

DH Is ABOUT BREAKING STUFF

Anne McGrail American Literature II

Write Like Gertrude: CUBIST PROSE POEM COLLAGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

Write a "cubist prose poem collage" of something that you know well enough to develop in the Gertrude Stein style.

Use headings the way that Stein does, and look at some Cubist paintings for inspiration. She was concerned with how to compose a poem that would avoid dreary literalness that had come to dominate early 20th century poetry. Like Cubist and Dada/Surrealist painters, Stein is concerned with undermining the conventions of representation.

Here is a "recipe" that will help you "operate" on your own text in ways that Stein does, playing with the words themselves, making the poem "about language and not people" as Stein says

1. Write any prose piece or borrow something you like from the paper, from our book, anything.
2. Perform Cubist or Dadaist operations on it by taking a word or a set of words and replacing those words or set of words with words that sound like those words, or remind you of those words, or are synonyms, homonyms, antonyms of those words.
3. Use synecdoche: Synecdoche is using a part for the whole. So if you find a word that seems interesting, choose a word that it is a part of or that is a whole of. If you come to a word like "pot" then replace it with "lid" (which is a part of a pot). But there are other associations (metonyms) for the word "pot"--for example, "marajjuana" or "belly stove". So you can see that you can start operating in many directions here.
4. Remember that metonyms are words associated ("next to") with other words. See where metonyms take you. If you come to a word like "run" for example, we might think "marathon" but then in the past month "marathon" might now be associated with "lost limbs" in a way that is very different from the previous idea of "tired legs". So metonyms can take you far in your "way of happening."
5. Now try playing around with the syntax--fragment it the way that Cubism does (so that only a sliver of a word or image is showing?). Or completely do away with the trace of representation if you want, bringing you closer to Surrealism (where the "Bride" of Duchamp looks like nothing representational at all.)
6. Remember that Stein was trying to take realism to another stage--to show what "she knew was there but you couldn't see."
7. Remember that repetition is also one of the operations that Stein performs--what words that you have would bear repeating? What is the effect of repeating that word over and over?

8. Don't forget rhythm and cadence. See what words would sound interesting and use those to create your patterns.