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# Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition



## Synopsis

The MLA Committee on Scholarly Editions has awarded *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition* its seal designating it an MLA Approved Edition. 2014 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the original publication of Gertrude Stein's groundbreaking modernist classic, *Tender Buttons*. This centennial edition is the first and only version to incorporate Stein's own handwritten corrections found in a first-edition copy at the University of Colorado as well as corrections discovered among her papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Editor Seth Perlow has assembled a text with over one hundred emendations, resulting in the first version of *Tender Buttons* that truly reflects its author's intentions. These changes are detailed in Perlow's "Note on the Text," which describes the editorial process and lists the specific variants for the benefit of future scholars. The book includes facsimile images of some of Stein's handwritten edits and lists of corrections, as well as an afterword by noted contemporary poet and scholar Juliana Spahr. A compact, attractive edition suitable for general readers as well as scholars, *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition* is unique among the available versions of this classic text and is destined to become the standard.

Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) was one of the most important and innovative American writers of literary modernism, as well as one of the great art collectors and salon hosts of the period. A pioneering lesbian writer, Stein lived most of her life in Paris but became a celebrity in the United States with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). Seth Perlow teaches English at Oklahoma State University. Juliana Spahr teaches writing at Mills College.

"*Tender Buttons* was recently reissued by City Lights Books, to mark the centennial of a volume that broke language barriers, acknowledging hungers to see more. It challenged with inspired daring."--Barbara Berman, *The Rumpus*

"For the centennial of this masterpiece, Seth Perlow has given us much the best edition of the poem, based on Stein's manuscript and corrections she made to the first edition. Punctuation, spelling, format, and a few phrases are affected and most especially the change in the capitalization of the section titles. 'The difference is spreading.'"--Charles Bernstein, University of Pennsylvania, author of *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions*

"Happy 100th birthday, *TENDER BUTTONS*. You are as explosive, tantalizing, and delicious as you were on the day you were born. Your birthday gift from Seth Perlow and Juliana Spahr is a beautiful new edition that will carry you into your next century, the best edition ever. Your birthday gift from all of us who love literature and culture is to buy this edition for ourselves and all our friends. Congratulations to all."--Catharine R. Stimpson, Professor, New York University, and co-editor of the two-volume *Gertrude Stein: Writings* published by the Library of America

The publication of an authoritative edition of *Tender*

Buttons, with Stein's hitherto unpublished corrections and editions, is a splendid way to celebrate the centennial of this influential modernist work. Scholars will benefit from the full documentation, and readers will appreciate its convenient format, which resembles the original publication.

--Jonathan Culler, Cornell University

"This radical multi-dimensional generative cubist text with the simplest words imaginable continues to alter and shape poetics into the post post modernist future. We have Gertrude Stein's 'mind grammar' operating at full tilt, with unpredictability, wit and sensory prevarication. Look to the 'minutes particulars,' Blake admonished, and here she does just that: 'it is a winning cake.' Salvos to the editor and salient 'afterword' that give belletristic notes and political perspective as well. A unique edition."

--Anne Waldman, The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Tender Buttons is a showcase of Stein's joyful draw to words."

--Dina Weinstein, Jewish Book Council

"What distinguishes this edition from others is over 100 edits, some indicated by Stein in her unmistakable handwriting found by editor Perlow in a first-edition copy held at the University of Colorado, as well as other corrections gleaned from her papers at Beinecke Library of Yale University and from the Library of America edition."

--Karren LaLonde Alenier, Scene4 Magazine

"She did in writing what Picasso and her other painter friends were doing in their Cubist painting. Writing had to be moved out of the grip of the nineteenth century. All naturalistic description, romanticism and sentimentality had to be left behind."

--Renate Stendhal, San Francisco Bay Times

"Tender Buttons is a dazzling work that rewards close study and requires a willingness to

let go of the need for concrete, literal storytelling."--Christopher Luna, Rain Taxi Review of Books

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**Gertrude Stein:** Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was one of the most important and innovative American writers of literary modernism, as well as one of the great art collectors and salon hosts of the period. A pioneering lesbian writer, Stein lived most of her life in Paris and became famous in the U.S. with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933).

**Seth Perlow:** Seth Perlow is an Assistant Professor of English at Oklahoma State University. His research and teaching focus on twentieth-century American literature, poetry and poetics, new media studies, and gay and lesbian literature. He earned a PhD in English at Cornell University.

**Juliana Spahr:** Juliana Spahr edits with Jena Osman the book series *Chain Links* and co-edits *Subpress*. With David Buuck she wrote *An Army of Lovers*, about two friends who are writers in a time of war and ecological collapse. She is the author of several poetry collections and teaches at Mills College.

As the owner of the very hard to find 1914 first edition (and at least 15 other editions, both in English and in translation), I must commend City Lights Publishers for this significant and historic edition!

Gertrude and Alice were not happy with the printing and binding of the first edition, which is a very fragile hardcover. Even though some may find this printing not to their liking, it is a quality paperback which, with its annotations and informational essays, will make this modernist, literary milestone accessible to a wide readership. Gertrude and Alice would approve!

PS For book collectors, books with uncut pages are often more valuable!

Stein gets five stars for trying to create a new poetry, much like trying to create a new novel. Later imitators have a much easier job than the original creator. Stein is far from perfect in this work and

sometimes it outright fails, but it's challenging and more creative than 99% of the stuff that is someone trying to write a better poem or novel.

The book was printed very sloppily. There were many pages that were uncut so in order read them there are slight tears in them. Also, I cannot find a credit for cover picture. I'm not that knowledgeable of art so it would have been nice if it was named. However, the afterward and the notes on changes were very interesting and I'm glad this was published for the 100th anniversary. PS: I've noticed lately there a like editorial errors found in printed material. I thought spell checkers would have gotten rid of this. We pay a lot for printed text so I expect it to be as accurate as possible.

When we think of critical texts, the New Testament most often comes to mind. However, any piece of literature can potentially benefit from scholarly analysis and reconstruction to achieve as close as possible what the author originally intended. Seth Perlow has done exactly this with *Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition* (City Lights Books, 2014), a new printing of Gertrude Stein's famous collection of prose. At his disposal were the original manuscript, the first printed edition, and two separate sets of the author's handwritten corrections. The result is a critical edition that can be appealing to scholars and layreaders alike. There are no messy brackets and footnotes to disturb your reading, yet toward the end of the book, inquisitive readers will find sample facsimiles, a brief word from the editor, and a "List of Variances" that references alternative readings. You will also notice that this edition is fairly free from interpretation. There's no introduction, footnotes, or the like to guide your reading. Contemporary poet Juliana Spahr does contribute an essay that touches on the history of interpreting Stein's works, along with some references suitable for future research. However, being an afterward, it is conveniently located at the end, giving the impression that it's not to take away from the reader's initial contact with the work. Now, you've probably concluded that I'm well-satisfied with this edition. But what about the book in and of itself? That's a different story. Not being familiar with modern literature styles, I was out of my element reading *Tender Buttons*. Scholars have debated as to how to understand Stein's writing in light of her feminism, lesbianism, and controversial politics. In the section titled "Rooms," I noticed some parts that introduced ideas about gender and sex, but I didn't get a sense that those subjects dominated. Stein is also noted

for her role in the development of Cubism, bringing a multiple perspective or multi-dimensional approach to literature as Pablo Picasso did to painting. In the  
“Objects” section, I could sense this cubist sort of style in  
“A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass” and “A Red Hat,” which made me think I was on the right track. In general, however, I  
can’t say I really get it. In the afterward, Spahr mentions that some have  
speculated whether or not Gertrude Stein was stoned when she wrote Tender Buttons. If  
that’s the case, maybe her poems were never meant to be understood. Disclaimer:  
I received this copy of Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition as a First Reads giveaway  
winner on GoodReads.com. There was no obligation to write a review.

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