thus, although all three voices of Rose sing the ending without Willie, they sing to the musical theme of Willie’s song.
Works Cited


