Paris France

Gertrude Stein

Paris France

Gertrude Stein

Paris France Gertrude Stein
Stein's incomparable, impressionistic memoir of Paris.

Published in 1940, on the day that Paris fell to the Germans, Paris France blends Stein's childhood memories of Paris with trenchant observations about everything French. It is a witty fricassee of food and fashion, pets and painters, musicians, friends, and artists, served up with a healthy garnish of "Steinien" humor and self-indulgence. For readers who have previously considered Gertrude Stein to be a difficult or even unreadable author, *Paris France* provides a delightful window on her personal and unique world.

Paris France Details

Date	:	Published June 1st 2003 by Peter Owen Publishers (first published 1940)
ISBN	:	9780720611977
Author	:	Gertrude Stein
Format	:	Paperback 166 pages
Genre	:	Cultural, France, Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Travel, Classics

From Reader Review Paris France for online ebook

Forest Collins says

I'm not a big dummy, but I initially had a hard time slipping into this & struggled getting through parts of this short (100 page) book. This is the 2nd time I've picked up a book by Stein and I didn't make it through the first one a decade ago...but thought maybe I was in a better head space to get back to her now.

The language is simple, but the style is particular: straightforward phrases and ideas, but strung together in incomplete sentences, unpunctuated, like train of thought or a naive poetry, which I initially found jarring and clunky. But, then by part 2, I kind of fell into the rhythm and felt swept along. At this point, I also felt like the book is better appreciated in a larger context. Either 1. as it relates to the life of Americans in Paris. or 2. as an influence on/reflection of writing styles of artists that ran in the same circles as Stein.

She makes some beautiful and apt observations of French sensibilities and culture that are still relevant nearly a century later. She butterflies over a wide range of topics: war, love, fashion, the art of being civilised, and more. She covers some major food territory in broad, sweeping and interesting strokes, starting from the mid 1700's.

Each of the four parts are ruminations and reflections on her experiences and interactions in France, including a bit of name dropping like her conversations with Picasso on buying a new dog. There is no story line running through the entire book so if you're looking for a coherent beginning, middle end, this is maybe not the one for you.

---

tai says

some nice sentences and juxtapositions but overall, tedious.i can't imagine enjoying this unless you care about stein as a figure, leading you to want to hear her privileged rambling.

Prooost Davis says

I had read somewhere that Gertrude Stein's writing was difficult, but that's not the case here. Yes, she wrote run-on sentences that were short on punctuation, but the sentences are not hard to understand, except for the occasional one that can be read in more than one way because of poor grammar.

As I read "Paris France," I wondered about the style. Was it meant to be stream of consciousness, naive, childlike, like speech, or all of these? To me, the effect of the style was to make Gertrude Stein appear a simpleton.

"Foreigners belong in France because they have always been there and did what they had to do there and remained foreigners there. Foreigners should be foreigners and it is nice that foreigners are foreigners and that they inevitably are in Paris and in France."

I decided to check my reactions to the Stein style against others, and so Googled the book and read the Wikipedia entry, which describes "Paris France" as a novella. Now, I had considered it a memoir, and still do (the back cover of the paperback unhelpfully calls it "literature"). But it's funny that changing the genre from memoir to fiction can change one's opinion of the very same prose one was reading before the change in perception. As a novella, the writing in "Paris France" is more acceptable, if you consider that you have an unreliable narrator who is a little dim.

Gertrude Stein lived in France through both World Wars, but her treatment of them in this book seems to show her desire to distance herself from the wars as much as possible. Perhaps if you're in the middle of a war, it's natural to lie low and hope you live through it.

I confess that "Paris France" has caused me to think a lot, even if my first thoughts were about how little I liked it.

Terry Scott says

What a lovely book! The prose, poetry floats at times like a leaf in an autumn breeze! G. Stein at a point is a bit disdainful of impressionist painters seeking to capture an object; she implies artists in the 1930's conveying an idea or thought on canvas more superior. (Murakami's Commendatore perhaps?)

Maria says

Memoir, surprisingly optimistic on the eve of war. Some really delightful passages; good for Stein novice. Better in a way than A Moveable Feast by Hemingway, who stole her style. Nice, very nice, intro by Adam Gopnik.

Sparrow says

Gertrude Stein was 66 when she published Paris France (in 1940). (I just noticed there is no comma in the title, which makes sense because Gertrude often avoids commas, in sentences like:

By the way the Austrian croissant was hurriedly made at the siege of Vienna in 1683 by the Polish soldiers of Sobieski to replace the bread that was missing and they called the crest of the emblem of the Turks whom they were fighting.

) Her point -- if it isn't obvious -- is that the croissant is not naturally French; it was brought from Austria by Marie Antoinette: "they took it over completely so completely that it became French so completely French that no other nation questions it." This is part of the digression on cooking, if it's possible for Gertrude Stein to have a digression.

Gertrude is attempting to define the Frenchness of France, a place she had lived for 37 years, through two great wars -- but really the second one was just beginning. Gertrude is very stoic about wars. (Paris France was written just before my most beloved Gertrude Stein book, Wars I Have Seen, a book I grew up with (it was my father's); and the same copy just perished in my recent flood.) The best part of Paris France is the story of Helen Button (she is a young French girl whose name is really Hélène Bouton, but Gertrude calls her

by her Anglicized name):

Helen Button started out with her dog William. As they were walking along suddenly William stopped and was very nervous. He saw something on the road and so did Helen. They neither of them knew what it was at first and at last as they approached very carefully they saw it was a bottle, a bottle standing up right in the middle of the road. There had been something in the bottle but what, it looked dark green or may be blue or black, and the bottle was standing up in the middle of the road not lying on its side the way a bottle on the road usually is.

William the dog and Helen the little girl went on. They did not look back at the bottle but of course it was still there because they had not touched it.

That is war-time.

So you see, she does use commas sometimes.

Henry Fellows-Moss says

Stein's composition seems random, as if she had been completely unconsidered in her production. In this rambling, confused, and verbose creation, Stein manages to confound her readers and distract them from her own points and simultaneously lose their attention on almost every page. This she accomplishes by writing with a disregard for convention so childishly irreverent that it is nigh impossible to take seriously any idea she propounds. While the modernists may well have been right about the necessity of a new writing for a new era, one cannot deny the fact that literary convention *works* in communicating ideas. Now, I am frustrated in general with the modernist incentive to cut the whole rose blossom for the sake of one withered petal. I am even more frustrated with the product of that incentive through Stein. She doesn't just cut the blossom; she burns the bush and tears up the entire garden. When reading her work, Stein's attempt to subvert literary convention is indistinguishable from a bungler's ignorance of it. All in all, *Paris France* is irredeemable.

Fyza Parviz Jazra says

I have a list of books about Paris to finish before our upcoming Fall European Adventure and Gertrude Stein's memoir "Paris" was first on my list to read.

Stein is most well known as the host of a salon in Paris for writers and artists including Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Picasso. But she was also a writer merited with her own style of writing. I was curious to know in her voice what she felt about Paris. And in this book she gives a clear and concise description of life in Paris and stories of Parisians from the point of view of an American.

The book is about the formation of the 20th century and Paris being the place where the then new century was coming into manifestation. Paris had tradition, it had fashion, and it had civilization. It was a place of freedom, a place of logic, and a place of art and literature.

Stein dedicated the book to France and England whose job she said was to civilize the century.

Miguel Duarte says

http://www.comunidadeculturaearte.com...

Gertrude Stein é um dos nomes incontornáveis entre aquela geração de americanos que decidiu ir viver para Paris no início do séc. XX. Como colecionadora de arte, foi uma das grandes responsáveis, em conjunto com o seu irmão Leo Stein, pela aclamação da arte de vanguarda protagonizada por artistas como Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne e Henri Matisse. Os quadros por si adquiridos eram dispostos na sua casa, em Paris, onde eram exibidos a convidados, e onde Stein passou a organizar um salão literário onde, além dos pintores já atrás mencionados, se juntavam também poetas e escritores, os da tal geração de expatriados americanos, da qual foi mentora, como Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Ezra Pound e Scott F. Fitzgerald, e não só.
O livro Paris França, agora editado pela Relógio d'Água, traz-nos uma Stein já mais velha, às portas da Segunda Guerra Mundial, tendo sido publicado em 1940, quando a autora contava já 66 anos e cerca de 40 anos de vida em França, bastantes mais do que aqueles durante os quais vivera na América. Com o seu habitual estilo literário com uma pontuação francamente esquisita (quase ausente e, quando presente, em locais estranhos), é nessa mesma América que o livro começa, com Stein a debruçar-se sobre o contacto que tinha tido com França enquanto lá vivia. É a partir daqui que a autora começa a delinear aqueles factos e características que, para ela, são inegavelmente franceses – a lógica, a civilização, a moda.
Parte do desconforto sentido a ler este livro, a par com o deleite em relação a alguns pontos feitos, parte da claramente exagerada extrapolação de características de um dado tipo de pessoas, desde os franceses, no geral, aos homens casados, no particular. Stein adora declarar que os franceses são lógicos e extrapolar a partir daí para tirar todo o tipo de conclusões. O que faz confusão não é achar-se que os franceses não o são, mas o quão facilmente tal processo de atribuição de características pode levar a conclusões erradas ou deturpadas.

"Um camponês em França naturalmente diz muitas coisas, mas não é íntimo, não é íntimo com um homem, nem com uma mulher uma criança ou um animal, não é íntimo, ser íntimo não é civilizado e os franceses têm necessidade de ser civilizados e para isso têm de ter tradição e liberdade e com tradição e liberdade não se pode ter intimidade com ninguém"

Paris França não é uma exploração da cidade como o é Paris é uma festa, de Hemingway. Mais do que debruçar-se sobre a cidade e sobre a sua vida por lá, o livro traz pouquíssimas referências a esses salões literárias e aos amigos "famosos" de Stein. Aborda de tudo um pouco, desde cozinha, à relação entre os humanos e os animais, à relação dos franceses com a figura de Napoleão, ao porquê de França e Paris, em particular, terem sido o destino de escolha desta geração de expatriados que quis levar a arte mais além.
O que não falta são, também, ideias interessantíssimas, provavelmente também só possíveis mediante as generalizações atrás referidas. Stein explora uma ideia na qual cada:

"[…] século parece-se com a vida de alguém, com a vida de cada nação, quer dizer começa isto é tem uma infância tem uma adolescência tem uma vida adulta tem uma meia-idade e uma velhice e depois acaba."

A Primeira Guerra Mundial seria nesse caso uma crise de adolescência, com a Segunda Guerra a surgir quase como uma crise de meia idade. É interessante olhar para trás e perceber que é possível identificar um arco como este no séc. XX.
Mais que um retrato de um tempo e de uma cidade, é uma divagação sobre aquilo que Stein julga serem as características que tornam alguém francês e sobre como é viver em tempo de guerra – bem, pelo menos como será viver em tempo de guerra na França rural, mas podemos generalizar.

Julie says

i've heard people struggle with book, then they give up and go do something to make themselves feel better.

i struggle with things, then i give up and go read this book to make myself feel better.

same thing with the teacup ride at storyland, when i was little. it makes you a bit disoriented, but as soon as you stop fighting it, it's good fun.

i do not feel the same way about Three Women, by the way.
try The World Is Round, instead.

Emily says

Well. This is not what I expected. I did not expect to love Gertrude Stein.

Stein and I have met before, but our meetings have never been very successful. I read *Ida* in high school and attempted *The Making of Americans* then as well, and both experiences left me veering between bemusement and annoyance. I did not understand what Stein was getting at with her odd, choppy style; she seemed arrogant and possibly insane. And although I've reevaluated many of my high school opinions on literature, I somehow never got around to giving Stein the benefit of a more mature reading, until now.

I must admit, it really paid off. Not that I would exactly reverse my former verdict of arrogance and possible insanity. No, Stein still does and says plenty of things in her 1940 essay-memoir *Paris France* that I normally find off-putting or flat-out disagree with: her habit, for example, of making sweeping statements about what she considers to be the defining characteristics of a group of people, based sometimes on a single anecdote. In this passage, she's discussing Frenchmen who never marry:

> recently in a village not far from here, one day he was about fifty-five and he never had been married, he shot a woman just any woman as he saw her at a distance. No man who had ever been married could have done that, manifestly not.

I mean, what rot: married men aren't immune from psychotic breaks any more than the rest of us. Similarly Stein declares, in defense of her theory that dogs from a given country are similar in temperament to the people from that country, that dachshunds and other German dogs are "rather timid gentle friendly and obedient." As much as I love dachshunds, none of those descriptors are words I would think of applying to the breed, which are in my experience near-fearless, fiercely territorial, hostile toward strangers, and only prone to obedience when there is an immediate culinary reward.

Two things, though. The first is that, as much as Stein's habit of over-enthusiastic extrapolation from insufficient data sometimes generates statements that seem bizarrely wrong, they perhaps oftener result in passages that seem oddly and intriguingly right. One of my favorite sections, and one that would earn the

book a five-star rating all on its own were I to give star ratings, is one in which Stein critiques the figure of speech "Familiarity breeds contempt." She argues, on the contrary, that "the more familiar it is the more rare and beautiful it is":

> I remember once hearing a conversation on the street in Paris and it ended up, and so there it was there was nothing for them to do, they had to leave the quarter. There it was, there was nothing else to do they had to leave the most wonderful place in the world, wonderful because it was there where they had always lived.
>
> [...]
>
> Familiarity does not breed contempt, anything one does every day is important and imposing and anywhere one lives is interesting and beautiful. And that is all as it should be.

As difficult as it is for me to remember when I am moaning about preparing for yet another 7am committee meeting featuring stale bagels and "lite" cream cheese, I deeply believe in this idea: that doing something day after day, or living in a place day after day, bestows upon that activity or place the beauty and interest of one's own life. It is easy to take the petty way out here, retorting that this is easy for Stein to say because where she lived every day was Paris, and what she did every day was write and collect art and hang out with Picasso and Hemingway, but I think there's a deeper truth here as well, and it's one of which I am glad to have expressed so succinctly and well.

I'm reminded of the Harvey Keitel character in the Wayne Wang/Paul Auster film *Smoke*: Keitel plays a smoke shop proprietor who takes a photograph of the same street corner at the exact same time every morning for decades. His profession is not glamorous and his photographs are not, individually, great artworks, but his years of *practice* of this activity lend it an unexpected depth and beauty, create a connection between him and the changing neighborhood (or quarter) in which he lives. Yet outwardly there's nothing special about his smoke shop over any other smoke shop, which is just what Stein is writing about here: the very act of living imparts life to one's actions and to the place where one lives.

The second mitigating circumstance that struck me about Stein's oft-bizarre extrapolations, is that she is sometimes coming to wrong conclusions willfully, almost as an act of magical thinking. *Paris France* was written in 1939 and is profoundly concerned with the recent outbreak of the Second World War. Stein had been in France during the carnage of the first World War, and is terrified and grief-stricken at the idea that the experience is about to be repeated—or worse, that from now on there will be a *constant* state of "general European war." So when she claims, for example, that dachshunds are timid and gentle and so German people must be timid and gentle too, or when she asserts that the French are logical and "logical people are never brutal, they are never sentimental, they are never careless," she does not so much believe these things as that she desires them—desperately—to be true, and perhaps half-believes that by asserting them she can bring them into being. At certain points in her narrative this doubt and desperation leak through to the surface in a way I found quite poignant:

> I thought poodles were french but the french breed always has to be refreshed by the german one, and the german pincher is so much more gentle than our Chichuachua little dog which it

> resembles, and so everything would be a puzzle if it were not certain that logic is right, and is stronger than the will of man. We will see.
>
> The characteristic art product of a country is the pulse of the country, France did produce better hats and fashions than ever these last two years and is therefore very alive and Germany's music and musicians have been dead and gone these last two years and so Germany is dead well we will see, it is so, of course as all these things are necessarily true.

Stein's circling syntax here is very much that of a person vacillating between trying to reassure herself, and wishing to express her doubt to someone else who will reassure her. It would be a puzzle; it is certain; we will see. We will see, it is so, of course.

In a similarly poignant way, Stein is attempting here to tell the story of the early 20th century and the art community that began then in Paris, but that is not the story that currently preoccupies her. She says at one point, in a sentence which is its own paragraph and which mimics the rhythm of a sigh:

> It is difficult to go back to 1901 now that it is 1939 and war-time.

And so 1939 keeps intruding on her points about 1901, and she must resort to long, discursive tangents to talk herself back to a point where 1901 is visible to her once more. After the line above, for example, she tells an anecdote that begins at the intersection of war (her true preoccupation) and food; she then writes for six pages about the French and their relationship with food through history, finally arriving at the statement: "and that brings me to the Paris I first knew when the Café Anglais still existed." This exercise in historical imagination enables Stein to access 1901 again for a time, although eventually 1939 seeps back again into the stream of her thoughts.

My motivation to read *Paris France* came from the fact that David and I are traveling to Paris in May, but the book turned out to have more insight about the 1939 psychology of Gertrude Stein than about Paris or the French people. Still, that psychology was both moving and fascinating, and Stein's keen ability to relate a well-observed anecdote had me marveling on a number of occasions. Some of these anecdotes, in fact, are almost like free-standing miniatures, and I wonder if Stein has been an inspiration for Lydia Davis. I'll leave you with one of these which particularly struck me:

> So one day there I saw a boy about thirteen years of age a stout well-set up and comfortably dressed boy sitting by the water-side, next to him was a woman evidently not his mother but a relation and there they sat. Large tears were rolling down his cheeks. What is it, I asked her, oh she said sorrow, but it will pass. He has failed in his examinations, but it will pass. And quite impersonally she sat by and indeed it was sorrow but as she said, sorrow passes.

Lorrayne says

Well, this is an interesting book, but I was not convinced. My issue with it was more content-wise than the

style-wise (which, yes, it is not for everyone). While there are some interesting passages, I struggled to find key messages of the book or the direction where it was going. I find her social or political interpretation of France/Paris at the time full of shortcomings, but what really bothered me was the way she romanticised the period to the point of naivety (maybe due to the privileges she had). Maybe the fault is on myself for having higher expectations from this known character which was Stein. I expected her to be a sharp critic of the society she was living in, and that was far from what I had.

Claire Scorzi says

Em breve, vídeo para ele (nem acredito!)

Judi says

I was hoping for a book full of insights and anecdotes about Paris in the first part of the 20th century. Maybe that's what Stein thought she was giving me, but all I got out of it was stream of consciousness about the French and France, with little or no standard punctuation. So now I know that the French are logical, latin, civilized and fashionable.

I did like this particular quote from pp. 29-30: "It is because of this [occasional crises] that the American married to a frenchwoman remarked my American sister rises wonderfully to a crisis but my french wife sees to it that a crisis does not arise."

I think I'd rather read about Gertrude Stein than read Gertrude Stein.

Susan Oleksiw says

Gertrude Stein is an acquired taste. On the first page of Gopnik's introduction and the first page by Stein, the reader immediately hears Hemingway and his adaptation of Stein's style to his own work.

Written in 1940, at the end of the false war, Stein ruminates on Paris, France, England, the French, and life in the city and the provinces. The relays conversations and impressions from her various friends, including Picasso, and gives a fairly good account of France at this time and how it was changing.

Reading Stein is an experience in the stretching of language. Some of her perceptions sound profound but are not, only the language and syntax they are presented in make them seem so. I recommend Stein as an experience for the reader, but at every line you are pulled back to self-awareness of what you are reading. No reader gets lost in these story inside this book.
