

Stein, Gertrude. "Portraits and Repetition". *Stein*. Penguin Group USA, 2001. Print.



# Stem

Writings 1932–1946

Stanzas in Meditation

Lectures in America

The Geographical History of America

Ida

Brewsie and Willie

Other Works

whole things is one of a series, but beside this there is the important thing and the very American thing that everybody knows who is an American just how many seconds minutes or hours it is going to take to do a whole thing. It is singularly a sense for combination within a conception of the existence of a given space of time that makes the American thing the American thing, and the sense of this space of time must be within the whole thing as well as in the completed whole thing.

I felt this thing, I am an American and I felt this thing, and I made a continuous effort to create this thing in every paragraph that I made in *The Making of Americans*. And that is why after all this book is an American book an essentially American book, because this thing is an essentially American thing, this sense of a space of time and what is to be done within this space of time not in any way excepting in the way that it is inevitable that there is this space of time and anybody who is an American feels what is inside this space of time and so well they do what they do within this space of time and so ultimately it is a thing contained within. I wonder if I at all convey to you what I mean by this thing. I will try to tell it in every way I can as I have in all the writing that I have ever done. I am always trying to tell this thing that a space of time is a natural thing for an American to always have inside them as something in which they are continuously moving. Think of anything, of cowboys, of movies, of detective stories, of anybody who goes anywhere or stays at home and is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving, a first real effort to express this thing which is an American thing began in writing *The Making of Americans*.

### *Portraits and Repetition*

**I**N Composition As Explanation I said nothing changes from generation to generation except the composition in which we live and the composition in which we live makes the art which we see and hear. I said in Lucy Church Amiablely that women and children change, I said if men have not changed women and children have. But it really is of no importance even if this is true. The thing that is important is the way that portraits of men and women and children are written, by what I mean made. And by made I mean felt. Portraits of men and women and children are differently felt in every generation and by a generation one means any period of time. One does mean any period of time by a generation. A generation can be anywhere from two years to a hundred years. What was it somebody said that the only thing God could not do was to make a two year old mule in a minute. But the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something and so that is what a generation does it shows that moving is existing. So then there are generations and in a way that too is not important because, and this thing is a thing to know, if and we in America have tried to make this thing a real thing, if the movement, that is any movement, is lively enough, perhaps it is possible to know that it is moving even if it is not moving against anything. And so in a way the American way has been not to need that generations are existing. If this were really true and perhaps it is really true then really and truly there is a new way of making portraits of men and women and children. And I, I in my way have tried to do this thing.

It is true that generations are not of necessity existing that is to say if the actual movement within a thing is alive enough. A motor goes inside of an automobile and the car goes. In short this generation has conceived an intensity of movement so great that it has not to be seen against something else to be known, and therefore, this generation does not connect itself with anything, that is what makes this generation what

it is and that is why it is American, and this is very important in connection with portraits of anything. I say portraits and not description and I will gradually explain why. Then also there is the important question of repetition and is there any such thing. Is there repetition or is there insistence? I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be. This is a thing about which I want you to think before I go on telling about portraits of anything. Think about all the detective stories everybody reads. The kind of crime is the same, and the idea of the story is very often the same, take for example a man like Wallace, he always has the same theme, take a man like Fletcher he always has the same theme, take any American ones, they too always have the scene, the same scene, the kind of invention that is necessary to make a general scheme is very limited in everybody's experience, every time one of the hundreds of times a newspaper man makes fun of my writing and of my repetition he always has the same theme, always having the same theme, that is, if you like, repetition, that is if you like the repeating that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. And so let us think seriously of the difference between repetition and insistence.

Anybody can be interested in a story of a crime because no matter how often the witnesses tell the same story the insistence is different. That is what makes life that the insistence is different, no matter how often you tell the same story if there is anything alive in the telling the emphasis is different. It has to be, anybody can know that.

It is very like a frog hopping he cannot ever hop exactly the same distance or the same way of hopping at every hop. A bird's singing is perhaps the nearest thing to repetition but if you listen they too vary their insistence. That is the human expression saying the same thing and in insisting and we all insist varying the emphasising.

I remember very well first beginning to be conscious of this thing. I became conscious of these things, I suppose anybody

does when they first really know that the stars are worlds and that everything is moving, that is the first conscious feeling of necessary repetition, and it comes to one and it is very disconcerting. Then the second thing is when you first realize the history of various civilizations, that have been on this earth, that too makes one realize repetition and at the same time the difference of insistence. Each civilization insisted in its own way before it went away. I remember the first time I really realized this in this way was from reading a book we had at home of the excavations of Nineveh, but these emotions although they tell one so much and one really never forgets them, after all are not in one's daily living, they are like the books of Jules Verne terribly real terribly near but still not here. When I first really realized the inevitable repetition in human expression that was not repetition but insistence when I first began to be really conscious of it was when at about seventeen years of age, I left the more or less internal and solitary and concentrated life I led in California and came to Baltimore and lived with a lot of my relations and principally with a whole group of very lively little aunts who had to know anything.

If they had to know anything and anybody does they naturally had to say and hear it often, anybody does, and as there were ten and eleven of them they did have to say and hear said whatever was said and any one not hearing what it was they said had to come in to hear what had been said. That inevitably made everything said often. I began then to consciously listen to what anybody was saying and what they did say while they were saying what they were saying. This was not yet the beginning of writing but it was the beginning of knowing what there was that made there be no repetition. No matter how often what happened had happened any time any one told anything there was no repetition. This is what William James calls the Will to Live. If not nobody would live.

And so I began to find out then by listening the difference between repetition and insisting and it is a very important thing to know. You listen as you know.

Then there is another thing that also has something to do with repeating.

When all these eleven little aunts were listening as they were

talking gradually some one of them was no longer listening. When this happened it might be that the time had come that any one or one of them was beginning repeating, that is was ceasing to be insisting or else perhaps it might be that the attention of one of some one of them had been worn out by adding something. What is the difference. Nothing makes any difference as long as some one is listening while they are talking.

That is what I gradually began to know.

Nothing makes any difference as long as some one is listening while they are talking. If the same person does the talking and the listening why so much the better there is just by so much the greater concentration. One may really indeed say that that is the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive, that is being one who is at the same time talking and listening. It is really that that makes one a genius. And it is necessary if you are to be really and truly alive it is necessary to be at once talking and listening, doing both things, not as if there were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them, well if you like, like the motor going inside and the car moving, they are part of the same thing.

I said in the beginning of saying this thing that if it were possible that a movement were lively enough it would exist so completely that it would not be necessary to see it moving against anything to know that it is moving. This is what we mean by life and in my way I have tried to make portraits of this thing always have tried always may try to make portraits of this thing.

If this existence is this thing is actually existing there can be no repetition. There is only repetition when there are descriptions being given of these things not when the things themselves are actually existing and this is therefore how my portrait writing began.

So we have now, a movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving, it does not have to move against anything to know that it is moving, it does not need that there are generations existing.

Then we have insistence insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way because

emphasis can never be the same not even when it is most the same that is when it has been taught.

How do you like what you have.

This is a question that anybody can ask anybody. Ask it.

If asking it I began to make portraits of anybody.

How do you like what you have is one way of having an important thing to ask of any one.

That is essentially the portrait of any one, one portrait of any one.

I began to think about portraits of any one.

If they are themselves inside them what are they and what has it to do with what they do.

And does it make any difference what they do or how they do it, does it make any difference what they say or how they say it. Must they be in relation with any one or with anything in order to be one of whom one can make a portrait. I began to think a great deal about all these things.

Anybody can be interested in what anybody does but does that make any difference, is it all important.

Anybody can be interested in what anybody says, but does that make any difference, is it at all important.

I began to wonder about all that.

I began to wonder what it was that I wanted to have as a portrait, what there is that was to be the portrait.

I do not wonder so much now about that. I do not wonder about that at all any more. Now I wonder about other things, I wonder if what has been done makes any difference.

I wonder now if it is necessary to stand still to live if it is not necessary to stand still to live, and if it is if that is not perhaps to be a new way to write a novel. I wonder if you know what I mean. I do not quite know whether I do myself. I will not know until I have written that novel.

I have just tried to begin in writing Four In America because I am certain that what makes American success is American failure.

I am certain about that.

Some time I will explain that at great length but now I want to tell about how I wrote portraits. I wrote portraits knowing that each one is themselves inside them and something about them perhaps everything about them will tell some one all

about that thing all about what is themselves inside them and I was then hoping completely hoping that I was that one the one who would tell that thing. Perhaps I was that one.

There is another thing that one has to think about, that is about thinking clearly and about confusion. That is something about which I have almost as much to say as I have about anything.

The difference between thinking clearly and confusion is the same difference that there is between repetition and insistence. A great many think that they know repetition when they see or hear it but do they. A great many think that they know confusion when they know or see it or hear it, but do they. A thing that seems very clear, seems very clear but is it. A thing that seems to be exactly the same thing may seem to be a repetition but is it. All this can be very exciting, and it had a great deal to do with portrait writing.

As I say a thing that is very clear may easily not be clear at all, a thing that may be confused may be very clear. But everybody knows that. Yes anybody knows that. It is like the necessity of knowing one's father and one's mother one's grandmothers and one's grandfathers, but is it necessary and if it is can it be no less easily forgotten.

As I say the American thing is the vitality of movement, so that there need be nothing against which the movement shows as movement. And if this vitality is lively enough is there in that clarity any confusion is there in that clarity any repetition. I myself do not think so. But I am inclined to believe that there is really no difference between clarity and confusion, just think of any life that is alive, is there really any difference between clarity and confusion. Now I am quite certain that there is really if anything is alive no difference between clarity and confusion. When I first began writing portraits of any one I was not so sure, not so certain of this thing that there is no difference between clarity and confusion. I was however almost certain then when I began writing portraits that if anything is alive there is no such thing as repetition. I do not know that I have ever changed my mind about that. At any rate I did then begin the writing of portraits and I will tell you now all there is to tell about all that. I had of course written about every kind of men and women in The

Making of Americans but in writing portraits I wanted not to write about any one doing or even saying anything, I found this a difficult enough thing to begin.

I remember very well what happened. As I say I had the habit of conceiving myself as completely talking and listening, listening was talking and talking was listening and in so doing I conceived what I at that time called the rhythm of anybody's personality. If listening was talking and talking was listening then and at the same time any little movement any little expression was a resemblance, and a resemblance was something that presupposed remembering.

Listening and talking did not presuppose resemblance and as they do not presuppose resemblance, they do not necessitate remembering. Already then as you see there was a complication which was a bother to me in my conception of the rhythm of a personality. I have for so many years tried to get the better of that the better of this bother. The bother was simply that and one may say it is the bother that has always been a bother to anybody for anybody conceiving anything. Dillinger is dead it was even a bother for him.

As I say as I felt the existence of anybody later as I felt the existence of anybody or anything, there was then the listening and talking which I was doing which anybody was doing and there were the little things that made of any one some one resembling some one.

Any one does of course by any little thing by any little way by any little expression, any one does of course resemble some one, and any one can notice this thing notice this resemblance and in so doing they have to remember some one and this is a different thing from listening and talking. In other words the making of a portrait of any one is as they are existing and as they are existing has nothing to do with remembering any one or anything. Do you see my point, but of course yes you do. You do see that there are two things and not one and if one wants to make one portrait of some one and not two you can see that one can be bothered completely bothered by this thing. As I say it is something that has always bothered any one.

Funnily enough the cinema has offered a solution of this thing. By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing,

it is in a way if you like one portrait of anything not a number of them. There again you do see what I mean.

Now I in my way wanted to make portraits of any one later in Tender Buttons I also wanted to make portraits of anything as one thing as one portrait and although and that was my trouble in the beginning I felt the thing the person as existing and as everything in that person entered in to make that person little ways and expressions that made resembling, it was necessary for me nevertheless not to realize these things as remembering but to realize the one thing as existing and there they were and I was noticing, well you do see that it was a bother and I was bothering very much bothering about this thing.

In the beginning and I will read you some portraits to show you this I continued to do what I was doing in the Making of Americans, I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing. As I read you some of the portraits of that period you will see what I mean.

I of course did not think of it in terms of the cinema, in fact I doubt whether at that time I had ever seen a cinema but, and I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one's period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production. And each of us in our own way are bound to express what the world in which we are living is doing.

You see then what I was doing in my beginning portrait writing and you also understand what I mean when I say there was no repetition. In a cinema picture no two pictures are exactly alike each one is just that much different from the one before, and so in those early portraits there was as I am sure you will realize as I read them to you also as there was in The Making of Americans no repetition. Each time that I said the somebody whose portrait I was writing was something that something was just that much different from what I had just said that somebody was and little by little in this way a whole portrait came into being, a portrait that was not description and that was made by each time, and I did a great many times, say it, that somebody was something, each time there was a

difference just a difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something. Oh yes you all do understand. You understand this. You see that in order to do this there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition, remembering is also confusion. And this too you will presently know all about.

Remembering is repetition anybody can know that. In doing a portrait of any one, the repetition consists in knowing that that one is a kind of a one, that the things he does have been done by others like him that the things he says have been said by others like him, but, and this is the important thing, there is no repetition in hearing and saying the things he hears and says when he is hearing and saying them. And so in doing a portrait of him if it were possible to make that portrait a portrait of him saying and hearing what he says and hears while he is saying and hearing it there is then in so doing neither memory nor repetition no matter how often that which he says and hears is heard and said. This was the discovery I made as I talked and listened more and more and this is what I did when I made portraits of every one I know. I said what I knew as they said and heard what they heard and said until I had completely emptied myself of all they were that is all that they were in being one hearing and saying what they heard and said in every way that they heard and said anything.

And this is the reason why that what I wrote was exciting although those that did not really see what it was thought it was repetition. If it had been repetition it would not have been exciting but it was exciting and it was not repetition. It never is, I never repeat that is while I am writing.

As I say what one repeats is the scene in which one is acting, the days in which one is living, the coming and going which one is doing, anything one is remembering is a repetition, but one is doing, anything one is remembering is a repetition, but existing as a human being, that is being listening and hearing is never repetition. It is not repetition if it is that which you are actually doing because naturally each time the emphasis is different just as the cinema has each time a slightly different thing to make it all be moving. And each one of us has to do that, otherwise there is no existing. As Galileo remarked, it does move.

So you see what I mean about those early portraits and the middle part of *The Making of Americans*. I built them up little by little each time I said it it changed just a little and then when I was completely emptied of knowing that the one of whom I was making a portrait existed I had made a portrait of that one.

To go back to something I said that remembering was the only repetition, also that remembering was the only confusion. And I think you begin to see what I mean by that.

No matter how complicated anything is, if it is not mixed up with remembering there is no confusion, but and that is the trouble with a great many so called intelligent people they mix up remembering with talking and listening, and as a result they have theories about anything but as remembering is repetition and confusion, and being existing that is listening and talking is action and not repetition intelligent people although they talk as if they knew something are really confusing, because they are so to speak keeping two times going at once, the repetition time of remembering and the actual time of talking but, and as they are rarely talking and listening, that is the talking being listening and the listening being talking, although they are clearly saying something they are not clearly creating something, because they are because they always are remembering, they are not at the same time talking and listening. Do you understand. Do you any or all of you understand. Anyway that is the way it is. And you hear it even if you do not say it in the way I say it as I hear it and say it.

I say I never repeat while I am writing because while I am writing I am most completely, and that is if you like being a genius, I am most entirely and completely listening and talking, the two in one and the one in two and that is having completely its own time and it has in it no element of remembering. Therefore there is in it no element of confusion, therefore there is in it no element of repetition. Do you do you do you really understand.

And does it make any difference to you if you do understand. It makes an awful lot of difference to me. It is very exciting to have all this be.

Gradually then I began making portraits. And how did I begin.

When I first began writing although I felt very strongly that something that made that some one be some one was something that I must use as being them, I naturally began to describe them as they were doing anything. In short I wrote a story as a story, that is the way I began, and slowly I realized this confusion, a real confusion, that in writing a story one had to be remembering, and that novels are soothing because so many people one may say everybody can remember almost anything. It is this element of remembering that makes novels so soothing. But and that was the thing that I was gradually finding out listening and talking at the same time that is realizing the existence of living being actually existing did not have in it any element of remembering and so the time of existing was not the same as in the novels that were soothing. As I say all novels are soothing because they make anything happen as they can happen that is by remembering anything. But and I kept wondering as I talked and listened all at once, I wondered is there any way of making what I know come out as I know it, come out not as remembering. I found this very exciting. And I began to make portraits.

I kept on knowing people by resemblances, that was partly memory and it bothered me but I knew I had to do everything and I tried to do that so completely that I would lose it. I made charts and charts of everybody who looked like anybody until I got so that I hardly knew which one I knew on the street and which one looked like them. I did this until at last any one looking like any one else had no importance. It was not a thing that was any longer an important thing, I knew completely how any one looked like any other one and that became then only a practical matter, a thing one might know as what any one was liable to do, but this to me then was no longer interesting. And so I went on with portrait writing.

I cannot tell you although I think I can, that, as I can read any number of soothing novels in fact nothing else soothes me I found it not a thing that it was interesting to do. And I think now you know why it was not an interesting thing to do. We in this period have not lived in remembering, we have living in moving being necessarily so intense that existing is indeed something, is indeed that thing that we are doing. And so what does it really matter what anybody does. The news-



papers are full of what anybody does and anybody knows what anybody does but the thing that is important is the intensity of anybody's existence. Once more I remind you of Dillinger. It was not what he did that was exciting but the excitement of what he was as being exciting that was exciting. There is a world of difference and in it there is essentially no remembering.

And so I am trying to tell you what doing portraits meant to me, I had to find out what it was inside any one, and by any one I mean every one I had to find out inside every one what was in them that was intrinsically exciting and I had to find out not by what they said not by what they did not by how much or how little they resembled any other one but I had to find it out by the intensity of movement that there was inside in any one of them. And of course do not forget, of course I was interested in any one. I am. Of course I am interested in any one. And in any one I must or else I must betake myself to some entirely different occupation and I do not think I will, I must find out what is moving inside them that makes them them, and I must find out how I by the thing moving excitedly inside in me can make a portrait of them.

You can understand why I did it so often, why I did it in so many ways why I say that there is no repetition because, and this is absolutely true, that the exciting thing inside in any one if it is really inside in them is not a remembered thing, if it is really inside in them, it is not a confused thing, it is not a repeated thing. And if I could in any way and I have done it in every way if I could make a portrait of that inside them without any description of what they are doing and what they are saying then I too was neither repeating, nor remembering nor being in a confusion.

You see what I mean by what I say. But I know you do. Will you see it as clearly when I read you some of the portraits that I have written. Maybe you will but I doubt it. But if you do well then if you do you will see what I have done and do do.

A thing you all know is that in the three novels written in this generation that are the important things written in this

generation, there is, in none of them a story. There is none in Proust in The Making of Americans or in Ulysses. And this is what you are now to begin to realize in this description I am giving you of making portraits.

It is of course perfectly natural that autobiographies are being well written and well read. You do see anybody can see that so much happens every day and that anybody literally anybody can read or hear about it told the day that it happens. A great deal happens every day and any day and as I say anybody literally anybody can hear or read everything or anything about anything or everything that happens every day just as it has happened or is happening on that day. You do see what that means. Novels then which tell a story are really then more of the same much more of the same, and of course anybody likes more of the same and so a great many novels are written and a great many novels are read telling more of these stories but you can see you do see that the important things written in this generation do not tell a story. You can see that it is natural enough.

You begin definitely to feel that it had to be that I was to write portraits as I wrote them. I began to write them when I was about in the middle of The Making of Americans, and if you read The Making of Americans you will realize why this was inevitable.

I began writing the portraits of any one by saying what I knew of that one as I talked and listened that one, and each time that I talked and listened that one I said what I knew they were then. This made my early portraits and some that I finally did such as Four Dishonest Ones Told by a Description of What They Do, Matisse and Picasso and a lot of others, did as completely as I then could strictly did this thing. Every time I said what they were I said it so that they were this thing, and each time I said what they were as they were, as I was, naturally more or less but never the same thing each time that I said what they were I said what they were, not that they were different nor that I was different but as it was not the same moment which I said I said it with a difference. So finally I was emptied of saying this thing, and so no longer said what they were.

## FOUR DISHONEST ONES.

Told By a Description Of What They Do.

They are what they are. They have not been changing. They are what they are.

Each one is what that one is. Each is what each is. They are not needing to be changing.

One is what she is. She does not need to be changing. She is what she is. She is not changing. She is what she is.

She is not changing. She is knowing nothing of not changing. She is not needing to be changing.

What is she doing. She is working. She is not needing to be changing. She is working very well, she is not needing to be changing. She has been working very hard. She has been suffering. She is not needing to be changing.

She has been living and working, she has been quiet and working, she has been suffering and working, she has been watching and working, she has been waiting, she has been working, she has been waiting and working, she is not needing to be changing.

*Portraits and Prayers, page 57.*

At this time also I wanted to make portraits of places, I did. I did make them of the Bon Marché, of the Galeries Lafayette, of a crowd at Mi-Careme, I have always liked what I did with that one. It was completely something. And there again in doing the portraits of these places and these crowds, I did Italians, and Americans too like that, I continued to do as I had done in *The Making of Americans*. I told exactly and completely each time of telling what that one is inside in them. As I told you in comparing it to a cinema picture one second was never the same as the second before or after:

## MI-CAREME

There was a man who said one could recognize him when one saw him again by the scar on the end of his nose and under his eye but these scars were very little ones almost not anything and one would remember him because he was one who had been saying that he was a man tired of working tired of being one being working,

and that he would be very amusing, he could be amusing by saying something that would make any one listening begin blushing but, he said, he would not do such a thing he would be politely amusing and he was amusing and some being amused by him were not frightened by him. He might have been amusing to some who were at the same time ones frightened by him. He might be very amusing to some who would never in any way think that he could frighten any one.

*Portraits and Prayers, page 173.*

At any rate I did these portraits and they were very exciting, they were exciting to me and they were exciting to others who read them.

Then slowly once more I got bothered, after all I listened and talked but that was not all I did in knowing at any present time when I was stating anything what anything was. I was also looking, and that could not be entirely left out.

The trouble with including looking, as I have already told you, was that in regard to human beings looking inevitably carried in its train realizing movements and expression and as such forced me into recognizing resemblances, and so forced remembering and in forcing remembering caused confusion of present with past and future time.

Do you see what I mean. But certainly you certainly do. And so I began again to do portraits but this time it was not portraits of men and women and children, it was portraits of anything and so I made portraits of rooms and food and everything because there I could avoid this difficulty of suggesting remembering more easily while including looking with listening and talking than if I were to describe human beings. I will go a little more into that.

This is the great difficulty that bothered anybody creating anything in this generation. The painters naturally were looking, that was their occupation and they had too to be certain that looking was not confusing itself with remembering. Remembering with them takes the form of suggesting in their painting in place of having actually created the thing in itself that they are painting.

In writing the thing that is the difficulty is the question of

confusing time, and this is the thing that bothered and still bothers any one in this generation. Later on in another writing I will tell about how this thing that is time has to do with grammar vocabulary and tenses. But now I am keeping strictly to the matter of portraits and repetition.

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 and at first if I were to include a complicated listening and talking it would be too difficult to do. That is why painters paint still lives. You do see why they do.

So I began to do this thing, I tried to include color and movement and what I did is what you have all either read or heard of, a volume called Tender Buttons.

I for a time did not make portraits because as I was trying to live in looking, and looking was not to mix itself up with remembering I wished to reduce to its minimum listening and talking. In Tender Buttons, I described anything, and I will read you a few things to show you what I did then.

#### A DOG.

A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey.

*Tender Buttons*, page 26.

Cloudiness what is cloudiness, is it a lining, is it a roll, is it melting.

*Tender Buttons*, page 38.

A hurt mended stick, a hurt mended cup, a hurt mended article of exceptional relaxation and annoyance, a hurt mended, hurt and mended is so necessary that no mistake is intended.

*Tender Buttons*, page 43.

Abandon a garden and the house is bigger. This is not smiling. This is comfortable. There is the comforting of predilection. An open object is establishing the loss that there was when the vase was not inside the place. It was not wandering.

*Portraits and Prayers*, page 101.

You see what I mean, I did express what something was, a little by talking and listening to that thing, but a great deal by looking at that thing.

This as I say has been the great problem of our generation, so much happens and anybody at any moment knows everything that is happening that things happening although interesting are not really exciting. And an artist inevitably has to do what is really exciting. That is what he is inside him, that is what an artist really is inside him, he is exciting, and if he is not there is nothing to any of it.

And so the excitement in me was then that I was to more and more include looking to make it a part of listening and talking and I did the portrait of Mabel Dodge and Susie Asado and Preciosilla and some others. But this was all after I had done Tender Buttons.

I began to wonder at at about this time just what one saw when one looked at anything really looked at anything. Did one see sound, and what was the relation between color and sound, did it make itself by description by a word that meant it or did it make itself by a word in itself. All this time I was of course not interested in emotion or that anything happened. I was less interested then in these things than I ever had been. I lived my life with emotion and with things happening but I was creating in my writing by simply looking. I was as I say at that time reducing as far as it was possible for me to reduce them, talking and listening.

I became more and more excited about how words which were the words that made whatever I looked at look like itself were not the words that had in them any quality of description. This excited me very much at that time.

And the thing that excited me so very much at that time and still does is that the words or words that make what I looked at be itself were always words that to me very exactly related themselves to that thing the thing at which I was looking, but as often as not had as I say nothing whatever to do with what any words would do that described that thing.

Those of you that have seen Four Saints in Three Acts must know do know something of what I mean.

Of course by the time Four Saints was written I had mastered very much what I was doing then when I wrote Tender

Buttons. By the time I wrote the Four Saints I had written a great many portraits and I had in hundreds of ways related words, then sentences then paragraphs to the thing at which I was looking and I had also come to have happening at the same time looking and listening and talking without any bother about resemblances and remembering.

One of the things as I said that made me most anxious at one time was the relation of color to the words that exactly meant that but had no clement in it of description. One portrait I did I will read it to you of Lipschitz did this color thing better than I had ever before been able to do it.

## LIPSCHITZ

Like and like likely and likely likely and likely like and like.

He had a dream. He dreamed he heard a pheasant calling and very likely a pheasant was calling.

To whom went.

He had a dream he dreamed he heard a pheasant calling and most likely a pheasant was calling.

In time.

*Portraits and Prayers*, page 63.

Thus for over a very considerable period of time sometimes a great many at a time and sometimes one at a time and sometimes several at a time I continued to do portraits. Around about this time I did a second one of Carl Van Vechten, one of Sherwood Anderson, one of Cocteau and a second one of Picasso. They were different from those that I had done in the beginning and very different from those I did just after doing Tender Buttons. These were less concentrated, they moved more although the movement was definitely connected with color and not so closely connected with talking and listening.

## VAN OR TWENTY YEARS AFTER

## A SECOND PORTRAIT OF CARL VAN VECHTEN.

Twenty years after, as much as twenty years after in as much as twenty years after, after twenty years and so on.

It is it is it is it is.

Keep it in sight all right.

Not to the future but to the fuchsia.

Tied and untied and that is all there is about it. And as tied and as beside, and as beside and tied. Tied and untied and beside and as beside and as untied and as tied and as untied and as beside.

*Portraits and Prayers*, page 157.

And then slowly it changed again, talking and listening came slowly again to be more important than that at which I was looking. Talking and listening became more important again but at the same time that it was talking and listening it had within itself an entirely different motion of moving.

Let me tell you just what I did at this thing.

As always happens one commences again. However often it happens one does commence again and now in my way I did commence again.

I was again bothered about something and it had to do as my bother always has had to do with a thing being contained within itself.

I realized that granted looking and listening and talking being all happening at one time and that I had been finding the words that did create that thing did create the portrait that was the object of the looking listening and talking I had been doing nevertheless I had been losing something, something I had had, in The Making of Americans and in Tender Buttons, that is a thing contained within itself.

As I say a motor goes inside and the car goes on, but my business my ultimate business as an artist was not with where the car goes as it goes but with the movement inside that is of the essence of its going. And had I in these rather beautiful portraits I had been writing had I a little lost this thing. Whether I had or whether I had not began a little to worry me not really worry but to be there inside me, had I lost a little the excitement of having this inside me. Had I. I did not think I really had but had I.

This brings me back once more to the subject of repetition.

The composition we live in changes but essentially what happens does not change. We inside us do not change but our emphasis and the moment in which we live changes. That is it is never the same moment it is never the same emphasis

at any successive moment of existing. Then really what is repetition. It is very interesting to ask and it is a very interesting thing to know.

If you think anything over and over and eventually in connection with it you are going to succeed or fail, succeeding and failing is repetition because you are always either succeeding or failing but any two moments of thinking it over is not repetition. Now you see that is where I differ from a great many people who say I repeat and they do not. They do not think their succeeding or failing is what makes repetition, in other words they do not think that what happens makes repetition but that it is the moment to moment emphasizing that makes repetition. Now I think the succeeding and failing is what makes the repetition not the moment to moment emphasizing that makes repetition.

Instinctively as I say you all agree with me because really in these days you all like crime stories or have liked crime stories or if you have not you should have and at any rate you do like newspapers or radio or funny papers, and in all these it is the moment to moment emphasis in what is happening that is interesting, the succeeding and failing is really not the thing that is interesting.

In the portraits that I did in that period of which I have just been speaking the later period considerably after the war the strictness of not letting remembering mix itself with looking and listening and talking which began with *The Making of Americans* and went on all through *Tender Buttons* and what came immediately after, all the period of *Geography* and *Plays* this strictness perhaps weakened a little weakened a little because and that in a way was an astonishment to me, I found that I was for a little while very much taken with the beauty of the sounds as they came from me as I made them.

This is a thing that may be at any time a temptation. This temptation came to me a little after the *Saint Remy* period when I wrote *Saints in Seven*, *Four Religions*, *Capital Capitals*. The strict discipline that I had given myself, the absolute refusal of never using a word that was not an exact word all through the *Tender Buttons* and what I may call the early *Spanish* and *Geography* and *Plays* period finally resulted in things like *Susie Asado* and *Preciosilla* etc. in an extraordinary

melody of words and a melody of excitement in knowing that I had done this thing.

Then in concentrating this melody I wrote in *Saint Remy* these things I have just mentioned *Four Religions*, *Capital Capitals*, *Saints in Seven* and a great many other things. In doing these I concentrated the internal melody of existence that I had learned in relation to things seen into the feeling I then had there in *Saint Remy* of light and air and air moving and being still. I worked at these things then with a great deal of concentration and as it was to me an entirely new way of doing it I had as a result a very greatly increased melody. This melody for a little while after rather got the better of me and it was at that time that I wrote these portraits of which I have just spoken, the second *Picasso*, the second *Carl Van Vechten*, the *Jean Cocteau*, *Lipschitz*, the *Stiwells*, *Edith Stiwell*, *Joe Davidson*, quantities of portraits. Portraits after my concentrated effort at *Saint Remy* to really completely and exactly find the word for the air and sky and light and existence down there was relatively a simple thing and I as you may say held these portraits in my hand and they came easily and beautifully and truly. But as I say I did begin to think that I was rather drunk with what I had done. And I am always one to prefer being sober: I must be sober. It is so much more exciting to be sober, to be exact and concentrated and sober. So then as I say I began again.

So here we have it. There was the period of *The Making of Americans* portraiture, when by listening and talking I conceived at every moment the existence of some one, and I put down each moment that I had the existence of that one inside in me until I had completely emptied myself of this that I had had as a portrait of that one. This as I say made what has been called repetition but, and you will see, each sentence is just the difference in emphasis that inevitably exists in the successive moment of my containing within me the existence of that other one achieved by talking and listening inside in me and inside in that one. These were the early portraits I did. Then this slowly changed to portraits of spaces inclosed with or without somebody in them but written in the same way in the successive moments of my realizing them. As I said it was if you like, it was like a cinema picture made up of succession

and each moment having its own emphasis that is its own difference and so there was the moving and the existence of each moment as it was in me.

Then as I said I had the feeling that something should be included and that something was looking, and so concentrating on looking I did the Tender Buttons because it was easier to do objects than people if you were just looking. Then I began to do plays to make the looking have in it an element of moving and during this time I also did portraits that did the same thing. In doing these things I found that I created a melody of words that filled me with a melody that gradually made me do portraits easily by feeling the melody of any one. And this then began to bother me because perhaps I was getting drunk with melody and I do not like to be drunk I like to be sober and so I began again.

I began again not to let the looking be predominating not to have the listening and talking be predominating but to once more denude all this of anything in order to get back to the essence of the thing contained within itself. That led me to some very different writing that I am going to tell about in the next thing I write but it also led to some portraits that I do think did do what I was then hoping would be done that is at least by me, would be done in this way if it were to be done by me.

Of these there were quite a number but perhaps two that did it the most completely the thing I wanted to do were portraits of George Hugnet and Bernard Fay. I will read them to you and you will see what I mean. All the looking was there the talking and listening was there but instead of giving what I was realizing at any and every moment of them and of me until I was empty of them I made them contained within the thing I wrote that was them. The thing in itself folded itself up inside itself like you might fold a thing up to be another thing which is that thing inside in that thing.

Do you see what I mean.

If you think how you fold things or make a boat or anything else out of paper or getting anything to be inside anything, the hole in the doughnut or the apple in the dumpling perhaps you will see what I mean. I will try and tell a little more

about this thing and how I felt about this thing and how it happened.

This time I do repeat; in going over this again, there was the portrait writing of The Making of Americans period. There was the portrait writing of the Tender Buttons period, Mabel Dodge came into that. There was the portrait writing of the Geography and Plays period, which ended up with Capital Capitals, and then there was the portrait writing of the Useful Knowledge period, including portraits of Sherwood Anderson and Carl Van Vechten. Of course in each one of these periods there were many many portraits written as I wrote portraits of almost any one and as at all times I write practically every day, to be sure not long but practically every day and if you write not long but practically every day you do get a great deal written. This is what I do and so I do do get a great deal written. I have written a great many portraits.

So then as I said at the end of all this I had come to know I had a melody and to be certain of my melody that melody carried me to be sure always by looking and listening and talking but melody did carry me and so as always I had once more to begin again and I began again.

Melody should always be a by-product it should never be an end in itself it should not be a thing by which you live if you really and truly are one who is to do anything and so as I say I very exactly began again.

I had begun again some time before in working at grammar and sentences and paragraphs and what they mean and at plays and how they disperse themselves in relation to anything seen. And soon I was so completely concerned with these things that melody, beauty if you like was once more as it should always be a by-product.

I did at the same time as I did plays and grammar at this time, I did do portraits in these portraits I felt an entirely different thing. How could a thing if it is a human being if it is anything be entirely contained within itself. Of course it is, but is it and how is it and how did I know that it is.

This was the thing that I found then to be completely interesting, this was the thing I found then to be completely exciting. How was anything contained within itself.

I felt that I began then to feel any one to be inside then very differently than I had ever found any one be themselves inside them. This was the time that I wrote Lucy Chure Amiably which quite definitely as a conception of what is seen was contained by itself inside it, although there it was a conceiving of what I was looking at as a landscape was to be inside in it, it was I said to be like an engraving and I think it is. But the people in it were in it as contained within the whole of it. I wanted however to do portraits where there was more movement inside in the portrait and yet it was to be the whole portrait completely held within that inside.

I began to feel movement to be a different thing than I had felt it to be.

It was to me beginning to be a less detailed thing and at the same time a thing that existed so completely inside it and it was it was so completely inside that really looking and listening and talking were not a way any longer needed for me to know about this thing about movement being existing.

And how could I have this happen, let me read you the short portrait of George Hugnet and perhaps you will see what I mean. It is all there:

It really does not make any difference who George Hugnet was or what he did or what I said, all that was necessary was that there was something completely contained within itself and being contained within itself was moving, not moving in relation to anything not moving in relation to itself but just moving, I think I almost at that time did this thing. Do you at all in this portrait of George Hugnet that I will now read to you do you really see what I mean and in this portrait of Bernard Fay.

GEORGE HUGNET

George Genevieve Gerromimo straightened it out without their finding it out.  
 Grammar makes George in our ring which Grammar makes George in our ring.  
 Grammar is as disappointed not is as grammar is as disappointed.  
 Grammar is not as Grammar is as disappointed.

George is in our ring. Grammar is not is disappointed. In are ring.

George Genevieve in are ring.

*Portraits and Prayers, page 66.*

BERNARD FAY

Patience is amiable and amiably.  
 What is amiable and amiably.  
 Patience is amiable and amiably.  
 What is impatience.  
 Impatience is amiable and amiably.

*Portraits and Prayers, page 42.*

Anyway this was to me a tremendously important thing and why. Well it was an important thing in itself for me but it was also an important thing because it made me realize what poetry really is.

This has something to do with what Edgar Allan Poe is. But now to make you understand, that although I was as usual looking listening and talking perhaps more than ever at that time and leading a very complicated and perhaps too exciting every day living, never the less it really did not matter what I saw or said or heard, or if you like felt, because now there was at last something that was more vibrant than any of all that and somehow some way I had isolated it and in a way had gotten it written. It was about that time that I wrote Four Saints.

This was all very exciting and it went on and I did not do a great many portraits at that time. I wrote a great deal of poetry a great many plays and operas and some novels in which I tried again to do this thing, in one or two I more or less did, one called Brim Beauvais, I very often did, that is I created something out of something without adding anything, do you see what I mean.

It does mean something I do assure you it does mean something although it is very difficult to say it in any way except in the way that I said it then.

And so as I say I did not write a great many portraits at that time.

Then slowly I got a little tired, all that had been tremendously exciting, and one day then I began to write the Auto-

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biography of Alice B. Toklas. You all know the joke of that, and in doing it I did an entirely different something some- thing that I had been thinking about for some time and that had come out of some poetry I had been writing, Before The Flowers Of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded, but that is too long a story to begin now but it will be all told in Poetry and Grammar.

However the important thing was that for the first time in writing, I felt something outside me while I was writing, hitherto I had always had nothing but what was inside me while I was writing. Beside that I had been going for the first time since my college days to lectures. I had been going to hear Bernard Fay lecture about Franco-American things and I had become interested in the relation of a lecturer to his audience. I had never thought about an audience before not even when I wrote Composition As Explanation which was a lecture but now I suddenly began, to feel the outside inside and the inside outside and it was perhaps not so exciting but it was very interesting. Anyway it was quite exciting.

And so I wrote the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and told what happened as it had happened.

As I said way back, as now everybody at any moment can know what it is that happens while it happens, what happens is interesting but it is not really exciting. And I am not sure that I am not right about that. I hope you all think I am right about that. At any rate it is true there is something much more exciting than anything that happens and now and always I am writing the portrait of that.

I have been writing the portraits of Four In America, trying to write Grant, and Wilbur Wright and Henry James and Washington do other things than they did do so as to try to find out just what it is that what happens has to do with what is.

I have finished that and now I am trying in these lectures to tell what is by telling about how it happened that I told about what it is.

I hope you quite all see what I mean. Anyway I suppose inevitably I will go on doing it.

## Poetry and Grammar

**W**HAT is poetry and if you know what poetry is what is prose.

There is no use in telling more than you know, no not even if you do not know it.

But do you do you know what prose is and do you know what poetry is.

I have said that the words in plays written in poetry are more lively than the same words written by the same poet in other kinds of poetry. It undoubtedly was true of Shakespeare, is it inevitably true of everybody. That is one thing to think about. I said that the words in a play written in prose are not as lively words as the words written in other prose by the same writer. This is true of Goldsmith and I imagine it is true of almost any writer.

There again there is something to know.

One of the things that is a very interesting thing to know is how you are feeling inside you to the words that are coming out to be outside of you.

Do you always have the same kind of feeling in relation to the sounds as the words come out of you or do you not. All this has so much to do with grammar and with poetry and with prose.

Words have to do everything in poetry and prose and some writers write more in articles and prepositions and some say you should write in nouns, and of course one has to think of everything.

A noun is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good.

People if you like to believe it can be made by their names. Call anybody Paul and they get to be a Paul call anybody Alice and they get to be an Alice perhaps yes perhaps no, there is something in that, but generally speaking things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns. Nouns are the name of anything