

Opinions, for example, that Goodheart, in *SD*, ascribes to de Man, pure and simple, in fact are also statements about what Shelley is saying in "The Triumph of Life."

Apropos of irony, it is always a painful business to try to explain a joke, but let me say, as literally as I can, that my phrase about stinkweeds and skunk cabbages, so offensive to Goodheart, was meant to be an ironic extension of that rather silly metaphor about letting a hundred flowers blow. It was a way of saying that my rejoicing in the power and novelty of new work by younger critics does not preclude thinking that some of it is wrong, wrong both in the readings it proposes and in its possible political or social effect. Surely Goodheart, who has so many harsh words to say about the work of the "deconstructionists" as "the most radical attack on meaning (or the meaningfulness) of literature" (*SD* 145) and as "subvert[ing] the very activity of value-making" (*SD* 32), and so on, will allow me to have my judgments too.

Goodheart is offended that I used the occasion of my presidential address to express my deepest convictions about literary study. It seemed to me that I had a moral obligation to say what I stand for and stand by. Did he want me to utter bland platitudes? I also had, so it seemed to me, especially an obligation to encourage in its diversity the work of those younger scholar-critics who will take over our profession during the next decade.

As for the death of deconstruction, it has been announced prematurely many times before, but always as a piece of wishful thinking. Literary study in Europe and America has been permanently marked by the various "deconstructionisms." Even those critics, for example the so-called new historicists, who are superficially hostile to deconstruction have borrowed many of its assumptions, even its assumptions about history.

That "deconstruction" is by no means dead but still seems a powerful threat, and that the stakes are indeed high, is indicated by the recent furor in the mass media and in the academy over the newly discovered wartime writings of Paul de Man. If de Man no longer mattered no one would have bothered, least of all the *New York Times* or *Newsweek*. Goodheart's letter, with its echoes of his earlier attacks on deconstruction, attacks that employ the same erroneous clichés as those in the *Nation*, *Newsweek*, the *Village Voice*, *La quinzaine littéraire*, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, among other journals, must of course be seen in the context of these recent articles. In spite of the qualifications and nuances of his treatment of deconstruction in *SD*, Goodheart shares with the authors of those articles a failure to read correctly what he is attacking, for example in the erroneous assumptions that deconstruction is, practically, "nihilistic" (whatever our protestations to the contrary), that it is "authoritarian" or dogmatic, that it empties texts of meaning or says readers can make texts mean anything they like, that it has no concern for history, ethics, or politics, and that it cuts literature off from society and individual life. The recent outpouring of such falsehoods

in the mass media has shown that my observations in the presidential address were right on the mark.

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### Gertrude Stein

To the Editor:

Of the spirited reaction to J. Hillis Miller's presidential address, perhaps enough has already filled the pages of *PMLA*. However, Clarke Owens's letter (103 [1988]: 58–59) cannot go unanswered. As an old Californian should know, Gertrude Stein was not born there! Indeed, as she was fond of telling customs agents, she was born on 3 February 1874 in a house on Western Avenue in Allegheny, Pennsylvania (now a part of Pittsburgh).

In the spring of 1875, the Stein family moved to Europe, living in Vienna and then Paris. Returning to the United States in 1879, they lived with relatives in Baltimore before starting out for California in 1880. Stein continued to make her home in California until 1892, when, after the deaths of her mother and father (1888, 1891), she and her sister went to live with her mother's family in Baltimore. Stein did not return to California between 1899 and 1935.

Perhaps to Owens such facts, easily available in any biographical handbook, are irrelevant to the point that he wanted to make about Miller's address. Stein herself would have been outraged at the confusion. And, oh yes, Alice B. Toklas was born in San Francisco on 30 April 1877.

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