

Plays

Gertrude Stein

In a book I wrote called *How to Write* I made a discovery which I considered fundamental, that sentences are not emotional and that paragraphs are. I found out about language that paragraphs are emotional and sentences are not and I found out something else about it. I found out that this difference was not a contradiction but a combination and that this combination causes one to think endlessly about sentences and paragraphs because the emotional paragraphs are made up of unemotional sentences.

I found out a fundamental thing about plays. The thing I found out about plays was too a combination and not a contradiction and it was something that makes one think endlessly about plays.

That something is this.

The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not one might say it is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience.

What this says is this.

Your sensation as one in the audience in relation to the play played before you your sensation I say your emotion concerning that play is always either behind or ahead of the play at which you are looking and to which you are listening. So your emotion as a member of the audience is never going on at the same time as the action of the play.

This thing the fact that your emotional time as an audience is not the same as the emotional time of the play is what makes one endlessly troubled

about a play, because not only is there a thing to know as to why this is so but also there is a thing to know why perhaps it does not need to be so.

This is a thing to know and knowledge as anybody can know is a thing to get by getting.

And so I will try to tell you what I had to get and what perhaps I have gotten in plays and to do so I will tell you all that I have ever felt about plays or about any play.

Plays are either read or heard or seen.

And there then comes the question which comes first and which is first, reading or hearing or seeing a play.

I ask you.

What is knowledge. Of course knowledge is what you know and what you know is what you do know.

What do I know about plays.

In order to know one must always go back.

What was the first play I saw and was I then already bothered bothered about the different tempo there is in the play and in yourself and your emotion in having the play go on in front of you. I think I may say I may say I know that I was already troubled by this in that my first experience at a play. The thing seen and the emotion did not go on together.

This that the thing seen and the thing felt about the thing seen not going on at the same tempo is what makes the being at the theater something that makes anybody nervous.

The jazz bands made of this thing, the thing that makes you nervous at the theater, they made of this thing an end in itself. They made of this different tempo a something that was nothing but a difference in tempo between anybody and everybody including all those doing it and all those hearing and seeing it. In the theater of course this difference in tempo is less violent but still it is there and it does make anybody nervous.

In the first place at the theater there is the curtain and the curtain already makes one feel that one is not going to have the same tempo as the thing that is there behind the curtain. The emotion of you on one side of the curtain and what is on the other side of the curtain are not going to be going on together. One will always be behind or in front of the other.

Then also beside the curtain there is the audience and the fact that they are or will be or will not be in the way when the curtain goes up that too makes for nervousness and nervousness is the certain proof that the emotion of the one seeing and the emotion of the thing seen do not progress together.

Nervousness consists in needing to go faster or to go slower so as to get together. It is that that makes anybody feel nervous.

And is it a mistake that that is what the theater is or is it not.

There are things that are exciting as the theater is exciting but do they make you nervous or do they not, and if they do and if they do not why do they and why do they not.

Let us think of three different kinds of things that are exciting and that make or do not make one nervous. First any scene which is a real scene something real that is happening in which one takes part as an actor in that scene. Second any book that is exciting, third the theater at which one sees an exciting action in which one does not take part.

Now in a real scene in which one takes part at which one is an actor what does one feel as to time and what is it that does or does not make one nervous.

And is your feeling at such a time ahead and behind the action the way it is when you are at the theater. It is the same and it is not. But more not.

If you are taking part in an actual violent scene, and you talk and they or he or she talks and it goes on and it gets more exciting and finally then it happens, whatever it is that does happen then when it happens then at the moment of happening is it a relief from the excitement or is it a completion of the excitement. In the real thing it is a completion of the excitement, in the theater it is a relief from the excitement, and in that difference the difference between completion and relief is the difference between emotion concerning a thing seen on the stage and the emotion concerning a real presentation that is really something happening.

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This then is the fundamental difference between excitement in real life and on the stage, in real life it culminates in a sense of completion whether an exciting act or an exciting emotion has been done or not, and on the stage the exciting climax is a relief. And the memory of the two things is different. As you go over the detail that leads to culmination of any scene in real life, you find that each time you cannot get completion, but you can get relief and so already your memory of any exciting scene in which you have taken part turns it into the thing seen or heard not the thing felt. You have as I say as the result relief rather than culmination. Relief from excitement, rather than the climax of excitement. In this respect an exciting story does the same only in the exciting story, you so to speak have control of it as you have in your memory of a really exciting scene, it is not as it is on the stage a thing over which you have no real control. You can with an exciting story find out the end and so begin over again just as you can in remembering an exciting scene, but the stage is different, it is not real and yet it is not within your control as the memory of an exciting thing is or the reading of an exciting book. No matter how well you know the end of the stage story it is nevertheless not within your control as the memory of an exciting thing is or as the written story of an exciting thing is or even in a curious way the heard story of an exciting thing is. And what is the reason for this difference and what does it do to the stage. It makes for nervousness that of course, and the cause of nervousness is the fact that the emotion of the one seeing the play is always ahead or behind the play.

Beside all this there is a thing to be realized and that is how you are being

introduced to the characters who take part in an exciting action even when you yourself are one of the actors. And this too has to be very much thought about. And thought about in relation to an exciting real thing to an exciting book, to an exciting theater. How are you introduced to the characters.

There are then the three ways of having something be exciting, and the excitement may or may not make one nervous, a book being read that is exciting, a scene in which one takes part or an action in which one takes part and the theater at which one looks on.

In each case the excitement and the nervousness and the being behind or ahead in one's feeling is different.

First anything exciting in which one takes part. There one progresses forward and back emotionally and at the supreme crisis of the scene the scene in which one takes part, in which one's hopes and loves and fears take part at the extreme crisis of this thing one is almost one with one's emotions, the action and the emotion go together, there is but just a moment of this coordination but it does exist otherwise there is no completion as one has no result, no result of a scene in which one has taken part, and so instinctively when any people are living an exciting moment one with another they go on and on and on until the thing has come together the emotion the action the excitement and that is the way it is when there is any violence either of loving or hating or quarreling or losing or succeeding. But there is, there has to be the moment of it all being abreast the emotion, the excitement and the action otherwise there would be no succeeding and no failing and so no one would go on living, why yes of course not.

That is life the way it is lived.

Why yes of course and there is a reasonable and sometimes an unreasonable and very often not a reasonable amount of excitement in everybody's life and when it happens it happens in that way.

Now when you read a book how is it. Well it is not exactly like that no not even when a book is even more exciting than any excitement one has ever had. In the first place one can always look at the end of the book and so quiet down one's excitement. The excitement having been quieted down one can enjoy the excitement just as any one can enjoy the excitement of anything having happened to them by remembering and so tasting it over and over again but each time less intensely and each time until it is all over. Those who like to read books over and over get continuously this sensation of the excitement as if it were a pleasant distant thunder that rolls and rolls and the more it rolls well the further it rolls the pleasanter until it does not roll any more. That is until at last you have read the book so often that it no longer holds any excitement not even ever so faintly and then you have to wait until you have forgotten it and you can begin it again.

Now the theater has still another way of being all this to you, the thing causing your emotion and the excitement in connection with it.

Of course lots of other things can do these things to lots of other people

that is to say excite lots of people but as I have said knowledge is what you know and I naturally tell you what I know, as I do so very essentially believe in knowledge.

So then once again what does the theater do and how does it do it.

What happens on the stage and how and how does one feel about it. That is the thing to know, to know and to tell it as so.

Is the thing seen or the thing heard the thing that makes most of its impression upon you at the theater. How much has the hearing to do with it and how little. Does the thing heard replace the thing seen. Does it help or does it interfere with it.

And when you are taking part in something really happening that is exciting, how is it. Does the thing seen or does the thing heard affect you and affect you at the same time or in the same degree or does it not. Can you wait to hear or can you wait to see and which excites you the most. And what has either one to do with the completion of the excitement when the excitement is a real excitement that is excited by something really happening. And then little by little does the hearing replace the seeing or does the seeing replace the hearing. Do they go together or do they not. And when the exciting something in which you have taken part arrives at its completion does the hearing replace the seeing or does it not. Does the seeing replace the hearing or does it not. Or do they both go on together.

All this is very important, and important for me and important, just important. It has of course a great deal to do with the theater a great great deal.

In connection with reading an exciting book the thing is again more complicated than just seeing, because of course in reading one sees but one also hears and when the story is at its most exciting does one hear more than one sees or does one not do so.

I am posing all these questions to you because of course in writing, all these things are things that are really most entirely really exciting. But of course yes.

And in asking a question one is not answering but one is as one may say deciding about knowing. Knowing is what you know and in asking these questions although there is no one who answers these questions there is in them that there is knowledge. Knowledge is what you know.

And now is the thing seen or the thing heard the thing that makes most of its impression upon you at the theater, and does as the scene on the theater proceeds does the hearing take the place of seeing as perhaps it does when something real is being most exciting, or does seeing take the place of hearing as it perhaps does when anything real is happening or does the mixture get to be more mixed seeing and hearing as perhaps it does when anything really exciting is really happening.

If the emotion of the person looking at the theater does or does not do what it would do if it were really a real something that was happening and

they were taking part in it or they were looking at it, when the emotion of the person looking on at the theater comes then at the climax to relief rather than completion has the mixture of seeing and hearing something to do with this and does this mixture have something to do with the nervousness of the emotion at the theater which has perhaps to do with the fact that the emotion of the person at the theater is always behind and ahead of the scene at the theater but not with it.

There are then quite a number of things that any one does or does not know.

Does the thing heard replace the thing seen does it help it or does it interfere with it. Does the thing seen replace the thing heard or does it help or does it interfere with it.

I suppose one might have gotten to know a good deal about these things from the cinema and how it changed from sight to sound, and how much before there was real sound how much of the sight was sound or how much it was not. In other words the cinema undoubtedly had a new way of understanding sight and sound in relation to emotion and time.

I may say that as a matter of fact the thing which has induced a person like myself to constantly think about the theater from the standpoint of sight and sound and its relation to emotion and time, rather than in relation to story and action is the same as you may say general form of conception as the inevitable experiments made by the cinema although the method of doing so has naturally nothing to do with the other. I myself never go to the cinema or hardly ever practically never and the cinema has never read my work or hardly ever. The fact remains that there is the same impulse to solve the problem of time in relation to emotion and the relation of the scene to the emotion of the audience in the one case as in the other. There is the same impulse to solve the problem of the relation of seeing and hearing in the one case as in the other.

It is in short the inevitable problem of anybody living in the composition of the present time, that is living as we are now living as we have it and now do live in it.

The business of Art as I tried to explain in *Composition as Explanation* is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present.

But to come back to that other question which is at once so important a part of any scene in real life, in books or on the stage, how are the actors introduced to the sight, hearing and consciousness of the person having the emotion about them. How is it done in each case and what has that to do with the way the emotion progresses.

How are the actors in a real scene introduced to those acting with them in that scene and how are the real actors in a real scene introduced to you who are going to be in an exciting scene with them. How does it happen, that is, as it usually happens.

And how are the actors in a book scene introduced to the reader of the book, how does one come to know them, that is how is one really introduced to them.

And how are the people on the stage that is the people the actors act how are they introduced to the audience and what is the reason why, the reason they are introduced in the way that they are introduced, and what happens, and how does it matter, and how does it affect the emotions of the audience.

In a real scene, naturally in a real scene, you either have already very well known all the actors in the real scene of which you are one, or you have not. More generally you have than you have not, but and this is the element of excitement in an exciting scene, it quite of course is the element of excitement in an exciting scene that is in a real scene, all that you have known of the persons including yourself who are taking part in the exciting scene, although you have most probably known them very well, what makes it exciting is that insofar as the scene is exciting they the actors in the scene including yourself might just as well have been strangers because they all act talk and feel differently from the way you have expected them to act feel or talk. And this that they feel act and talk including yourself differently from the way you would have thought that they would act feel and talk makes the scene an exciting scene and makes the climax of this scene which is a real scene a climax of completion and not a climax of relief. That is what a real scene is. Would it make any difference in a real scene if they were all strangers, if they had never known each other. Yes it would, it would be practically impossible in the real scene to have a really exciting scene if they were all strangers because generally speaking it is the contradiction between the way you know the people you know including yourself act and the way they are acting or feeling or talking that makes of any scene that is an exciting scene an exciting scene.

Of course there are other exciting scenes in peace and in war in which the exciting scene takes place with strangers but in that case for the purpose of excitement you are all strangers but so completely strangers, including you yourself to yourself as well as the others to each other and to you that they are not really individuals and inasmuch as that is so it has the advantage and the disadvantage that you proceed by a series of completions which follow each other so closely that when it is all over you cannot remember that is you cannot really reconstruct the thing, the thing that has happened. That is something that one must think about in relation to the theater and it is a very interesting thing. Then in a case like that where you are all strangers in an exciting scene what happens as far as hearing and seeing is concerned. When in an exciting scene where you are all strangers you to yourself and you to them and they to you and they to each other and where no one of all of them including yourself have any consciousness of knowing each other do you have the disadvantage of not knowing the difference between hearing and seeing and is that a disadvantage from the standpoint of remembering. From that standpoint the standpoint of remembering it is a serious disadvantage.

But we may say that that exciting experience of exciting scenes where you have really no acquaintance with the other actors as well as none with yourself in an exciting action are comparatively rare and are not the normal material of excitement as it is exciting in the average person's experience.

As I say in the kind of excitement where you have had no normal introduction to the actors of the scene the action and the emotion is so violent that sight sound and emotion is so little realized that it cannot be remembered and therefore in a kind of a way it has really nothing to do with anything because really it is more exciting action than exciting emotion or excitement. I think I can say that these are not the same thing. Have they anything to do with the way the theater gets you to know or not to know what the people on the stage are. Perhaps yes and perhaps no.

In ordinary life one has known pretty well the people with whom one is having the exciting scene before the exciting scene takes place and one of the most exciting elements in the excitement be it love or a quarrel or a struggle is that, that having been well known that is familiarly known, they all act in acting violently act in the same way as they always did of course only the same way has become so completely different that from the standpoint of familiar acquaintance there is none there is complete familiarity but there is no proportion that has hitherto been known, and it is this which makes the scene the real scene exciting, and it is this that leads to completion, the proportion achieves in your emotion the new proportion therefore it is completion but not relief. A new proportion cannot be a relief.

Now how does one naturally get acquainted in real life which makes one have a familiarity with some one. By a prolonged familiarity of course.

And how does one achieve this familiarity with the people in a book or the people on the stage. Or does one.

In real life the familiarity is of course the result of accident, intention or natural causes but in any case there is a progressive familiarity that makes one acquainted.

Now in a book there is an attempt to do the same thing that is, to say, to do a double thing, to make the people in the book familiar with each other and to make the reader familiar with them. That is the reason in a book it is always a strange doubling, the familiarity between the characters in the book is a progressive familiarity and the familiarity between them and the reader is a familiarity that is a forcing process or an incubation. It makes of course a double time and later at another time we will go into that.

But now how about the theater.

It is not possible in the theater to produce familiarity which is of the essence of acquaintance because, in the first place when the actors are there they are there and they are there right away.

When one reads a play and very often one does read a play, anyway one did read Shakespeare's plays a great deal at least I did, it was always necessary to keep one's finger in the list of characters for at least the whole first act, and in a way it is necessary to do the same when the play is played. One has one's

program for that and beside one has to become or has become acquainted with the actors as an actor and one has one's program too for that. And so the introduction to the characters on the stage has a great many different sides to it. And this has again a great deal to do with the nervousness of the theater excitement.

Anybody who was as I was, brought up and at the time that I was brought up was brought up in Oakland and in San Francisco inevitably went to the theater a lot. Actors in those days liked to go out to the coast and as it was expensive to get back and not expensive to stay there they stayed. Besides that there were a great many foreign actors who came and having come stayed and any actor who stays acts and so there was always a great deal to see on the stage and children went, they went with each other and they went alone, and they went with people who were older, and there was twenty-five cent opera to which anybody went and the theater was natural and anybody went to the theater. I did go a great deal in those days. I also read plays a great deal. I rather liked reading plays, I very much liked reading plays. In the first place there was in reading plays as I have said the necessity of going forward and back to the list of characters to find out which was which and then insensibly to know. Then there was the poetry and then gradually there were the portraits.

I can remember quite definitely in the reading of plays that there were very decidedly these three things, the way of getting acquainted that was not an imitation of what one usually did, but the having to remember which character was which. That was very different from real life or from a book. Then there was the element of poetry. Poetry connected with a play was livelier poetry than poetry unconnected with a play. In the first place there were a great many bits that were short and sometimes it was only a line.

I remember *Henry VI* which I read and reread and which of course I have never seen played but which I liked to read because there were so many characters and there were so many little bits in it that were lively words. In the poetry of plays words are more lively words than in any other kind of poetry and if one naturally liked lively words and I naturally did one likes to read plays in poetry. I always as a child read all the plays I could get hold of that were in poetry. Plays in prose do not read so well. The words in prose are livelier when they are not a play. I am not saying anything about why, it is just a fact.

So then for me there was the reading of plays which was one thing and then there was the seeing of plays and of operas a great many of them which was another thing.

Later on so very much later on there was for me the writing of plays which was one thing and there was at that time no longer any seeing of plays. I practically when I wrote my first play had completely ceased going to the theater. In fact although I have written a great many plays and I am quite sure they are plays I have since I commenced writing these plays I have

practically never been inside of any kind of a theater. Of course none of this has been intentional, one may say generally speaking that anything that is really inevitable, that is to say necessary is not intentional.

But to go back to the plays I did see, and then to go on to the plays I did write.

It was then a natural thing in the Oakland and San Francisco in which I was brought up to see a great many plays played. Beside there was a great deal of opera played and so all of it was natural enough and how did I feel about it.

Generally speaking all the early recollections all a child's feeling of the theater is two things. One which is in a way like a circus that is the general movement and light and air which any theatre has, and a great deal of glitter in the light and a great deal of height in the air, and then there are moments, a very very few moments but still moments. One must be pretty far advanced in adolescence before one realizes a whole play.

Up to the time of adolescence when one does really live in a whole play up to that time the theater consists of bright filled space and usually not more than one moment in a play.

I think this is fairly everybody's experience and it was completely mine.

Uncle Tom's Cabin may not have been my first play but it was very nearly my first play. I think my first play really was *Pinafore* in London but the theater there was so huge that I do not remember at all seeing a stage I only remember that it felt like a theater that is the theater did. I doubt if I did see the stage.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* I remember only the escape across the ice, I imagine because the blocks of ice moving up and down naturally would catch my eye more than the people on the stage would.

The next thing was the opera the twenty-five cent opera of San Francisco and the fight in Faust. But that I imagine was largely because my brother had told me about the fight in Faust. As a matter of fact I gradually saw more of the opera because I saw it quite frequently. Then there was Buffalo Bill and the Indian attack, well of course anybody raised where everybody collected arrow heads and played Indians would notice Indians. And then there was Lohengrin, and there all that I saw was the swan being changed into a boy, our insisting on seeing that made my father with us lose the last boat home to Oakland, but my brother and I did not mind, naturally not as it was the moment.

In spite of my having seen operas quite often the first thing that I remember as sound on the stage was the playing by some English actor of Richelieu at the Oakland theater and his repeated calling out, Nemours Nemours. That is the first thing that I remember hearing with my ears at the theater and as I say nothing is more interesting to know about the theater than the relation of sight and sound. It is always the most interesting thing about anything to know whether you hear or you see. And how one has to do with

the other. It is one of the important things in finding out how you know what you know.

Then I enormously remember Booth playing Hamlet but there again the only thing I noticed and it is rather a strange thing to have noticed is his lying at the Queen's feet during the play. One would suppose that a child would notice other things in the play than that but that is what I remember and I noticed him there more than I did the play he saw, although I knew that there was a play going on there, that is the little play. It was in this way that I first felt two things going on at one time. That is something that one has to come to feel.

Then the next thing I knew was adolescence and going to the theater all the time, a great deal alone, and all of it making an outside inside existence for me, not so real as books, which were all inside me, but so real that it the theater made me real outside of me which up to that time I never had been in my emotion. I had largely been so in an active daily life but not in any emotion.

Then gradually there came the beginning of really realizing the great difficulty of having my emotion accompany the scene and then moreover I became fairly consciously troubled by the things over which one stumbles over which one stumbled to such an extent that the time of one's emotion in relation to the scene was always interrupted. The things over which one stumbled and there it was a matter both of seeing and of hearing were clothes, voices, what they the actors said, how they were dressed and how that related itself to their moving around. Then the bother of never being able to begin over again because before it had commenced it was over, and at no time had you been ready, either to commence or to be over. Then I began to vaguely wonder whether I could see and hear at the same time and which helped or interfered with the other and which helped or interfered with the thing on the stage having been over before it really commenced. Could I see and hear and feel at the same time and did I.

I began to be a good deal troubled by all these things, the more emotion I felt while at the theater the more troubled I became by all these things.

And then I was relieved.

As I said San Francisco was a wonderful place to hear and see foreign actors as at that time they liked it when they got there and they stayed and they played.

I must have been about sixteen years old and Bernhardt came to San Francisco and stayed two months. I knew a little French of course but really it did not matter, it was all so foreign and her voice being so varied and it all being so French I could rest in it untroubled. And I did.

It was better than the opera because it went on. It was better than the theater because you did not have to get acquainted. The manners and customs of the french theater created a thing in itself and it existed in and for itself as the poetical plays had that I used so much to read, there were so

many characters just as there were in those plays and you did not have to know them they were so foreign, and the foreign scenery and actuality replaced the poetry and the voices replaced the portraits. It was for me a very simple direct and moving pleasure.

This experience curiously enough and yet perhaps it was not so curious awakened in me a desire for melodrama on the stage, because there again everything happened so quietly one did not have to get acquainted and as what the people felt was of no importance one did not have to realize what was said.

This pleasure in melodrama and in those days there was always one theater in a theatrically inclined town that played melodrama, this pleasure in melodrama culminated for me in the Civil War dramas of that period and the best of them was of course *Secret Service*. Gillette had conceived a new technique, silence stillness and quick movement. Of course it had been done in the melodrama already by the villains particularly in such plays as the *Queen of Chinatown* and those that had to do with telegraph operators. But Gillette had not only done it but he had conceived it and it made the whole stage the whole play this technique silence stillness and quick movement. One was no longer bothered by the theater, you had to get acquainted of course but that was quickly over and after that nothing bothered. In fact Gillette created what the cinema later repeated by mixing up the short story and the stage but there is yet the trouble with the cinema that it is after all a photograph, and a photograph continues to be a photograph and yet can it become something else. Perhaps it can but that is a whole other question. If it can then some one will have to feel that about it. But to go on.

From then on I was less and less interested in the theater.

I became more interested in opera, I went one went and the whole business almost came together and then finally, just finally, I came not to care at all for music and so having concluded that music was made for adolescents and not for adults and having just left adolescence behind me and besides I knew all the operas anyway by that time I did not care any more for opera.

Then I came to Paris to live and there for a long time I did not go to the theater at all. I forgot the theater, I never thought about the theater. I did sometimes think about the opera. I went to the opera once in Venice and I liked it and then much later Strauss's *Electra* made me realize that in a kind of a way there could be a solution of the problem of conversation on the stage. Beside it was a new opera and it is quite exciting to hear something unknown really unknown.

But as I say I settled down to Paris life and I forgot the theater and almost forgot opera. There was of course Isadora Duncan and then the Russian ballet and in between Spain and the Argentine and bullfights and I began once more to feel something about something going on at a theater.

And then I went back, not in my reading but in my feeling to the reading

of plays in my childhood, the lots of characters, the poetry and the portraits and the scenery which was always of course and ought always to be of course woods that is forests and trees and streets and windows.

And so one day all of a sudden I began to write Plays.

I remember very well the first one I wrote. I called it "What Happened, a Play," it is in *Geography and Plays* as are all the plays I wrote at that time. I think and always have thought that if you write a play you ought to announce that it is a play and that is what I did. What Happened. A Play.

I had just come home from a pleasant dinner party and I realized then as anybody can know that something is always happening.

Something is always happening, anybody knows a quantity of stories of people's lives that are always happening, there are always plenty for the newspapers and there are always plenty in private life. Everybody knows so many stories and what is the use of telling another story. What is the use of telling a story since there are so many and everybody knows so many and tells so many. In the country it is perfectly extraordinary how many complicated dramas go on all the time. And everybody knows them, so why tell another one. There is always a story going on.

So naturally what I wanted to do in my play was what everybody did not always know nor always tell. By everybody I do of course include myself by always I do of course include myself.

And so I wrote *What Happened, A Play*.

Then I wrote *Ladies Voices* and then I wrote a *Curtain Raiser*. I did this last because I wanted still more to tell what could be told if one did not tell anything.

Perhaps I will read some of these to you later.

Then I went to Spain and there I wrote a lot of plays. I concluded that anything that was not a story could be a play and I even made plays in letters and advertisements.

I had before I began writing plays written many portraits. I had been enormously interested all my life in finding out what made each one that one and so I had written a great many portraits.

I came to think that since each one is that one and that there are a number of them each one being that one, the only way to express this thing each one being that one and there being a number of them knowing each other was in a play. And so I began to write these plays. And the idea in "What Happened, a Play" was to express this without telling what happened, in short to make a play the essence of what happened. I tried to do this with the first series of plays that I wrote.

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I have of course always been struggling with this thing, to say what you nor I nor nobody knows, but what is really what you and I and everybody knows, and as I say everybody hears stories but the thing that makes each one what he is is not that. Everybody hears stories and knows stories. How can

they not because that is what anybody does and what everybody tells. But in my portraits I had tried to tell what each one is without telling stories and now in my early plays I tried to tell what happened without telling stories so that the essence of what happened would be like the essence of the portraits, what made what happened be what it was. And then I had for the moment gone as far as I could then go in plays and I went back to poetry and portraits and description.

Then I began to spend my summers in Bilignin in the department of the Ain and there I lived in a landscape that made itself its own landscape. I slowly came to feel that since the landscape was the thing, I had tried to write it down in *Lucy Church*, *Amiably* and I did but I wanted it even more really, in short I found that since the landscape was the thing, a play was a thing and I went on writing plays a great many plays. The landscape at Bilignin so completely made a play that I wrote quantities of plays.

I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there and so the play being written the relation between you at any time is so exactly that that it is of no importance unless you look at it. Well I did look at it and the result is in all the plays that I have printed as *Operas and Plays*.

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The landscape has its formation and as after all a play has to have formation and be in relation one thing to the other thing and as the story is not the thing as anyone is always telling something then the landscape not moving but being always in relation, the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any detail to any other detail, the story is only of importance if you like to tell or like to hear a story but the relation is there anyway. And of that relation I wanted to make a play and I did, a great number of plays.

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The only one of course that has been played is *Four Saints*. In *Four Saints* I made the saints the landscape. All the saints that I made and I made a number of them because after all a great many pieces of things are in a landscape all these saints together made my landscape. These attendant saints were the landscape and it the play really is a landscape.

A landscape does not move nothing really moves in a landscape but things are there, and I put into the play the things that were there.

Magpies are in the landscape that is they are in the sky of a landscape, they are black and white and they are in the sky of the landscape in Bilignin and in Spain, especially in Avila. When they are in the sky they do something that I have never seen any other bird do they hold themselves up and down and look flat against the sky.

A very famous French inventor of things that have to do with stabilization in aviation told me that what I told him magpies did could not be done by any bird but anyway whether the magpies at Avila do do it or do not at least they look as if they do do it. They look exactly like the birds in the Annunciation pictures the bird which is the Holy Ghost and rests flat against the side sky very high.

There were magpies in my landscape and there were scarecrows.

The scarecrows on the ground are the same thing as the magpies in the sky, they are a part of the landscape.

They the magpies may tell their story if they and you like or even if I like but stories are only stories but that they stay in the air is not a story but a landscape. That scarecrows stay on the ground is the same thing it could be a story but it is a piece of the landscape.

Then as I said streets and windows are also landscape and they added to my Spanish landscape.

While I was writing the *Four Saints* I wanted one always does want the saints to be actually saints before them as well as inside them, I had to see them as well as feel them. As it happened there is on the Boulevard Raspail a place where they make photographs that have always held my attention. They take a photograph of a young girl dressed in the costume of her ordinary life and little by little in successive photographs they change it into a nun. These photographs are small and the thing takes four or five changes but at the end it is a nun and this is done for the family when the nun is dead and in memoriam. For years I had stood and looked at these when I was walking and finally when I was writing Saint Therese in looking at these photographs I saw how Saint Therese existed from the life of an ordinary young lady to that of the nun. And so everything was actual and I went on writing.

Then in another window this time on the rue de Rennes there was a rather large porcelain group and it was of a young soldier giving alms to a beggar and taking off his helmet and his armor and leaving them in the charge of another.

It was somehow just what the young Saint Ignatius did and anyway it looked like him as I had known about him and so he too became actual not as actual as Saint Therese in the photographs but still actual and so the *Four Saints* got written.

All these things might have been a story but as a landscape they were just there and a play is just there. That is at least the way I feel about it.

Anyway I did write *Four Saints an Opera to be Sung* and I think it did almost what I wanted, it made a landscape and the movement in it was like a movement in and out with which anybody looking on can keep in time. I also wanted it to have the movement of nuns very busy and in continuous movement but placid as a landscape has to be because after all the life in a convent is the life of a landscape, it may look excited a landscape does

sometimes look excited but its quality is that a landscape if it ever did go away would have to go away to stay.

Anyway the play as I see it is exciting and it moves but it also stays and that is as I said in the beginning might be what a play should do.

Anyway I am pleased. People write me that they are having a good time while the opera is going on a thing which they say does not very often happen to them at the theater.

So you do see what I have after all meant.

And so this is just at present all I know about the theater.