

Chapter Eight

Radio Free Stein

Rendering Queen and Country

Adam Frank

The pages that follow offer a reading of Gertrude Stein's "For the Country Entirely. A Play in Letters." (1916) informed by a specific dramatic context: a large-scale audio project called *Radio Free Stein* in which I render a number of Stein's plays into recorded dramatic and musical form. This dramatic context—created by editing and mixing the sound (dialogue and music) recorded for the pilot episode—productively informs critical readings of Stein's plays. The word *render* aptly describes the *Radio Free Stein* project, rather than *adapt* or *interpret*, because of the set of meanings that constellate around this word (from French *rendre* and Latin *reddere*, "to give back"). The first meaning of render as giving in return (to reproduce, represent, perform, or translate) is clearly relevant to a project that moves from printed page to (recorded) performance: I aim to translate and represent Stein's plays in a manner faithful to the writing.

However, any attempt to perform Stein's writing immediately brings in the second meaning of render as giving up (to hand over, surrender or relinquish, pay as rent or tax, to do a service) in the sense that this debt-inducing transaction will involve making choices that give up elements on the page; the service that I hope to render Stein's writing will necessarily be a disservice. Here, the third meaning of render (to bring a person into a state or condition, to cause to be of a certain nature) enters the picture: the recorded audio form, what I call "radio melodrama," substantially alters Stein's plays by rendering them in the medium of sound. Finally, the chemical definition of rendering (to obtain or extract by melting, to clarify) also suits a project that subscribes to Stein's poetics of confusion, as she puts it in her lecture "Portraits and Repetition," "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" (*Lectures* 174). Any lively and substantive attempt to render or clarify Stein's plays will create its own confusions.

In addition to these meanings, the genealogy of the word fits Stein's own expatriated situation: *render* is unusual in retaining the French infinitive form in English (other examples would be *tender* and *gender*, important words for Stein and her critics). *Render* also echoes rending or tearing up, particularly appropriate to the epistolary form of "For the Country Entirely. A Play in Letters." First published in *Geography and Plays* (1922), "For the Country Entirely" was one of several plays that Stein wrote during the wartime year she lived in Mallorca with Alice Toklas (1915–16).¹ Jane Bowers, in what continues to be the most significant study of Stein's playwriting, has grouped this work among what she calls the conversation plays, written between 1915 and 1919, a characterization that echoes Stein's own sense of her work at this time: "We are very peaceful," she wrote on a postcard to Carl Van Vechten in December 1915. "I am making plays quite a number of them. Conversations are easy but backgrounds are difficult but they come and stay" (Burns 49). Stein's remark about the peaceful quality of her and Toklas's life in Mallorca should be understood by contrast with their time in Paris earlier in the year: they had left the zeppelin air raids and coal shortages in March 1915 for what they thought would be a brief sojourn in neutral Spain where, as it turned out, they remained until the following spring. According to Richard Bridgman, "The impact of the war on Gertrude Stein's writing was profound. . . . It was in this period that her prose began to absorb heard speech seriously" (141–42). He goes on to suggest that "Reading Gertrude Stein in this period is rather like listening to an interminable tape recording made secretly in a household" (149). Bowers takes up this perspective in describing the conversation plays as "transcriptions" (10). It is in part because Stein's plays from this period are so clearly interested in conversational speech that radio turns out to be an apt medium for interpreting them.²

But why should the war have affected Stein's writing in this way? And what relation does her newfound ease or interest in representing conversations have with the difficulty she claims to be experiencing with "backgrounds" in the plays of this time? *Background* is part of a constellation of key terms for Stein, terms that include *land*, *geography*, *country*, and others that she insistently associates with her play writing and theater poetics. These terms name both a technical problem for Stein as a writer of plays (what to do about setting) and a set of social, political, or environmental questions: how to make space for women (and other non-combatants) to engage with and participate in experiences of war. These questions can be posed more narrowly and biographically with regard to the plays of the Mallorcan period: given her status as an American expatriate and situation of self-directed exile in Spain, how would Stein choose to engage with and disengage from patriot-

ism and national allegiance in the supercharged context of Europe 1915–16? When posed more generally, however, the questions and problems of background become familiar to twenty-first-century readers and critics: how can we readers of Stein situate her (play)writing historically, ideologically, and conceptually without the reductive and anxious moralism that has come to characterize responses to Stein and her alleged politics in recent years?³

Michael Moon's suggestion that scholars of Stein's writing may need "to revisit the landscapes in which she lived and wrote—one hopes, with something of the enlivening sense of the resistance of place to being definitely and definitively named that animated some of her best work," points toward one helpful alternative to this moralism. Consider, for example, how the play's title immediately evokes difficulties of background and the resistance of place to being definitively named. "For the Country Entirely" appears to announce a univocal expression of dedication to nation, but "the" country is at once determined and unspecified, and the meanings of "country," unlike those of "nation," are not solely political: they are also geographical (city/country) and sexual. The word "entirely" complicates matters further since its denotative meaning (whole, total, unbroken or intact) and its etymology (from L. *integrum* or in touch) take the title phrase in different directions. It would not take much to read this title in the terms made famous by Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*, that is, in terms of a feminist antipatriarchal writing that undermines total (and singular) dedication to abstract nationhood by way of a more tactile commitment to (multiple) female sexuality that the subtitle glosses as "A Play in Letters."⁴ But these sexual meanings should not be read as simply replacing the national ones; Stein would not likely subscribe to the motto "make love not war." Rather, the title's various meanings exist in ironic tension, one with the other, thereby raising questions about the mutualities of sexual and national feeling, the similarities and differences between the visceral acts of sex, war, and writing. Background and country are terms that bring forward affect, sexuality, and the visceral as fundamental to Stein's writing project as she continually explores ways of knowing.

Country specifically echoes *landscape*, a key term in Stein's theater poetics. Her fullest discussion of this term appears considerably later in her career in the lecture "Plays," written in 1934 for her U.S. lecture tour, where she characterizes her plays of the 1920s as landscapes. Critics have generally accepted this designation as it names a refinement and evolution of her playwriting techniques, but note how both the earlier conversation plays and the later landscape plays engage the same problem: how "to tell what happened without telling stories," that is, to convey "the essence of what happened" without the emphasis that Aristotelian mimesis places on plot (*Lectures* 121–22). The problem with story or plot, according to Stein, is that it creates what she calls "nervousness" or emotional syncope in audience

members who feel temporally out of step with (either behind or ahead of) the emotion and action on the stage. The earlier conversation plays and the later landscape plays both attempt to solve this problem by rejecting story and by opening up the relational space of the play itself as it offers a study of dynamic relations among a number of persons, that is, a group. In her lecture, Stein analogizes this relational group space to a landscape: “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” (125). Elsewhere I have unfolded Stein’s play poetics by way of theories of the relation between affect and thinking: I argue that Stein’s plays aim both to depict and create loose emotional coordinations among a group of persons, especially between audience and stage (or page), in order to allow experiences of what the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion calls “reverie” as a condition for coming to new knowledge (Frank 2012). When they are successful, Stein’s plays accomplish this by focusing on formal theatrical elements other than plot and character, including dialogue, setting, stage direction, and titles. Taken up by later dramaturgy, landscape poetics comes to include a host of non-linguistic theatrical elements as well, such as movement, sound, sets, lighting, costume, all of which may come to have equivalent theatrical value.

Because my understanding of Stein’s plays and play poetics focuses on the dynamics of affect and groups, it offers a somewhat different approach to what Jane Bowers calls Stein’s “metadramas,” “self-reflexive plays that question the way language functions in the theater and that are concerned with the interaction between textuality and performance” (4). Bowers argues (against Betsy Alayne Ryan) that Stein’s plays “oppose the physicality of performance” (2) and, by foregrounding speech and text, address a fundamental condition of theater, the many ways that language in performance is “overwhelmed, transformed, subordinated, menaced, and dissolved” (7). Bowers keenly observes the obstacles that Stein’s plays throw up to performance—“Stein asserts the substantiality of her written text and makes it an active participant, as it were, in the process of its own enactment” (34)—and so helpfully locates Stein’s play poetics not in a European avant-garde tradition that aims to shock or antagonize audiences and minimize the importance of text and language but in an American tradition of artists committed to the categories of experience, poesis, and an aesthetics of the contemporary (130–3). Important figures that Bowers includes in this line are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and John Cage. And, I would add, Edgar Allan Poe, William James, Morton Feldman, and Andy Warhol.

It is no accident that some of those who have taken up Stein’s poetics most acutely in the twentieth century, including the composer Feldman and

the visual artist Warhol, have worked primarily in mediums other than language (although I would not want to underestimate the importance of language for their work).⁵ Stein's writing, especially her plays and theater poetics, invite nonlinguistic consideration, those forms of attention that Bowers's commitment to more exclusive forms of linguistic reflexivity cannot accommodate. Consider her description of the conversation plays:

In order . . . for a play text to be the essence of what happened, which is what Stein hoped her plays to be, "what happened" must be a linguistic event, a speech act, because, with respect to other kinds of events and acts, language can only be a report or a response, but not the thing itself. Stein's conversation plays appear to be written records of speech acts, and nothing more. They are not windows onto a nonlinguistic world. They are themselves the world—a world of conversations without stories. (11)

The notion of "speech act" that Bowers uses here, in which speech "can only be a report or a response, but not the thing itself," does not adequately take into account linguistic performativity as J. L. Austin famously theorized it. Recall, for Austin, performatives form a class of utterance in which to speak is, in some circumstances, to do something: "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (6). The utterance required to make a promise, for example, or to marry someone is precisely not a report but itself an action, and when Austin generalizes this class of utterance into what he calls the illocutionary aspect of language, he offers what remains a promising approach for those of us who are committed to the necessary and unpredictable interimplications of the linguistic with the nonlinguistic.⁶ Austin's generalized notion of performativity frames and motivates my reading of Stein's play as I attempt to take into account both its linguistic and non-linguistic circumstances. I would reformulate Bowers's remark that Stein's plays "are not windows onto a nonlinguistic world" this way: these plays compose, spatialize, and recreate a linguistic and nonlinguistic world with which they are already complexly interwoven.

The particular world that "For the Country Entirely" composes and recreates is the one that Stein inhabits in Mallorca with Alice Toklas and a handful of other international English speakers who are all absorbing news about and engaging in discussion of the war.⁷ Consider the play's first line, which consists of two sentences: "Almond trees in the hill. We saw them today" (227). Stein does not italicize this line or otherwise indicate whether these sentences are meant to describe the play's setting or to be spoken as dialogue; in my radio interpretation, as I explain below, they are both. As setting, this first line informs a reader that the play takes place in a Mediterranean locale where almond trees can be found, such as Mallorca, mentioned later in the play (234). This setting is not only geographical, however; it is also literary and affective: almond trees appear frequently in the Bible and in

Hebrew and Arabic poetry as symbols of watchfulness and promise because their white or pink flowers bloom suddenly and rapidly in early spring. "We saw them today" emphasizes this watchfulness, an anticipation that hints not only at the season but at the sociopolitical surround. There are other words embedded in the phrase "Almond trees in the hill": the French words "au monde" (or "tres au monde"), "Allemagne," as well as treason ("trees in"). With this first line, readers are rapidly introduced to a complex setting, at once geographical, sociopolitical, and psychical, one that suits Stein's own situation of voluntary exile: watchfulness concerning the national or global military forces that do not directly threaten in Mallorca; the possibility of lurking enemies or sympathizers ("in the hill"); anxiety about accusation and allegiance.

Stein's five act play contains a number of lines that appear to indicate setting, and a few that indicate stage directions: "With a view / Of trees and a hill" (227), "An avenue goes through a city and a street crosses it crosses the city" (228), "A country and a cup where they sell water" (228), "Little pieces of paper are suddenly burnt" (230), "In the country and for the country" (231), "The land is very near and is seen and nuns fix it" (235), "A great many mountains are higher than any on the island" (235). In my radio interpretation, I have chosen to record these as "landscapes": actors speak these lines so as to create specific sonic effects outside the ongoing stream of dialogue. For "Almond trees in the hill," the four actors gather around the microphone and listen to one another closely while each begins by uttering or intoning a distinct phoneme from that sentence; they repeat or change these sounds in relation to what they are hearing until they find a moment to stop and say the entire sentence simultaneously. This improvisation brings forward the literal meaning of the subtitle's "A Play in Letters" and aims to make audible some of the layered words indicated above; it also asks the actors to pay careful attention to their fine-tuned responses to one another and to themselves, helping to create the reciprocal dynamics of talking and listening at the same time so central to Stein's larger poetics (*Lectures* 170). Actors treat each of the play's landscape lines somewhat differently by playing with pitch, pace, vocal layering, rhythms, and so on, variables that are further altered during the editing and mixing process. These landscape lines break the otherwise rapid forward movement of the dialogue to open up still spaces in conversational time, creating backgrounds that "come and stay."

While backgrounds or settings are important in "For the Country Entirely," its main innovation is that it consists largely, although not exclusively, of dialogue written in letter form and is, in this primary sense, "A Play in Letters." Here are some of the first lines:

Dear Mrs. Steele.

I like to ask you questions. Do you believe that it is necessary to worship individuality. We do.

Mrs. Henry Watterson.

Of course I have heard.

Dear Sir. Of course I have heard.

They didn't leave the book.

Dear Sir.

They didn't leave the book.

Yes yes.

I know what I hear. Yes sir.

Dear Sir.

I heard her hurrying.

We all did.

Good night.

Isabel Furness. (227)

The play's letters are often addressed and signed (but not always both) and some of these addressees and signatories refer to historical individuals. The play's first letter is addressed to Mrs. Steele, a reference (it would seem) to the wife of the eighteenth-century writer and cofounder of *The Spectator*, Richard Steele, whose correspondence was widely read. That same letter's signatory is Mrs. Henry Watterson, the wife of an American politician, editor, and journalist who would later win the Pulitzer Prize for newspaper editorials he wrote supporting US entry into the war. Stein begins the play topically, engaging her contemporary ideological context through imagining an act of letter writing across historical time and geographical space by wives of patriotic English and American journalists.

Why letters? Letters as a form of semi-public writing had been offering women (especially aristocratic European women) a way to participate in political discourse for centuries. In this way epistolary form offered one answer to the question of how women may participate in the largely male business of war, a matter of importance to Stein during the writing of this play. "I had never read anything aloud much," remarks Stein in *Everybody's Autobiography*, "except all the letters of Queen Victoria to Alice Toklas when we were in Majorca at the beginning of the war" (281).⁸ Victoria's letters, with their hyperstylized gestures of intimacy that are at the same time direct expressions of political will, would have served as powerful examples of the form of women's letter writing as it coordinates a social and political space. Even when they are not included in published correspondence women's letters are palpably present, as for example in *The Epistolary Correspondence of Richard Steele*: the content of Mary Steele's letters can often be inferred from her husband's responses to them, and the sheer number of letters addressed to her invites a reader to imagine the equivalent number going in the other direction. Epistolary form not only lets a woman's writing be seen (even when not directly represented), it also offers a technique, as Logan Esdale puts it, for "regulat[ing] the distance between herself and others" (103). In a convincing reading of *Everybody's Autobiography* as taking

the form of a newsletter, Esdale suggests that letters offered Stein a way to navigate her relations and lack of relations to her multiplying audience. These relations to audience are, in correspondence, fundamentally reversible: Stein and Toklas were themselves audience for many of the letters that Mildred Aldrich wrote comprising her book of war journalism *A Hilltop on the Marne, Being Letters Written June 3–September 8, 1914* (1915).

In preparing a scenario or script for radio, I foreground the epistolary form by casting the first scene for three voices: two North American women's voices (roughly, Gertrude and Alice personas that I initially named A and B, then renamed Ava and Bella) dictating letters to a male English amanuensis (C, later renamed Walter). I chose a specifically English voice to index Stein's reading of Victoria's letters as well as to thematize the eighteenth-century epistolary novel form that subtends the play (Stein titles the initial sections "chapters" before turning to more conventional act and scene divisions). The fourth voice, American and male, I name William Cook after Stein's close friend, an expatriate American who Stein and Toklas spent time with in Mallorca (his name appears at the end of the first scene and again in act 2). My script assigns lines to this voice at the start of the third scene of act 1 where it queries the epistolary form of the play:

Why do you play in letters.
 Because we are English.
 Is it an English custom.
 It is not an American one.
 Oh yes I remember you did mention. (228–29)

Stein's longstanding concern with the differences between English and American linguistic habits, differences which she assigns in large part to geography, takes the strange mixed form of conversations-in-letters: a combination of Stein's democratic sensibilities, what Bowers calls "the democratic turn-taking of social discourse" (19), with her attention to the spatializing power of Queen Victoria's highly regulated and regulating letters.

Four voices speak the lines of Stein's play in my radio production, voices that mix fictional personas (Walter, the English amanuensis), semi-fictional ones (Ava and Bella), and fictionalized historical ones (William Cook), to create an interweaving of documentary materials with imaginary ones that I believe suits Stein's compositional motives. While none of the voices or speakers in the radio play become characters in any conventional dramatic or literary sense, they are nevertheless distinct from one another even when these distinctions are not coherent or consistently carried out over the whole play (or, sometimes, a whole scene), and these distinctions serve to create much of the interest in listening. Bowers asserts that, while "A performance that is true to the text of these plays will minimize characterization and action" (23), these elements will almost certainly return "through the inter-

mediary of the actor" (24) and summarizes her understanding of Stein's conversation plays this way: "The conflict between the written play text and the performance text (in which all the elements that the written text eliminated become reinstated) eventually replaces conversation as the source of the drama in Stein's plays" (24). Perhaps this is one source of Stein's drama, but, rather than simply being "eliminated" and (grudgingly) "reinstated," I see performance elements as potentially useful for understanding the plays themselves. Reading Stein's writing aloud can help in enjoying and understanding it because, as Steven Meyer puts it, intonation "provides a compositional landscape for grammar, and thereby provides grammatical constructions with determinate significance" (302).⁹ Because voices and bodies offer affective material to work with, a handful of talented actors offers means to explore the dynamic relations of Stein's plays as group portraits. "This is bloody technical!" as one of the actors put it, both with frustration and a sense of realization of just how much his vocal inflection, intonation, emphasis, and so on matter for every line of the play.¹⁰ These vocal choices matter so much in performances of Stein's plays because the propositional and contextual senses that usually guide or determine meaning-making are mostly absent. In directing actors, we asked them for a technical attention to feeling and responsiveness, a characterization-in-the-moment that need not add up to full characterizations.

The radio production of this play aims for a group portrait, a depiction of changing relations between Ava, Bella, Walter, and William as they entertain questions of citizenship, nationality, and the international situation at some indeterminate distance from the war. It begins with a playful scene of dictating letters, then changes mood in the second section where the word "country" shows up in a set of persnickety exchanges, as in this debate about general literacy: "A great many people can read. Not women. Not in some countries. Oh yes not in some countries" (228). Or consider how a description of the Mediterranean locale turns into a quarrel:

Everybody sells water. In this country. Everybody sells water in this country.
Is it a hot country. It is not and water is plentiful. Then I do not understand
you. You need not question me. (228)

This scene brings forward frustrating concerns associated with the foreignness of setting, the lack of literacy in Mallorca, concerns over miscommunication, misunderstanding, and pedagogy: "A class is full and teaching is difficult. They do not understand. Who does not understand. The Barcelonese" (228). The speakers, however, are not the only persons present: as a consequence of Stein's use of epistolary form there are many names in this play, some of which clearly refer to historical persons. For example, one line in the second section begins "Dear Whitehead and Paul and Woolson and

Thorne": Alfred North Whitehead, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Isabel Thorne (a nineteenth-century campaigner for medical education for women) were all historical persons who were significant for Stein. Many names in the play do not refer in this way, for example, those in the next section that summon up a scene of domestic dining: "Mr. and Mrs. Eaton," that is, mister and missus eating; "Frederick and Harriet Beef"; "Mr. Colin Bell," the call-in (dinner) bell. In my reading, this scene offers us William Cook's awkward and unsuccessful entrance at a dinner or luncheon into the company of the three established voices. Concerns over miscommunication, pedagogy, and exclusion persist ("We often spell together. / We like latin" (229)), sustaining a generally anxious mood ("Do be anxious about me. / We are not anxious about me" (229)). The act ends with an invitation ("Do be gracious and come again") met with a refusal: "I do not know how to reply. / No you don't and I am so uneasy. / Not today. / No not at all. / Dear Sir. / Good night" (229).

If the first act introduces voices that are neither comfortable in their setting nor with one another, in the second act these speakers engage in a sequence of lively exchanges that comprise the longest single conversation of the play. The act begins jauntily, reflexively, "Here we come to act two" (229), with the introduction of English-language newspapers: "Australian papers. / Canadian papers. / American papers" (229). This sets the stage for very brief discussions of news topics such as conscription, teaching English, and dress and costume, and weaving all these exchanges together are a set of epistemic verbs (such as *to know*, *to expect*, *to believe*, *to understand*), used both positively and negatively. Here is a partial list: "You know very well" (230), "I wish you would come and tell me" (230), "A great many people expect you... We do not expect you" (230), "We understand that" (230), "In believing a shoe maker you believe his father. / I do not believe his father" (230), "I do not know the name" (231), "Some people believe" (231), "Do you mean it" (231), "I cannot understand Mary Rose Palmer" (231), "I can understand explaining things to one another" (231). This act depicts the uncertain epistemic mood of the group of exiles, their need to know about wartime events, and the difficulty finding trustworthy information. Recall the various meanings of "almond trees" discussed above as they appear in the following letter: "Dear Mrs. Cook. / Do you want to know about almond leaves and almond roots. Or do you refer to olive roots. Olive trees have large roots. I do not know about almond trees" (230). I hear the words "love" and "alive" in "olive trees," as well as the Biblical association of the olive branch with peace, by contrast with the next letter, which contains these sentences: "Some people believe that they will be killed. By this I mean that they delight in teaching" (231). Language teaching appears in several places in this conversation, for example in this letter addressed "Dear Mr. Lindo Webb. / I understand why you are not better liked. A great many people expect you to teach them English" (230). Stein met James Lindo Webb (and

his wife Lettie Lindo Webb) in Palma where he taught English before becoming the British vice consul in October 1915. These names reappear in Act 4 associated with competition ("Dear Mr. Lindo Webb. Why do you wish to win" (236)) and bodily harm ("Dear Mrs. Lindo Webb. How can you break your teeth" (236)). As Ulla Dydo points out, "Lindo" becomes one of Stein's words to describe sexual activity; she remarks both its Spanish meaning (pretty, nice, cute) and its half-rhyme with dildo (33). "For the Country Entirely" connects language learning with both sexuality and aggression, associating literacy with maternal/sexual, national, and colonial feeling.

The act ends with the successful installation of the voice of William Cook into the play's domestic space: "Dear Mr. Cook. / How do you do. Do you mean that you are able to stay. / The rest of the afternoon" (231). But there is a cost: "Mrs. Cook I ask of you do not come again" (231). The historical William Cook was a visual artist, a few years younger than Stein, who moved to Paris in 1903 (like Stein) after training at the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Academy of Design in New York City. Cook had vacationed with Stein and Toklas on an earlier trip to Mallorca and was a close companion during their year there. Apparently, his partner or mistress, Jeanne Moalic, befriended Stein and Toklas's housekeeper, both from Breton, and according to James Mellow, "Alice felt that it made for a difficult social situation" (268). In my radio production, William's vocal presence changes the group dynamics: Ava and William become collegial, effecting a displacement that creates new pairings. It was the historical William Cook's decision to return to France in 1916 that partly motivated Stein and Toklas to return as well; and when Stein decided to import a Ford motor car from the United States so that she could contribute to the war effort as a driver for the American Fund for French Wounded, Cook taught her how to drive. Notably, Cook was one of the few friends that Stein never broke with.¹¹

Act 3 offers the play's main thematic investigations. The first scene begins with the phrase "In the country and for the country" (231), which I interpret as a landscape in my radio production: the actors speak these phrases together but with different emphases, creating a rousing and complex expression that aims to raise the question, are you *in* or are you *for* the country? The question is at once geographical and political, and the speakers move back and forth between these meanings. The first letter begins "Dear Master" but immediately interrupts itself: "Do not say so. / You mean there is no such address. / I do not mean that I criticize. I do mean that the method used does not agree with me" (231–2). Clearly, the "method" of treating the topic of the country by way of addressing a leader figure does not suit the critical attitude of the speaker. The next letter, then, is differently addressed to the country: "Dear land." What follows is posed mostly in the negative ("When I call away I do not mean that I wish the coal to burn. It is not necessary to tell me that the peas will suffer. They certainly will not and

neither will the pinks" (232)), invoking everyday domestic objects (coal, peas) associated with landscape in both its geographical and bodily senses ("pinks"). In between these two letters is a brief exchange that poses a fundamental question:

Why do you need a name.
I don't know. I like the point of Inca.
Do not see it every where.
I will not. (232)

Inca names the town where Stein and Cook attended bullfights and at the same time indicates the materials of writing: the point of Inca, pen, and ink. Place names, nationalism ("for the country"), and mastery go together on the one hand, while writing, geography ("in the country"), and negation or uncertainty go together on the other. The last sentence appears to choose the geographical interpretation ("Dear me it is windy" (232)), the speaker's self-address ("Dear me") comically refusing to engage the political question except possibly by poking fun at it.

But the national or political theme does not stay away for long. The next scene consists of two letters addressed "Dear Sir" and recreates a particular dynamic of wartime communication. Here is the first letter:

Dear Sir. Mr. Cousins told me that they were away when it happened. They recollected being asked if they were well if they had recovered from their emotion. They were also asked if their wives and children were well. They certainly did not know how to say excuse me I do not know who you are. They might have said I would wish to know your name because it would not be right not to be able to give your message and if we do not know your name we cannot say from whom the message came.

This was not done. (232)

This letter recounts (at second- or third-hand) a short story about an upsetting event that involves a family receiving a message from an unknown or unnamed person. We are not told the content of the message, but there is something impersonal in its delivery, an impersonality that plays some part in what is upsetting. The next letter follows up with "Dear Sir. Do not be angry with your government. / Sincerely yours. / William Hague" (232). These letters seem to depict responses to an official communication conveying disturbing news, perhaps about the injury or death of a family member. Stein's play brings the background of the war into the foreground by way of letters, newspapers, stories that circulate among friends and acquaintances, and conversations about these forms of communication that regulate emotional, geographical, and political distance.

Letters and newspapers also serve to bring the war into domestic space, requiring non-combatants to confront their own relations to citizenship and

participation. The next scene offers a meditation on these issues and begins with the sentence "This was the way to reason" (232). What follows a few sentences later consists of a logical demonstration and definition that I attribute mainly to the voice of William Cook but with the three other voices chiming in as a chorus:

Now as to the word citizen. The use of it differs. Some are inclined to ratify the use of it others prefer to ask what is a citizen. A citizen is one who employing all the uses of his nature cleans the world of adjoining relations. In this way we cannot conquer. We do conquer and I ask how, how do you do. (232-33)

The play's differential attention to "the word citizen" distinguishes between a fixed, stable, or ratified use and a more uncertain, interrogative one. The question "what is a citizen" may be answered by the title of the play: a citizen is she who is for the country entirely. But just as the different meanings of "country" and "entirely" create competing senses in the title phrase, so does the word citizen (from L. *civitas*, city): it turns out that a citizen can be for the country entirely only when she is for the city entirely; in other words, for the political entity that governs the country. Of course, Stein's own citizenship (American) does not line up with the city she has chosen to dwell in (Paris), the city of her everyday "adjoining relations." Like other queer expatriate writers, including Henry James, James Baldwin, and Patricia Highsmith, Stein prized her American citizenship at the same time that she chose to live outside the geographical borders of the United States, able only from a distance to support the ideals that permit a multiplicity of hyphenated identities to coexist under the umbrella of American citizenship. "In this way we cannot conquer": this "we" points to the voices of the expatriated Americans in the play who reject the ratified form of citizenship that destroys adjoining relations but who still seek some participatory relation to the war. The remainder of this scene consists of a series of very short letters beginning "Dear Sir" that indicate a calm and heroic preparedness for war ("When it is necessary to come you will come," "When it is necessary to be hurried you are not nervous" (233)), as well as an appropriateness of costume ("Why have you special places for your handkerchiefs. / Because they have been so charmingly embroidered" (233)).

The final scene of this act, titled "Scene 3" like the previous one, replays the question of American entry into the war in a comic, unheroic tone. It continues the costume theme ("Extra dresses," "Extra gloves," "masked balls" (233)), emphasizing the most visible signs of war for non-combatants, soldiers' uniforms, and the conventional role for women in wartime of making clothes (Alice Toklas knit for soldiers throughout the war). One of the speakers in this scene seems dissatisfied with this role, however: "I do not like the word gloves it has a combination of letters in it that displeases me. /

Since when. / Since this evening" (233). We may hear some frustration in this letter addressed (it would appear) to the President of the United States: "Dear Mr. Wilson. / Why do you have such plain entrances. What do you mean. / I mean in Mallorca they do it in such a way that every house has an interesting entrance" (234). If this letter invites Woodrow Wilson to contemplate a more interesting American "entrance," an idea that returns in the next act ("Dear Woodrow. This is a name. / What does anybody mean by interesting" (236)), the scene ends, instead, with a static or settled situation: "You mean chairs. / Yes I mean chairs" (234). (The United States did not enter the war until the following spring, 1917.)

The conversations in this middle act of the play seem to express a set of desires, fears, and frustrations on the part of the exiles in Mallorca, feelings that may have been intensified by the attack on Verdun that began in late February 1916; Stein describes the importance of news about Verdun in *The Autobiography*, how after "The Germans had given up hoping to take it . . . we none of us wanted to stay in Mallorca any longer, we all wanted to go home" (167). The next act of "For the Country Entirely" consists of seven very short scenes that repeat several of the themes touched on. The radio production explores the changing relations between the voices, how in these scenes the triple Ava-Bella-Walter loosens up after William Cook has spoken his piece about citizenship in the previous act, and the pairings and cross-pairings that result. In these scenes, we get a continued exploration of the Mallorcan environment ("here it is more a country road and the electricity is easily had" (235)), of everyday living and meaning ("Dear Sir. Do you wish me to go to market. / Dear Sir. Do you wish me to have that made. / How do you mean" (236)), and sexual activity ("Dear Mrs. English. Do you like a different country. / Do you mean higher up in the hills. / Not so very much higher" (237)).

The play's final act returns to the context of war to address the irreducible fact of mass death: "Dear Sir. Every evening the snow falls. Red. Yes and so do the asphodels. Asphodel isn't red. I know it looks so" (238). Asphodels are the favorite food of the dead in Greek myth, the flower of Hades sacred to Persephone planted around graves. The play rejects any discourse that glorifies or beautifies death in battle ("But we don't find it [asphodels] beautiful. I too have failed to find beauty in them" (237)), identifying instead features of the land (snow) with red blood as if to index hellish experiences of trench warfare: destroyed fields of mud mixed with human body parts. This association offers yet another way that the play insists on the relation between bodily and geographical space, a morbid literalization that repulses understanding:

Yesterday afternoon was a holiday. You mean a festival. I mean a day of the country.
Do you mean that you understand the country.
No indeed. (238)

The single line of the next scene resonates in the context of this inability to understand: "Dear friends. Have patience" (238). And with its final lines the mood of the play turns ironically upbeat. Here is the entire scene:

This has ended very well.
 You mean meeting one another.
 Yes and asking us to remain here.
 You mean that a great many people were troubled.
 Not a great many people.
 Some are very happy.
 So are others.
 We all have wishes.
 Expressed wishes.
 Dear Sir. Will you come again and eat ham.
 Not in this country.
 Fish.
 Not in this country. (238)

While the speakers are satisfied with the play itself—as a meeting or group portrait—they ironically underplay the surrounding troubles of "a great many people," moving quickly to bluff generalities ("We all have wishes. / Expressed wishes"). Countering these sentiments, however, is a direct rejection of the nourishment on offer "in this country." According to *The Autobiography*, Stein and Toklas left Mallorca in spring 1916 to return to "an entirely different Paris. It was no longer gloomy. It was no longer empty. This time we did not settle down, we decided to get into the war" (168). If this play has served one of its purposes, to permit Stein (in her group of exiles) to come to terms with what it means to be "for the country," it does so through a negation ("not in this country") that ends the play, a negation that becomes Stein's figure for play more generally: (not) the country, (not) the landscape, (not) the background.

"For the Country Entirely. A Play in Letters." addresses the question of women's participation in wartime experience. It points to the possibility that Stein's Mallorcan plays and the device of conversation address this question more generally, leading to the question of what role war plays in Stein's theater poetics. In *Gender and the Theater of War*, Barbara Bowen offers the beginnings of a scholarly genealogy of the "theater of war" metaphor, the ways that war has been historically considered "above all as an event to be *seen*" (8). Bowen explores a number of key historical moments in the establishment of the metaphor in twentieth-century and, now, twenty-first-century military discourse. In its initial late seventeenth-century usage, "Theatres of war" named a new style of maps for consumers interested in following the events of the Nine Years War; Bowen argues that the term moved quickly from naming a kind of map to the area of military engagement itself, "from a *picture* of the war to the *place* where war is conducted" (13). Interestingly,

this change is similar to the one that occurs at approximately the same historical moment with the term landscape: as John Barrell explains, “landscape” initially names a style of painting before it comes to name a place that might be depicted in this style. This parallel between “theater of war” and “landscape” raises a basic question for understanding Stein’s poetics: to what degree do Stein’s plays address the gendered opposition between spectator and participant that accompanies both war and theater?¹² *Radio Free Stein*’s audio renderings, as they invite close attention to Stein’s less-read plays, will offer future opportunities to answer this question among others.

NOTES

1. “For the Country Entirely” heads the list of plays for 1916 according to the Haas-Gallup Catalogue (where it is listed as #121, “In the Country Entirely. A Play in Letters”). See also Bridgman’s emendations of this catalogue and similar lists in the appendices to books by Ryan and Bowers.

2. As Donald Sutherland puts it, “most of the plays of the first period are, I think, literary and not for the stage, though they might be very interesting on the radio” (103); a few pages later he suggests that “radio time is clearer for her writing” (107). The sound artist Erik Belgium has pursued a project similar to *Radio Free Stein* but without the same critical motivations under the name softpalate: see http://www.ubu.com/sound/softpalate_stein.html.

3. For one set of examples of the anxiety around Stein’s politics, see a number of the panelists’ comments in Rosten. By contrast, consider the more nuanced remarks by Catherine Stimpson, Al Carmines, and Charles Bernstein.

4. The classic reading of Stein’s writing vis-à-vis French feminist work is DeKoven’s *A Different Language*.

5. I argue for this unusual genealogy of writers and artists in my book *Transferral Poetics, from Poe to Warhol* (Fordham University Press, forthcoming in 2014).

6. Eve Sedgwick puts it this way: “the line between words and things or between linguistic and nonlinguistic phenomena is endlessly changing, permeable, and entirely unsusceptible to any definitive articulation” (6).

7. For biographical information on Stein’s time in Mallorca I have primarily used Mellow (265–74) and Bridgman (143–54).

8. See also *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: “It was at this time that Gertrude Stein read aloud to me all of Queen Victoria’s letters” (164).

9. A number of critics have attended to the crucial role for intonation and other dimensions of sound in reading Stein, such as Pound and J. Frank.

10. Alan Marriott, in conversation. The other actors who participated in the audio recording were Cara McDowell, Lucia Frangione, and Kurt Evans. Adam Henderson directed, and Dorothy Chang composed the music.

11. For Stein’s reminiscences about William Cook see *The Autobiography* (167–68); see also Mellow (266–68).

12. For scholarship on modernist women’s writing on war, see Gallagher, Goodspeed-Chadwick, Phillips, Owens, Gregory, and Whittier-Ferguson.

WORKS CITED

- Aldrich, Mildred. *A Hilltop on the Marne, Being Letters Written June 3–September 8, 1914*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915.
- Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*. Harvard University Press, 1962.

- Barrell, John. *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730- 1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- Bowen, Barbara. *Gender in the Theater of War: Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993.
- Bowers, Jane Palatini. *"They Watch Me as They Watch This": Gertrude Stein's Metadrama*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- Bridgman, Richard. *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Burns, Edward. *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, vol. 1 1913-1935*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- DeKoven, Marianne. *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Dydo, Ulla E. with William Rice. *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923-1934*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003.
- Esdale, Logan. "Gertrude Stein, Laura Riding and the Space of Letters." *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.4 (Summer, 2006): 99-123.
- Frank, Adam. "Loose Coordinations: Theater and Thinking in Gertrude Stein." *Science in Context* 25.3 (2012): 447-467.
- Frank, Johanna. "Resonating Bodies and the Poetics of Aurality; Or, Gertrude Stein's Theatre." *Modern Drama* 51.4 (2008): 501-527.
- Gallagher, Jean. *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998.
- Gregory, Elizabeth. "Gertrude Stein and War." In *Women's Fiction and the Great War*. Ed. Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 263-81.
- Goodspeed-Chadwick, Julie. *Modernist Women Writers and War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011.
- Haas, Robert Bartlett and Donald Clifford Gallup. *A Catalogue of the Published and Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*. New Haven: Yale University Library, 1941.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans. Karen Jurs-Munby. London: Routledge, 2006.
- McCaffrey, John. "'Any of Mine Without Music to Help Them': The Operas and Plays of Gertrude Stein." *Yale/Theatre* 4.3 (1973): 27-39.
- McParland, Robert P., ed. *Music and Literary Modernism: Critical Essays and Comparative Studies*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006.
- Mellow, James R. *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein & Company*. New York: Avon Books, 1974.
- Meyer, Steven. *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Moon, Michael. "Wherein the South Differs from the North: Naming Persons, Naming Places, and the Need for Visionary Geographies." *Southern Spaces* 16 May 2008.
- Owens, David. "Gertrude Stein's Lifting Belly and the Great War." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44 (1998): 608-618.
- Phillips, Kathy. "Seeing the War Through Cut-off Triangles: H.D. and Gertrude Stein." *Back to Peace: Reconciliation and Retribution in the Postwar Period*. Ed. Aranzazu Usandizaga and Andrew Monnickendam. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- Pound, Scott. "The Difference Sound Makes: Gertrude Stein and the Poetics of Intonation." *English Studies in Canada* 33.4 (2007): 25-35.
- Rosten, Bevy. "A Play to be Performed: Excerpts from the Gertrude Stein Symposium at New York University." *Theater* 32.2 (2002): 3-25.
- Ryan, Betsy Alayne. *Gertrude Stein's Theatre of the Absolute*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984.
- Sedgwick, Eve. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Steele, Richard. *The Epistolary Correspondence of Richard Steele*. London, 1787. Web.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Lectures in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- . *Geography and Plays*. New York: Something Else Press, 1968. Reissue in typographic facsimile of the 1922 edition.

- . *Everybody's Autobiography*. Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993.
- . "For the Country Entirely." *Geography and Plays*. New York: Something Else Press, 1968. Reissue in typographic facsimile of the 1922 edition. 227–38. Print
- . *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Sutherland, Donald. *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951.
- Whittier-Ferguson, John. "The Liberation of Gertrude Stein: War and Writing." *Modernism/modernity* 8.3 (2001): 405–428.
- Williams, Raymond. *Drama: From Ibsen to Brecht*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1971.