
Nokaa-Zagaakwa'on Gaawiin Zagaakwasiiag: Tender Buttons Unfastened

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Gertrude Stein's signature line, "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," first appeared in her poem "Sacred Emily" in 1913 and was used by her throughout her life, becoming a red signature of repetition and linguistic machination. Her writing is often a circuitous exploration of the play between sound and meaning in language that disrupts the standard use of words, allowing alternate connections to be made. Stein once explained:

When I said.

A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.

And then later made that into a ring I made poetry and what did I do I caressed
completely caressed and addressed a noun (Stein 1985, 231).

The idea of nouns caressed and addressed is sensual and evocative. Stein does not offer romantic realism; she sketches a monologue of fragments. She uses sound and meaning the way a kaleidoscope uses refraction and reflection to create new patterns with familiar objects. Her method of taking language apart in order to understand it better is useful in the work of language revitalization. She demonstrates how to fall in love with language as it falls apart and is reconstructed each time we speak. Stein spun phrases into being in order to question the very nature of writing, representation, and interpretation, which speakers of all languages do. These operations are the fundamental defense of linguistic diversity. Variety in linguistic engineering makes the potential of the entire system greater. And while language is focused first on the work of assisting survival, it is through pleasure, play and manipulation that languages come to life. The more different ways different languages can reflect the human experience, the more we are able to appreciate our shared and complex existence.

This essay is a digression Gertrude Stein might have enjoyed if an Anishinaabe poet had joined her Saturday salons in Paris with Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, Mildred Aldrich and others who practiced modern ways of fastening and unfastening words and images. The act of translating Stein's English into Anishinaabemowin serves as a method of linguistic and artistic analysis. The Anishinaabemowin lines offered here are experimental word play in response to the spirit of her work, not definitive equivalents. Stein evokes the senses in writing to center

identity on angles and dimensions not often included in verse. She offers social commentary in the form of images that can benefit from a range of diverse readings. Anishinaabe-based explorations of the way she combines sensation, location, and history are not lessons in grammar or explication; they are ventures into a territory co-created by Stein’s imagination and the overarching aesthetics of Anishinaabemowin. Consider the following an example of *nindinendaamin izhitwaawinan epiichi gaawiin zagaakwa’igaadesinoog gaye geyabi zagaakwa’igaazoyaang*, unbuttoning and rebuttoning ideas across traditions.

Oginiwi – Being a Rose

When Stein’s signature rose-phrase moves from English into Anishinaabemowin the definition of a rose and the purpose of repetition can be called into question by speakers willing to bend and stretch the common rules of Anishinaabemowin.

A rose / *Oginigaade* (The idea of roseness)

is a rose / *oginiwi* (is to be a rose)

is a rose / *ogininaan* (to rose something)

is a rose. / *oginimaa*. (to rose someone)

In English, Stein’s repetition of “rose” without change is a matter of meter and a lack of adjectives. Her unnatural redundancy calls for an unnatural focus on the noun. From an Anishinaabe perspective, repetition often shifts identity creating a spiral of contrasting relationships with an object. One option for an Anishinaabemowin translation, which achieves a similar level of unnatural, or forced, focus on the rose, might allow the rose to move through all of the various states of animacy foundational to Anishinaabemowin but not available in English. As the rose is re-imagined through different verb forms, the symbolic nature of the rose becomes an action and a potential point of re-interpretation. Experimental wordplay with repetition allows the rose to take different endings, indicating different levels of animacy. Animacy, it should be noted, is a difficult term, not explained. More than something that is simply living or non-living, or in motion versus still, the term is used to differentiate noun classifications and the four major types of verbs in Anishinaabemowin. Something “inanimate” is an event not defined by or viewed as being in an active relationship with other beings or objects. As the “animacy” of a person, place, thing, idea, or observable state shifts, it enters into more complex relationships

with other animate and inanimate nouns. Returning to the repetition of the rose, in Anishinaabemowin a rose can be described as inanimate, an *oginigaade*, the essence of rose identity. Or the rose could be described as an animate noun, opening up the possible ways the rose can be in the world. You or I could *oginiwi*, become a rose, which is similar to, but not the same as, *oginikaazo*, pretending to become a rose. This play with the “rose” is strange in both languages and does not follow the rules of vernacular conversation. Just as a student of English would be told to replace repetition with adjectives, a student of Anishinaabemowin would be told, “those words have not been used before.” Yet in both cases the speaker or writer uses recognizable language and attention is unquestionably focused on the nature of a rose. Patterns of repetition and word construction can lead to an expansion of meaning and perspective. Stein’s English reframes linguistic experimentation and any translation and alternate reading of her work must do the same, which is why contemplation of a creative response to her writing is a worthwhile exercise. All translations call both sides of the equation into question.

Ezhi-Gikendamaazoyaang - Sensation

One of Stein’s most iconic poetic texts, *Tender Buttons*, was published in 1914. While it may seem rooted in a specific Parisian expatriate moment, there are instances where its content is surprisingly aligned with a North American indigenous perspective, as when she writes, “a canoe is orderly” (29) or “a white hunter is nearly crazy” (16). An Anishinaabe poet might also appreciate the statement, “a feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive” because it speaks of something animate “trimmed” or decorated and specially recognized (14). The text is primarily viewed as aesthetic experimentation and has been read many ways including as extra-textual exploration, linguistic cubism, feminist sound poetry, and experiments in somatic writing (Poetzsch, Dubnick, Marchiselli, Bruner). It is certainly some of that for some readers, but it is not much of that for a reader using an Anishinaabe frame of reference for whom the world cubed is a not-new concept; the gender signals “he, him, she and her” are not articulated the same way; a “modernist” break from the past was navigated through assimilative resistance, and automatic writing echoes the very familiar practice of listening

beyond the plane of human understanding. For Anishinaabe readers *Tender Buttons* is a rewarding challenge in translation and an affirmation of a shifting, sensory, spatial aesthetic.

Tender Buttons is organized around sections featuring objects, food and rooms, but the assembly of words reveals the “centre” to be anything but the nouns. Speaking about her own work in the context of what artists were doing at the time, Stein said:

“The painters were looking... and they too had to be certain that looking was not confusing itself with remembering... I began to make portraits of things and enclosures that is rooms and places because I needed to completely face the difficulty of how to include what is seen with hearing and listening” (Stein, *Portraits*).

As cubism on the canvas is a refraction of multiple visual viewpoints, *Tender Buttons* is an attempt to create multiple sensory perspectives in poetry. She uses language in layers, which is, of course, appealing to speakers of agglutinative languages which by definition are constructed of multisyllabic layers of meaning with words that begin in the center and radiate description in multiple directions through meaning and inflection. For example, one translation of “cubism” might be “*dawimazinbiige*” to clear space, or make space while using lines to create an image. To say Pablo Picasso, George Braques and Gertrude Stein all did this well becomes a single variation of the verb: *Ogii-nitaadawimazinbiigewag*.

Stein creates a system of perceiving nouns from many visual directions. Her writing is at times transformational, *aanjisemagad*. Objects can move between states of inanimacy and animacy. In one case, “a carafe, this is a blind glass... an arrangement in a system to pointing” suggests an unseeing water vessel, which in English is an awkward and unusual phrase with one word originating in French (3). Anishinaabemowin has a tendency to not absorb words from other languages and has a mutable approach to nominalization. Thus, the fancy “blind carafe,” could be described as: a *zhaabwaate omooday*, an inanimate bottle seen through; a *gagiibiingwe-minikwaajigan*, an object used for drinking that is unable to see; or part of an *izhinoobii’igan*, a system of pointing. In Stein’s writing things come apart and are reassembled in new forms from various alternate angles. This same transformation is easy to echo in Anishinaabemowin due to the way objects can be animate or inanimate depending on how speakers wish to represent them. Stein speaks of: “four choices and there are four choices in a difference, the time when there are four choices there is a kind and there is a kind” (23). Stein and other modernists were often

inspired by global indigenous art and ideas, often taking “primitive” art as inspiration for cubist abstraction. Techniques considered “modern” from a 20th century post-industrial perspective can be reconsidered from an indigenous angle as a continuation and affirmation of traditional semiotics. Although new and unusual to Stein’s contemporary audience, this cubed approach is not *avant-garde*, forward advancing, *niigaani-minisinoog*, for Anishinaabe readers; it is precisely what one should do, move between two word classes and four verb types to represent reality as precisely as possible within the realm of Anishinaabe science and epistemology. An Anishinaabe reading of *Tender Buttons* involves analysis of topics and translation. Stein focuses primarily on the waves and elements of the universe as she experiments with the syntax and structure of her sentences. She explores color, light, sound, air, water and celestial bodies as a way of being in the universe.

In Anishinaabemowin, speakers often create their own descriptive terms for color based on personal experience and perspective. This is precisely what Stein does. For example, a common word for “gray” in Anishinaabemowin is *akakanzhewaande*, meaning “coal-colored” matching exactly with Stein’s line: “Color is in coal. Coal is outlasting roasting and a spoonful, a whole spoon that is full is not spilling.” (23). In translation this could become: *Akakanzhewaande akakanzhe*, literally, “coal is coal-colored,” which capitalizes on the coincidence that the word for the color of coals is already commonly used as a color in Anishinaabemowin. The morphemes “*akak*” and “*aanzhe*” in the word “coal-colored” call to mind edges on fire leading to the further play on words *akakanzhewaanzhe akakanzhe*, which is a Stein-like instance of repetition. Meanwhile, the second line about coal might become, “*Wenda-abwaadaan, akakanzhe-emikwaanens, mooshkine emikwaanens gaawiin ziigwebinigaadesiinoon.*” (Completely roasted, the coal spoon is a full spoon that is not spilling.) As with many parts of Stein’s texts, staying true to the assonance and consonance of the original sometimes leads to the meanings taking a slight turn. The idea of outlasting slips to completeness in order to allow several consonants to repeat.

As *Tender Buttons* continues, Stein’s overall use of color decreases and several specific colors dominate the visual conversation. The summary below shows which colors appear most often.

| Color | Objects | Food | Rooms | Total |
|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| Red | 33 | 25 | 15 | 73 |
| White | 20 | 14 | 9 | 43 |
| Green | 10 | 8 | 2 | 20 |
| Yellow | 7 | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| Black | 8 | 1 | 2 | 11 |
| Blue | 8 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| Brown | 5 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Orange | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 91 | 57 | 32 | 180 |

With no obvious explanations for the focus on *miskwaa* (red) and *waabishkaa* (white) readers are left with supposition. One interpretation might view the focus on *miskwaa* as a gesture toward *miskwaa* (red), the color of a rose. An Anishinaabe cultural analysis might interpret the focus on *miskwaa* (red) as a reference to *miskwaabik* (copper), a metal prominent in the culture, common in the Great Lakes, and found in both *miskwi* (blood) and *okan* (bone). The emphasis on *waabishkaa* pulls into the conversation concepts of *waabi* (sight), *waaban* (the light of dawn) and *waabanong* (the east). In some cultures, white is purity and privilege, in others it is viewed more scientifically as waves of color combined and reflected, and specifically in Anishinaabe words that contain “*waabi*” are tied to light and heat energy as well as the ability to see. The act of translation shifts possible interpretations.

Stein writes of color as something to be traded and exchanged between object and observer. More than purity she implies the need to perceive the mixing. She declares, “an ordinary color, a color is that strange mixture which makes, which does not make a ripe juice” (*bagakisin enaandeg, mayagiginigawinigaadeg gaawiin aditewabookesii*) (27 – 28). A translation of the phrase requires use of the prefix *mayagi*, which is close in meaning to “strange” but can also mean “unusual.” In English one can more easily label and separate nouns, while in Anishinaabemowin one can be clear about *ginigawinan* and *ginigawin*, the nature of what is being mixed and by whom. Whether each language offers clarity or obfuscation relates to the information organizing priorities of each culture. Stein’s tender buttons are unusual in English because buttons are not typically described as tender. Tender buttons are unusual in

Anishinaabemowin because buttons, *zagaakwa'onag*, are animate but nearly the same as *zagaakwa'iganan*, nails, which are not, and furthermore the act of buttoning *zagaakwa'* is just one sound separate from *zagaa'oozo*, to be entangled. This incorporation of images and meaning is a logical response to reading Stein, who works to broaden the range of description in her work. This practice also makes great sense to speakers of Anishinaabemowin, which rarely imposes strict rules for description and places value on including all possible angles in a word or interpretation. For example, on the one hand, *ozhaawashkwaande* is all the blue-green between the sea and the sky while *ozaawaande* is the full spectrum of yellow-brown from yolk to earth. On the other hand, any highly specific item can be transformed into a color, as noted with coal becoming the standard for “gray.” Stein’s desire to expand options for description occurs naturally in Anishinaabemowin. She affirms the belief that every whole can be described as made of many parts when she asks: “Why is there a single piece of any color, why is there that sensible silence, why is there resistance in a mixture...” (*Aaniin dash enaandeg, aaniin dash mikigaade bizaanayaan, aaniin dash nanaakonaan ginigawinigaadeg...*) (47).

After mixtures of color in *Tender Buttons*, Stein turns to sound. As the focus moves from objects to rooms, sound begins to take up space. For readers who are also singers this representation of sound is reminiscent of the world’s great improvisation traditions. For Anishinaabe readers specifically, this move from patterns of meaning to patterns of sound is familiar as part of the drum and rattle tradition. Some of the oldest songs and healing lyrics are heavily dependent on repetition marked by subtle variation. As Stein uses the familiar global tradition of sensory disruption to create new rhythms, her line, “cadences, real cadences, real cadences and a quiet color” (*madwe mii wenda-madwe mii sa wenda-madwe gaye bizaanenaandeg*) harmonizes with her sentiment, “should there be a call there would be a voice” (*giishpin ganoozhaad, ganoondiwaad*) (48). It is a simple equation. Sounds are measured and cut like objects or lines of text. Stein echoes the patterns of oral traditions based on observation. Her technique is familiar to many cultures in which repetition is used to record reality, aid memory, and alter states of being. As with healing chants, her verse moves from literal data to a musical mantra and can easily flow between languages: “A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since...” (*gaawiin mii gaawiin mii igo gaawiin apii sa gaawiin apii*) (38). Discourse markers *mii, sa* and *igo* parse the oral narrative tradition in the way commas and other punctuation are used in English to provide in Anishinaabemowin what is often provided by

punctuation and word stress in English. These little words are often literally translated as “so,” “then” or “really,” but the lesson learned through the experience of translation is one of the ways in which sound adds to meaning. English is a language that bends now toward literature while Anishinaabemowin still retains much of its oral past. Stein was breaking English “rules” but acting in ways that conform to Anishinaabe expectations.

Omaa Aayaayaang - Location

Related to the subjects of color and sound found in *Tender Buttons* is a discussion of *wiikwiiwin*, a form of energy that crosses distance, such as a wavelength or current. When Stein asks, “What is the current that makes machinery, that makes it crackle... what is this current, what is the wind, what is it” (8), she draws important correlations to Anishinaabe epistemology. Stein connects currents to machinery drawing a connection between science and society but does not explore those connections any further than to simply gesture toward crackle, control and the need to understand our physical environment. Wind in Anishinaabemowin is *noodin* and can be found as part of many words including: *waasnoode* (the northern lights), *ganoodan* and *ganoozh* (to speak to something or someone) and *noodenim* (to flirt with someone). Embedded in an Anishinaabemowin translation, Stein’s questions of connections and control are more visible.

Not the same kind of current, water is also a thread through the text. She writes: “Water astonishing and difficult altogether makes a meadow” (*Nibi maamakaanendaagwad gaye zaganag ezhi-omashkosiwibiigeyang*) (12). Water is powerful and can shape the land. Translating this phrase into Anishinaabemowin it is possible to emphasize the way a meadow is written onto the landscape. The nature of water, *nibi*, when separated is both *ni* (there) and *bi* (here), which a poet might read as location and perception. Certainly an Anishinaabe reading would highlight her phrase “water, water is a mountain and it is selected and it is so practical that there is no use in money” (*nibi, nibi aawan wajiw miinawaa nawaj aapiich zhooniyaa*) (28). In Stein’s text water is climate, geography, and a base for artistic innovation. Water and weather become music. “A climate, a single climate, all the time there is a single climate, any time there is a doubt, any time there is music” (*izhiwebad agwajing da madwechige*) (49). Water can be a symbol for systems of transfer, “cloudiness what is cloudiness, is it a lining, is it a roll, is it melting... a transfer, a large transfer” (24), all of which could be reduced to two words

aanjisemigad aanakwadoon, the way clouds change, if the translation aims for a core equivalency and a relative amount of initial and internal alliteration. At times, Stein's repetition does lead to a distillation of meaning, which works well with an Anishinaabe reading. For life on earth, water is the center of being as Stein agrees when she writes "any little thing is water" (46), which can be echoed as the common Anishinaabe phrase, *nibi aawiyang* (we are water). Water is life. Stein writes as if she is familiar with this phenomenology based on relationships between both human and nonhuman elements and actors. Although she was not overtly working from this perspective, an Anishinaabe reading highlights the ways in which she shifts human and non-human relationships on earth to align within a more complex network than one where humans are necessarily the center.

Her ability to situate her subjects in a network of knowledge beyond the human is another reason to read Stein. *Tender Buttons* includes several references to the way scientific, seasonal, astrological, and meteorological ways of knowing influence the human world. Stein asks and then answers: "Star-light, what is star-light, star-light is a little light that is not always mentioned with the sun, it is mentioned with the moon and the sun, it is mixed up with the rest of the time" (*Anangaazhe, aanii abiskaakonesed, ezhi-zaagiiiasiged gaawiin apane dibaajimaasiiwangid miinawaa giizis gaye dibiki-giizis, mii ginigawinangwaa daso-diba'iganeg*) (48). To represent the possibility only alluded to in English, an Anishinaabemowin translator must account for the fact that *anangoog* (stars), *giizis* (the sun), and *dibiki-giizis* (the night-sun, or moon) are all animate, which changes the way a reader might view the possibility that they influence perceptions of time. Many Anishinaabe readers will recognize the ways the universe is pulled into human lives. For instance, they might read into Stein's discussion of virgins the relationship between elders and youth who are coming of age. Stein writes: "A virgin a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and outlines and real seasons" (14). One direct translation could be: *Oshkiniigikwe, gigi-oshkiniigikwe, dibaakonaanaan mii ge-waagishkaaged, izhibii'amawaanaan epiichii aandakiiwang* (a new woman, a whole new woman, she is judged by them as she curves and is written by them as the seasons change). Stein describes a young woman as changing, like the seasons, in a way that could be part of an Anishinaabe vision quest, berry fast, or simply a portent of what she calls "a peaceful life to arise her, noon and moon and moon", literally translated as "*bizaanibimaadizi, ombishkaa, naawakweg gaye dibiki-giizis,*

dibiki-giizis” (15). In Stein’s writing and an Anishinaabe interpretation, a young woman becomes a part of moontime and an eternal system of cycles that define experience as more than civility.

Connections between the human and non-human elements continue in *Tender Buttons* as Stein writes of immovable clouds and thunder bridges:

This cloud does change with the movements of the moon and the narrow the quite narrow suggestion of the building (*O’o aanakwad anjiseemigad apii giizis gaye dibiki-giizis mamaajiseewaad miinawaa idamang agaasadeyaagamig*)... A bridge a very small bridge in a location and thunder, any thunder, this is the capture of reversible sizing and more indeed more can be cautious (*aazhogaans endaazhi-animikiikaang gakina aanjiseemagad*) (51).

Affixing the gathering on narrow crossings in space and time not measured by clock or calendar is reminiscent of annual gatherings dictated by the relationship of earth to sky and is not as random to Anishinaabe readers as it might have appeared to early industrial capitalists.

Gaa-Ezhiwebag – History

In many ways *Tender Buttons* can be read as a means of undoing of assimilation, which, according to Stein, and many Anishinaabe readers, might be a sensible decision.

The sensible decision was that notwithstanding many declarations and more music, not even notwithstanding the choice and a torch and a collection, notwithstanding the celebrating hat and a vacation and even more noise than cutting, notwithstanding Europe and Asia and being overbearing, not even notwithstanding an elephant and a strict occasion... not even with drowning and with the ocean being encircling, not even with more likeness and any cloud, not even with terrific sacrifice of pedestrianism and a special resolution, not even more likely to be pleasing. (52).

Is she writing against society or exploring the beauty of communal anarchy as led by a troupe of tricksters? To translate these sentiments possibly interpreted as an interrogation of cultural dominance, names for nations are needed along with a word for “notwithstanding.” It is a problem that the words for Europe, “*Waabishkiiwed Odakiim*” (white ones’ homeland) or “*Agaaming Gichigami*” (the other side of the sea), are both simply indicators of distant shores.

Just as the terms “eastern” and “western” are not the global cultural and philosophical binary they are sometimes used to imply, the Anishinaabe use of *gaming* (the sea) and bodies of water larger and smaller to locate other cultures does not do justice to actual national variation. This lack of cultural specificity reveals a gap in contemporary Anishinaabemowin that will need to be filled by new descriptions for nations based on their actual history and self-declared identity if a full translation of Stein’s work is ever attempted. The term “notwithstanding” is a bit easier; both *zhaagooch* and *booch igo* imply an air of diffidence in spite of any reasoning. In her meandering metaphor of assimilation, Stein celebrates the ability of perception to vary infinitely. She leans toward the encircling oceans notwithstanding. Many of Stein’s culturally specific passages highlight this challenge of finding ways to accurately name nouns not a part of Anishinaabe culture and identify meaningful terms for a number of English prepositions.

But challenges in translation should not be considered reasons to avoid the task. As an expatriate poet living in Paris, Stein understood the meaning of dislocation and relocation. Born in 1874 to Jewish American parents, emigration and migration held a particular meaning for Stein, but as she disassembles the term it can be read in many ways. Her line in the passage based on a room, preceded by reflection on cardinal directions and followed by rhetorical discourse focused on seduction asks: “giving it away, not giving it away, is there any difference?” (47). This phrase could productively be read as a post-constitutional, post-treaty critique about the shape and nature of gifts and what and why specific acts are defined as giving. In Anishinaabemowin, there is no way to speak of giving without clarifying what is given, who is giving, who is receiving. There is no gift followed by the idiomatic fragment “thanks” used in English. Instead, the word “*miigwe*” (the act of giving) is used to reflect a relationship based on “*miizh*” (giving to someone) often followed by “*miigwechiwi*” (thanks). A speaker of Anishinaabemowin must determine:

- Does “we” includes the listener or not (*gimiizhaanaanig* or *nimiizhaanaanig*)?
- Are we are giving to them or they are giving to us (*nimiizhaanaanig* or *nimiizhigoonaanig*)?
- Are the giving and not giving always parallel with us giving to them and then not giving to them (*nimiizhaanaanig mii gaawiin miizhaasiiwangidwaa*) or are we sometimes giving to them and they are not giving to us (*nimiizhaanaanig mii gaawiin miizhaasiyangidwaa*)?

Native nations were deconstructed through warfare, treaty-making and legislation. When the Dawes Act of 1887 used accounting as a means of erasure, who was doing the giving and whose land it was to give? Translating the facts of history can be as difficult as verb paradigms. Those who survived the giving often became forced and voluntary immigrants in a home rapidly becoming unfamiliar. Stein’s *Tender Buttons* offers ways to think about nationhood and identity.

Oginiig – The Roses

This essay began by noting Stein’s desire to use alternate means of expression to deconstruct perception and find the “center” of an object or idea. An indigenous reading of her work might identify the search for a center as a post-national enterprise. As Stein moved to new angles to discern different truths she exchanged one view for another. First color, then sound, then wavelengths and dimensions led to new views. She composed strings of syllables as simultaneously readable and unreadable as Picasso’s *Woman in a Blue Hat*, eyes bulging, shapeshifting, trapped in two dimensions. The polysyllabic nature of Anishinaabemowin easily lends itself to such a practice. The verb as the center of most words, is surrounded by prefixes, suffixes, tenses and other various possible additions radiating outward in both directions changing the meaning ever so slightly with each addition.

Stein’s system for reflecting on reality mirrors the economy and precision of perception long practiced by Anishinaabe people, as well as many other indigenous groups, where there is no definite binary, no unidirectional chronology, but rather a living center of knowledge that is maintained through continual reinterpretation. The reason for holding fast to ceremony and tradition is not one of savage simplicity but rather sophisticated understanding of an ever-evolving universe. Sustainability is not a romantic relationship to nature; it is a scientific response to shifts in space and time. Perhaps Stein was writing about a feast, some buttons and a roast, but in her words we can find the metamorphosis of mountains, the light of stars, and the sound of ideas. We find a center that defines better than edges. She sums it up well when she states, “what is the custom, the custom is in the centre” (*izhitwaayang naawayi’iing*) (26). And in this center, wrapped in phenomenology and physics is spiritual tradition and the insistence that change is inevitable and survival depends on embracing it. Her writing is dense and rambling perhaps, but so is life and the methods of healing and persistence.

A religion, almost a religion, any religion, a quintal in religion, a relying and a surface and a service in indecision and a creature and a question and a syllable in answer and more counting and no quarrel and a single scientific statement and no darkness and no question and an earned administration and a single set of sisters and an outline and no blisters and the section seeing yellow and the centre having spelling and no solitude and no quaintness and yet solid quite so solid and the single surface centred and the question in the placard and the singularity, is there a singularity, and the singularity, why is there a question and the singularity why is the surface outrageous, why is it beautiful why is it not when there is no doubt, why is anything vacant, why is not disturbing a centre no virtue, why is it when it is and why is it when it is and there is no doubt, there is no doubt that the singularity shows. (49)

In the deconstruction of morphemes and translation of ideas, meanings do not always align and cannot always be tied to etymological history, but the structure and content of *Tender Buttons* can still cause questions to arise, new alignments to be realized, centers to be rebuilt.

As Stein writes of sensation, location and history, her words hold additional meaning for readers familiar with Anishinaabe language and culture. This attempt at translation and Anishinaabe reading, this *bakonaan dibaajimowin*, a skinning of the story, is not the only, or even the most productive method for reading Stein, but it does produce new cross-cultural linguistic and literary comparisons. Her atomic disassembly questions standard ways of perceiving nouns, actions, and relationships. Her words render obvious the way patterns of language lead to different interpretations. *Tender Buttons* can be a source of cross-cultural inspiration. Stein had her own dance in mind when she wrote: “Dance a clean dream and an extravagant turn up, secure the steady rights and translate more than translate the authority, show the choice and make no more mistakes than yesterday” (51). I will, Gertrude, I will:

Biinishimoyaan bawaajimoyaan gaye maamakanendaagoziyaan, zhaabwitooyaan gweyakonakoniigeyaan, aanikanootamaan, aanikanootawagwaa, ayaangwaamendamaan gaye gaawiin waa awashme wanichigesiiyaan.

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