

76. Gertrude Stein's new drama: Play as The Essence of What Happened

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Abstract

American playwright, novelist, story and biography writer Gertrude Stein, with her avant-garde perception destructing the theatre conventions, became one of the inspiring playwrights for the experimental theater in the twentieth century. Stein's plays were interpreted by directors and performance artists from various disciplines such as painting, music, plastic arts and literature. When we look at her theoretical texts alongside her literary works, the concept of "continuous present" emerges as a strategy developed by Stein against the "tension" she feels due to the "syncopation" between the time of the audience and the time of the play in the conventional theater. The "nervousness" she felt towards the conventional theater also led Gertrude Stein to introduce a new definition of play. Gertrude Stein, whose literary activities can be examined under three periods, describes her plays written in the first period as "the essence of what happened". Contrary to the texts in the conventional theater, Stein gave works that could solve the time conflict in the theater through the "subversive" language she used in these early plays. She wrote without focusing on a story. Within the scope of this article, the use of "continuous present" is to be examined through Stein's play *What Happened* (1913) and the literary strategy developed by her is to be interpreted as a dramaturgical method that will help us understand the avant-garde plays.

Keywords: American Theater; Alternative Theatre; Gertrude Stein; Experimental Theatre, Continuous Present.

Gertrude Stein'in yeni draması: Olan Şeylerin Özü Olarak Oyun²

Öz

Amerikalı oyun, roman, öykü ve biyografi yazarı Gertrude Stein, konvansiyonel tiyatro algısını kıran avangart tiyatro anlayışıyla yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısında alternatif ve deneysel tiyatronun esin kaynağı olan oyun yazarlarının başında gelmiştir. Gertrude Stein'in oyunları resim, müzik, plastik sanatlar ve edebiyat gibi değişik disiplinlerden beslenen yönetmenler ve performans sanatçıları tarafından yorumlanarak sahneye aktarılmıştır. Gertrude Stein'in yazınsal eserlerinin yanında yazdığı teorik metinlere baktığımızda karşımıza çıkan "Sürekliliği şimdi zaman" kavramı ise Stein'in yazımında alışlagelmiş tiyatrodaki seyirci zamanı ile oyunun zamanı arasındaki uyumsuzluktan dolayı hissettiği "gerginliğe" karşı geliştirdiği bir strateji olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Alışlagelmiş tiyatroya karşı hissettiği bu "rahatsızlık" aynı zamanda Gertrude Stein'in tiyatro alanında yeni bir oyun tanımı getirmesine de yol açmıştır. Yazın faaliyetlerini üç dönem altında inceleyebileceğimiz Gertrude Stein, ilk dönemde yazdığı oyunlarını "olan şeylerin özü" olarak nitelemektedir. Alışlagelmiş tiyatrodaki karşımıza çıkan metinlerin aksine anladığımız anlamda bir hikâyeye

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odaklanmadan kaleme aldığı bu ilk dönem oyunlarında kullandığı “yıkıcı” dil aracılığıyla Stein, tiyatrodaki zaman uyumsuzluđına çözüm olabilecek türde eserler üretmiştir. Bu makale kapsamında Gertrude Stein'in yazdığı ilk oyun olma özelliđini taşıyan *Ne Oldu* (1913) isimli oyunu üzerinden “sürekli Őimdiki zaman” kullanımı incelenecek ve adı geöen kavram üzerinden yazarın geliřtirmiş olduđu yazın stratejisi avangart oyun metinlerini anlamamıza yardımcı olacak bir dramaturjik yöntem olarak anlamlandırılmaya çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Amerikan Tiyatrosu, Alternatif Tiyatro; Gertrude Stein; Deneysel Tiyatro; Sürekli Őimdiki Zaman.

Introduction

Gertrude Stein can be seen among the most important figures in the 20th century art along with Antonin Artaud, John Cage, and Bertholt Brecht. Not only did Gertrude Stein write plays but also, she wrote many novels, stories and long poems. After Gertrude Stein the avant-garde theater has been shaped in the light of her theories. Her plays have been produced by many alternative theater groups in off-Broadway and off off-Broadway. Many iconoclastic directors like Richard Foreman, Judith Malina, Robert Wilson and Heiner Goebbels have adapted her texts -plays, novels and poems- into performance. Her definition of play as landscape and use of “continuous present” have inspired many other experimental theater artists from European stages.

Within the scope of this article, the use of “continuous present” is to be examined through Stein's play *What Happened* (1913) and the literary strategy developed by her is to be interpreted as a dramaturgical method that will help us understand the avant-garde plays.

Towards a New Dramaturgical Perspective

In her early works Stein wrote about human types and the language of her texts are more referential when compared to her later texts. The idea of breaking the hierarchy between the elements of a narrative was shaped starting with her first work. When she wrote her first portraits, she started to express her narrative more painterly terms. It was normal that she refused stories to create progressive ritual in which movement to amuse the ear and eye would be used instead of dramatic action, while she knew that innovative approaches to conventional theater would not be accepted widely, she also knew the visual potential of a play was attracting. If she laid aside story and action in the service of emotion and time, and additionally broke traditional expectations of the audience, she knew that any play had the power of welcoming the audience who could surrender to its demand. This idea gave her a feeling of relaxation of all conventional theater and she went on writing regardless of the previous theatrical conventions. She wrote her first play *What Happened* in 1913 after she came back from a dinner party which had a great influence on the play. In the same year she wrote *Ladies' Voices* and *Curtain Raiser* which were published in *Geography and Plays*.

Conveying the essence of what happened without telling a story is a resistance towards the traditional understanding of cause and effect in story. According to Stein there was always something happening so she felt that she did not have to tell a story which has a beginning and ending. And in that case when it was the time to tell “what happened” Gertrude Stein chose to stay in present and told it with all its dynamics in the present. However, despite her dramatic inspiration, Stein's plays haven't been the subject of study, even for the Stein academics. This does not mean there is no criticism of Stein's plays.

Sarah Bay-Cheng gives a comprehensive list of studies that concentrated on Stein's theater. The list of these studies that are to be mentioned here have also shed light on my study. Wilford Leach examined Stein's plays in modern theater context in her PhD dissertation entitled "Gertrude Stein and the Modern Theater" (1956). She divided Stein's plays three periods: Plays as the essence of what happened, plays as landscape and plays as narration, history and melodrama. Betsy Alayne Ryan examined Stein's plays as texts intended for stage in her PhD dissertation entitled "Gertrude Stein's Theater of Absolute" (1984). She studied the plays under three main sections, first she examined the general aesthetics of the plays then the playwriting aesthetic and last play analysis. Jane Palatini Bowers was inclined to read Stein's plays as plays about theater in her book entitled "*They Watch Me as They Watch This*": Gertrude Stein's *Metadrama* (1991). Marc Robinson examined Stein's theater in his book *The Other American Drama* and Stephan Watson wrote the process of *Four Saints in Three Acts* beginning from its very first ideas to its success in the United States of America in his book *Prepare for Saints: Gertrude Stein, Virgil Thomson, and the Mainstreaming of American Modernism* (1998). Arnold Aronson in his book *American Avant-Garde Theater: A History* (1997) placed Gertrude Stein among the major figures who influenced American avant-garde theater. The scholars tend to read Stein's plays as poetry and assessed her texts in terms of theater theory. There are fewer books which see her plays as texts written for performance (Bay-Cheng, 2004: 3). Sarah Bay-Cheng underlined the importance of reading Stein's plays in terms of theater and its own terms in her book *Mama Dada Gertrude Stein's Avant-Garde Theater* (2004). According to her the plays have a dramatic progression; she examined the plays to plant them as the seeds of avant-garde theater in the United States of America. Martin Puncher aimed to read Stein's plays as closet drama in his book *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (2011), but he stated that *Four Saints in Three Acts* was not written to be read, it needs a third category "closet drama that is to be performed." Bonnie Marranca in his book *Ecologies of Theater* (1996) devoted Stein's plays a chapter entitled "St. Gertrude". He aimed to read her plays as a formulation of landscape and the importance of landscape for American performance.

Gertrude Stein's plays are available in three published books. Her first plays and portraits were published in *Geography and Plays* (1922), the second book is *Operas and Plays* (1932) and her last plays and operas were published in *Last Operas and Plays* (1949).

Gertrude Stein is among the most important figures in the 20th century art along with Antonin Artaud, John Cage, and Bertholt Brecht. Not only did Gertrude Stein write plays but also, she wrote many novels, stories and long poems. After Gertrude Stein the avant-garde theater has been shaped in the light of her theories. Her plays have been produced by many alternative theater groups in off-Broadway and off off-Broadway.

Many iconoclastic directors like Richard Foreman, Judith Malina, Robert Wilson and Heiner Goebbels have adapted her texts -plays, novels and poems- into performance. Her definition of play as landscape and use of "continuous present" have inspired many other experimental theater artists from American and European stages. The theater of Gertrude Stein has never been classified according to the norms of conventional theater. Her understanding of play has subverted the concept of well-made play. She opened a new arena to discuss the problem of representation. Beginning from her childhood she felt nervous while she was watching a conventional play. In her lecture entitled "Plays" Stein expressed the things that bothered her in a play. The thing that troubled Stein in conventional theater is the difference between the time of audience and the time of the play. She explained this problem of time:

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 (Stein, 1990: 59).

As she described above, Stein was nervous because of the syncopated time in theater. Elin Diamond gives a comprehensive definition of syncopation in her book *Unmaking Mimesis*:

Syncopation from the Greek *synoplain*, means to strike, chop off; in musical terms it refers to the placing of an accent or accents on parts of a bar that are not usually accented. If a syncopated rhythm is continued for more than a bar it has the effect of a displaced meter superimposed on the basic meter (Diamond, 1997, 103).

For Stein syncopation was the reason of nervousness in conventional theater. In other words, she explains the problem of time while she was watching a play:

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 (Stein, 1990: 59).

Stein problematized time in theater when she declared that although the actors and the audience share the same place the emotion of the audience is hardly at the same level as the actors. She used the curtain in the theater to underline the different times:

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 behind or in front of the other (Ibid., p.60).

The curtain became the symbol of these two different times. According to Stein audience could never share the same time with the actors in the play. Thus, the feeling of nervousness was inevitable according to Stein. She thought about the time and emotion in conventional theater and posed many fundamental questions to solve this time related nervousness. Beginning with the definition of syncopated time in conventional plays she took three different scenes one of which is from real life, the second of which is from a story and the last of which is from theatrical scene. She explained the excitement in these three scenes to show that in theater the feeling of excitement is never completed. It is only a relief from excitement. In the scene from real life and a story you have the control over the scenes. You can remember each scene and the memory of the exciting scene gives you the control. You can begin many times. You can close the book to control the feeling of excitement. But the stage is not the same:

[...], 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 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. And what is the reason for this difference and what does it do to the stage (Ibid., p.62).

It is the cause of nervousness. The stage is so fast that you can never catch the scenes in a play. This is the final reason of the feeling of nervousness. The stage is before and behind the audience. Defining the feeling of uneasiness in the play Stein asked the question: "Does the thing seen or does the thing heard affect you and effect you at the same time or in the same degree or does it not" (Ibid., p.64). While she was asking the question related to hearing and seeing she attributed the mixture of these two to the feeling of nervousness. She posed questions:

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. [...] 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 (Ibid., p.65).

And she went on to consider theater in terms of sight and sound and their link to emotion and time. She did not think in terms of story and action. And the problem became apparent one more time. It is not possible to solve the problem as long as one thinks conventionally. Lastly Stein asked the question of familiarity in theater. She explained that in reading a play it is difficult to follow the characters' names, one has to go forward and back to the list of characters. She revealed the problem of familiarity:

It is not possible in the theatre 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 play a great deal at least I did, it was 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 programme for that and beside one has to become or has become acquainted with the actors as an actor and one has one's programme 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 (Ibid., p.69).

The readers or the audience are one more time doomed to stay behind the play. And this is the significant reason of the feeling of nervousness. Explaining her ideas about the conventional theater she talked about her childhood experience of seeing plays. When she was a girl, she started to feel the distrust to the conventional ways of theater making. When she grew up, she challenged all these dominant conventional norms:

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 thing 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 then it was a matter both of seeing and of hearing were clothes, voices what the actors said, how they were dressed and how that 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 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 the same time and did I (Ibid., p.72).

It is clear that Stein was troubled by the idea of conventional play. Beginning from her early plays which she entitled as "the essence of what happened" she chose to solve the problem of time in her plays. Stein was the best playwright who identified the time problem and theatricalized the solution in her plays. To end "syncopation" Stein used "continuous present". She stated that she did "continuous present" naturally. She defined "continuous present" in her lecture entitled "Composition as Explanation":

Continuous present is one thing and beginning again and again is another thing. These are both things. And then there is using everything. This brings us again to composition this the using everything. The using everything brings us to composition and to this composition. A continuous present and using everything and beginning again. [...] There was a groping for using everything and there was a groping for a continuous present and there was an inevitable beginning of beginning again and again. (Stein, 1990: 25- 26).

The Portraits and First Plays

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Before writing her first play in 1913 she wrote many portraits. She wrote the portraits of people around her. The link between the portraits and her first play is apparent but it is necessary first to have a look at the relations of science and Stein's writing. Steven Meyer explains the relation of science and Stein's writing:

It is not just that Stein's ideas of writing were influenced by science: she reconfigured science as writing and performed scientific experiments writing. Initially her understanding of science was thoroughly mechanistic; thus in *The Making of Americans*, written between 1902 and 1911, she attempted to describe the precise mechanisms of human personality in great detail. Yet *Tender Buttons*, composed the year after she completed her monumental novel, she embraced a nonmechanistic outlook. In this collection of prose poems –and in hundreds of pieces, large and small, written over twenty years–Stein endeavored to portray consciousness in terms of the experience of writing, as she moved to a more “organic” sense of writing [...] (Meyer, 2004: 250).

Meyer cites from Stein's lecture in 1934: “science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything, which ultimately the complete description of everything. (Stein quoted in Meyer, 2004: 251) She step by step stopped description because she thought “a complete description is a possible thing” (Stein qtd. in Meyer, 2004: 251). As Meyer explains Stein's new project was “stop [ping] describing everything,” (Ibid.) Stein recognized that it is possible to describe everything and so her new interest is portraiture. Meyer cites Stein:

Being at last really convinced that a description of everything is possible it was inevitable that I gradually stopped describing everything. Description was replaced by portraiture, or more exactly by what James termed “knowledge of acquaintance (Ibid.).

James tells the impossibility of description. Meyer cites from James to explain what exactly cannot be done according to James:

I am acquainted with many people and things, which I know very little about, except their presence in the places where I have met them... [A]bout the inner nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say nothing at all. I cannot impart acquaintance with them to anyone who has not already made it himself. I cannot describe them (James qtd. in Meyer, 2004: 251).

According to Meyer, Stein tried to do what James says can't be achieved: Stein adapted “an acquaintance with description” instead of James's acquaintance without description in her writing (Meyer, 2004: 251). Stein's first portrait dated back 1909 and it was entitled *Ada, and Alice B. Toklas* talks about Stein's first portrait in Stein's book entitled *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*:

It was the portrait called *Ada*, the first in *Geography and Play*. I began it and I thought she was making fun of me and I protested, she says I protest now about my autobiography. Finally I read it all and was terribly pleased with it. And then we ate our supper. This was the beginning of the long series of portraits. She has written portraits of practically everybody she has known, and written them in all manners and in all styles (Stein, 1990: 107).

The first portrait was followed by *Matisse* and *Picasso*, and they were written “in all manners and in all styles” (Ibid.). In portraits entitled *Picasso* she wrote about her friend without describing him. She rejected using nouns and adjectives. She explained in her lecture entitled “Poetry and Grammar” why she refused nouns and adjectives:

In the way one is completely possessing something and incidentally one's self. Now in that diagramming of the sentences of course there are articles and propositions and as I say there are nouns but nouns as I say even by definition are completely non interesting, the same thing is true of adjectives. Adjectives are not really and truly interesting. In a way anybody can know always has known that, because after all adjectives effect nouns and as nouns are not really interesting the thing that effects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting. In a way as I say anybody knows

that because the first thing that anybody takes out of anybody's writing are the adjectives. You see of yourself how true it is that which I have just said. Beside the nouns and the adjectives there are verbs and adverbs. Verbs and adverbs are more interesting. In the first place they have one very nice quality and that is that they can be so mistaken. It is wonderful the number of mistakes a verb can make and that is equally true of its adverb. Nouns and adjectives never can make mistakes can never be mistaken but verbs can be so endlessly, both as to what they do and how they agree or disagree with whatever they do. The same is true of adverbs. In that way any one can see that verbs and adverbs are more interesting than nouns and adjectives (Stein, 2004: 290).

Stein abandoned using nouns and adjectives and she used verbs and adverbs in her portraits. The verbs were used in gerund form which gives an idea of continuity. She repeated the words and sentences with slight changes. In this way she developed "continuous present" in the portraits. In the portrait of Picasso:

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something. Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one bringing out of himself then something that was coming to be a heavy thing, a solid thing and a complete thing. One whom some were certainly following was one working and certainly was bringing something out of himself then and was one who had been all his living had been one having something coming out of him (Stein, 1971: 51).

In this portrait the verbs following, working, bringing out create a sense of continuity. The verbs are used in "-ing" form and the sentences follow each other to create a flowing rhythm. There are slight differences between the sentences and they seem as if nothing changes in the sentences. In her portraits she used "continuous present" which she explained in her lecture entitled "Composition as Explanation": "In making these portraits I naturally made a continuous present and including everything and beginning again and again within a very small thing" (Stein, 1967: 26). The portrait opens with "One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming." And the same words are repeated many times. The portrait is of three pages and there are twelve new paragraphs in it. The paragraphs are new but the words are the same. The portrait finishes with "Some were certainly following him. He was one who was working" (Stein, 1971: 53). In a way the portrait finishes where it starts. Stein explained what she was doing in her lecture entitled "Portraits and Repetition" "In the beginning [...] 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" (Stein, 1967: 106). Later in her plays she also used this notion of time. She changed the genre from portraiture to play but the link is remarkable.

To underline the relationship between portraits and plays Jane Palatini Bowers states that "she was continuing her work in another genre, the literary portrait, and developing what Wendy Steiner has called a 'hybrid form' –the dialogue portrait, a kind of 'exercise' for playwriting" (Bowers,1991: 9). Stein explains the link between her portraits and play:

I had before I began writing plays written many portraits. I had 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 plays (Stein, qtd. in Bowers, 1991: 9).

The Essence of What Happened

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The first play Stein wrote was *What Happened* (1913) in which she aimed to tell “the essence of what happened”.

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 an always have thought that if you write a play you ought to announce that it is 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 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 (Stein, 1990: 74-75).

Gertrude Stein emphasized that there are many stories around us and there is no need telling one more, and she stated that anything can be a play so one should announce that it is a play. These two points made clear in her essay entitled “Plays” give us a “story” idea about her understanding of play.

Sara J. Ford explains the structure of the play. *What Happened* was divided into five acts. The play maintains a clear example of Stein's presentation of non-narrative. The play is a short piece consisting of four pages and it has neither dialogue not action. The characters or voices are not names, but they are just numbers (Ford, 2002: 30). She just states at the beginning how many people are speaking together: (One) Loud and no cataract. Not any nuisance is depressing (Stein, 1922: 205). Here we have the first line of the play, there is one person speaking here in the first scene, and so maybe the speaker is Stein herself. Dana Cairns Watson interprets the first part of the play as the first two words give us the idea of the exchange between sight and sound. Loud is related to sound but cataract may be a waterfall or the illness causing shortage of eyesight. Water is rushing loud but it is not one body of water it is not stream going in only one direction. There is no cataract; the body of the water can be divided into different, small units (Watson, 2005: 68).

Her new approach focused on small units in portraits. As she stated in the first act of *What Happened* there is “... no cataract.” The mind can be parted into different sections. Therefore, in *What Happened* first one person speaks and then five speak:

(Five.)

A single sum four and five together and one, not any sun a clear signal and an exchange.

Silence is in blessing and chasing and coincidences being ripe. A simple melancholy clearly precious and on the surface and surrounded and mixed strangely. A vegetable window and clearly most clearly an exchange in parts and complete.

A tiger a rapt and surrounded overcoat securely arranged with spots old enough to be thought useful and witty quite witty in a secret and in a blinding flurry.

Length what is length when silence is so windowful. What is the use of a sore if there is no joint and no toady and no tag and not even an eraser. What is the commonest exchange between more laughing and most. Carelessness is carelessness and a cake well a cake is a powder, it is very likely to be powder, it is very likely to be much worse.

A shutter and only shutter and Christmas, quite Christmas, an only shutter and a target a whole color in every center and shooting real shooting and what can hear, that can hear that which makes such an establishment provided with what is provisionary (Stein, 1922: 205-206).

The reader of the text is not informed about who these five people are and what they are talking about. There is no specific line attributed to a single person. Consequently, these five speakers can talk one by

one or they can speak all together. The scene is left to the reader to imagine. However, the thing that is clear is that Stein listened all these people talking. They may be sitting around the table in a dinner party but who knows? While we are reading, we think that there is something happening all the time. This "something going on" is not related to telling a story. Stein stated that she did not want her plays to tell stories. As Bowers stated "the story in Stein's plays is the language itself" (Bowers, 1991: 11).

There are speakers on the one hand supposedly speaking one by one or all together at one time; however, on the other hand there are lines which in turn points the language itself. In the first scene again: (Two.) Paralysis why is paralysis a syllable why is it not more lively (Stein, 1922: 206).

However, as Stein's play revealed, the mimetic theory of theater is based on fallacy. The dramatic dialogue is not realistic, it is fiction and it is artificial. Stein was interested in telling the essence of an event without telling a story. Thus, she eliminated the "dialogue" from her plays. Because she did not believe the fact that the dialogue could create the essence. As Bowers claimed that in order a play to be the essence of what happened its focus should be on language (Bowers, 1991: 11).

Stein's project was related to language and time. After we considered the first scene of the play in terms of structure it reveals that Stein's rejection of linear narrative and her choice of staying in present moment all drew attention to her project. At this point it is necessary to show in *What Happened* how Stein managed to plant her narrative in the present moment using the devices such as repetition, modification to capture the essence of concrete, dynamic and absolutely present in her play.

Betsy Alayne Ryne says that by eliminating the story from the play as it draws the attention of the audience from the present moment Stein created a chain of non-physical statements that occupies the objects of her perception at the time she thinks about it (Ryne, 1975: 142). As we have stated earlier syncopation resulted in nervousness and to overcome the feeling of nervousness one should start again and again:

ACT THREE

(Two.)

A cut, a cut is not a slice, what is the occasion for representing a cut and a slice. What is the occasion for all that.

A cut is a slice, a cut is the same slice. The reason that a cut is a slice is that if there is no hurry any time is just as useful.

(Four.)

A cut and a slice is there any question when a cut and a slice are just the same.

A cut and a slice has no particular exchange it has such a strange exception to all that which is different.

A cut and only slice, only a cut and only a slice, the remains of a taste may remain and tasting is accurate.

A cut and an occasion, a slice and a substitute a single hurry and a circumstance that shows that, all this is so reasonable when every thing is clear (Stein, 1922: 207).

By aiming to begin again and again Stein made us to focus on the language, not to perceive world through it. To concentrate on the lines in the play word by word Stein had a suggestion. When Alice Toklas cut her hairs after many years one day, she found out:

I found that any kind of a book if you read with glasses and somebody is cutting your hair and so you cannot keep the glasses on and you use your glasses as magnifying glass and so you read word by word reading word by word makes the writing that is not anything be something. Very regrettable but very true. So that shows to you that a whole thing is not interesting because as a whole well as a whole there has to be remembering and forgetting, but one at a time, oh one at a time is something oh yes something (Stein, 1973: 143).

When we read the writing above cited word by word it makes anything something. We start to take the words one by one holding them under a magnifying glass. In all these five acts of the play *What Happened* Stein asked questions but leaving the words alone concrete with their material beings:

A birthday, what is a birthday, a birthday is a speech, it is a second time when there is tobacco, it is only one time when there is poison. It is more than one time when the occasion which shows an occasional sharp separation is unanimous.

A blanket, what is a blanket, a blanket is so speedy that heat much heat is hotter and cooler, very much cooler almost more nearly cooler than at any other time often.

A blame what is a blame, a blame is what arises and cautions each one to be calm and an ocean and a master piece.

A clever saucer, what is a clever saucer, a clever saucer is very likely practiced and even has toes, it has tiny things to shake and really if it were not for a delicate blue color would there be any reason for every one to differ (Stein, 1922: 208-209).

In that case it turns out to be “what is the question.” With all these questions related to the concerns of the text which is called representation problems in Act Three she opens not with a description but with a refusal saying “a cut is not a slice” then she declares “what is the occasion for representing a cut” which means there is no reason representing a “cut”. Alternatively, if she opened the act with a representative line, it would be saying only one thing, however under these conditions we can talk about many possibilities, for example, a cut can be a slice or it can be the female genital organ which means in representational understanding a “void”. But in Steinian anti-representational theatrical experiment a “cut” becomes the signifier floating to many meanings. In that case a “cut” becomes the cut of the text; you can creep into from that cut to reach the unrepresented world of signifieds. “What is the occasion for all that” in a way Stein invited us to question all these representation in Western thinking. Beginning with such a question which refers not to outer reality but to the representation problems of theater itself creates a new understanding to question character, act, and scene in a play. Additionally, it nails down the attention of the reader/audience onto the surface of the language. While we are listening to the text we are made to question if there is an occasion to represent a cut. First, we hear two people talking then we hear four people talking and last we hear only one person speaking:

(One.)

All alone with the best reception, all alone with more than the best reception, all alone with a paragraph and something that is worth something, worth almost anything, worth the best example there is of a little occasional archbishop. This which is so clean is precious little when there is no bath water. A long time a very long time there is no use in an obstacle that is original and has a source (Ibid., p.207-208).

One person speaks in the last section of the third act. This one person is like the writer figure in the text. It is as though Stein is speaking here. She sits “All alone with the best reception” she sits “all alone with a paragraph”. However, “that is worth something”. According to Bowers she deconstructs the play by including the process of writing into the text. We are made to notice writer writing (Bowers, 1993: 2).

As far as we learn from Stein's anecdotes, she wrote this play after she came back from a dinner party. In the play on the one hand, she writes about the things happening around and there appears in the text

the words related to food such as turkey, water, lemons, orange, apples and bread, on the other hand the text does its best to subvert all the established notions of conventional theater; the most crucial of which is representation. The play itself becomes a manifestation of representation problem in theater. It underlines the fact that it is a text concerning the representation problem. And it helps to solve the time problem in theater which bothers Stein; it unites the time of writing with the time of the actions on the stage.

According to Watson, the feeling of movement in these still acts creates a feeling of “hereness” The perceptive process of the lines occurs at the time of speaking. That creates the “continuous present” in the text. Also, the exact focus of the distracted mind upon the moment as it happens creates the “writing as it is being written.” When Stein says that she aimed “to make a play the essence of what happened” she not only depletes story from theater but also, she is stressing action. “What happens” suggests activity. Gertrude Stein wasn't interested in where the car goes on; the thing that she was interested in was the movement inside the car (Watson, 2005: 66).

Conclusion

Before concluding the argument, it may be useful to remember some of the tenets that Stein's plays have. Stein wanted to find out whether a play was possible without plot, characters and suspense. When she posed the problem of time in theater, she tried to solve this problem by planting the play in the present. She eliminated story from her plays and there was no need for a plot. In that case there only stays time for audience to experience, and the language is not a means of communication but it is also an object in the play waiting to be experienced. She underlined the sound side of the language. The language, characters, acts and scene stand independently but in contact. There is no hierarchy between these elements.

Stein's artistic intention was to establish a drama which was saved from illusionistic concerns of conventional theater. She aimed to solve the problem of representation and time in theater by getting rid of story in her early plays. By cleaning the drama from an understanding of linear time, a story and progressive action she created a new concept of time for theater which is always and absolute present. It is crucial for us to see this adaptation of time in terms of alternative searching of time. In linear time everything has a beginning and end and in conventional theater everything should be well-made, so the reason why so few people read Gertrude Stein's plays is that in the narrow frame of linear time the visions of people are conventionalized. The texts of Stein are not difficult to understand but the problem is that we are made to find everything one by one in other word we are accustomed to get the “knowledge”, we do not choose to go and just stand on a new ground and try to “know”. Therefore, for us to read Stein's plays do not mean understanding them but to find a way out through the language by which all the ideologies are shaped.

The possibility for a new language and time understanding gives us the glimpse of a new utopia in twenty first century when all the utopias have fallen behind the needs of an ever-changing world. Gertrude Stein was looking for an artistic utopia. The language is no more useful to refer to old meanings and it brings a fresh looking to a tired language. She is like an explorer. A language is a language at all.

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