In the morning, early,
Birds flew over the stable,
The morning glories ringed the flapping corn
With Saturn faces for the surly light,
And stars hung on the elder night.

But in the afternoon
Clouds came;
Cyclonic gusts and chilling rain
Banged-to the windows of our heroine
Beginning to chronicle her wound-up skein.
Rib, spin.

TOM W. HARRIS:

Totem Pole

Totem pole, beaked eagle and kingfisher—
My grandfather's madness
Stood face on face and claw on crest to the height where he hollered
and looked down,
The oblique creator and exacerbator of a family of faces puddled.
The stack,
The weasel masks and fat wide faces, were his own,
And the long-snouted
And the short-snouted
The dreaming bird
And the eyes like wire
The eyes like flies
And the hunting face.
The gray cirrus streaming from the top was wine of rhododendron,
Bitterroot, solomon seal, prophecy and chicanery;
Mountain stones and river mud and the clink of silver dollars
Were the waving words he thudded, burst or spiraled
Down to the scatter of our own strange faces:
Shocked scattered open flowers, cornhusks, vulvas, buckwheat hulls.

W. H. GASS:

Gertrude Stein: Her Escape from Protective Language

It has not proved helpful to the understanding of Gertrude Stein's creative works that she wrote so much herself to justify and explain them. It has not been helpful either that her autobiographies are rich and charming or that she took such care with the rituals of genius, finally fashioning for herself a personality as eloquent and commanding as her Roman face. Of this she never tired, and she began again and again. But in her life she knew too many foolish men and women, became too willingly a legend among them, something to be seen in Paris like the Eiffel Tower. They attacked her with their admiration and she encouraged it. She gave them manuscripts to market and they handed them around as signs of their complete release from common sense. She composed their portraits and they read these aloud and had them printed on expensive paper and dropped them about like cards of visitation. Her art must have seemed an ideal medium for making known their own confusions, and I imagine it was comforting to see how all of it proceeded from one so sure, oracular, and solid. All in all she was a gesture more decisive and more meaningful than they could ever make themselves, and when they left her it was often to wobble about the world like Mabel Dodge, enshrining foolishness. They would receive their portraits and they would write to say how pleased their friends were, how delighted. "Am I really like that, Gertrude? how very wonderful to be!"

Her stories, poems, and plays lie beside the mass of modern literature like a straight line by a maze and give no hold to the critic bent on explication. Art to be successful at nearly any time dare not be pure. It must be able to invite the dogs. It must furnish bones for the understanding. Interest then has sought the substitutes that she provided for it. There has been prolonged and largely malicious gossip about her and her circle and those famous friendships that finally faded. And there have been all those horrid little essays whose titles she might have enjoyed arranging into piles: The Notion of Time in Gertrude Stein, repeated again and again. Only a few people, and nearly all of them are writers, have done as Donald Sutherland ad-

vises in his book about her (the advice comes too late for Mr. Sutherland to have taken it):

> Forget all this talk about her work and do not prepare to have an opinion of your own to tell. Simply read her work as if that were to be all.[1]

Gertrude Stein has mostly been, therefore, an anecdote and a theory and a bundle of quotations. The advice of Mr. Sutherland is certainly simple but it seems too hard. Once admired by a few without judgment, she is now censured by many without reason, and that perplexity her work and person have created, as Coleridge noted the connection, has contained sufficient fear to predispose some minds to anger.

B. L. Reid, whose book is the most recent attack,[2] makes all the customary substitutions. He describes it, with an easy presumption of its power, as "an essay in decapitation" and he genuinely believes that it destroys her reputation. On the other hand, Mr. Reid insists, Gertrude Stein has no literary reputation. She is "effectively dead as a writer" and "nobody really reads her." The critics have ignored her and all the important essays about her can be lightly ticked across the fingers of a single hand. As a result she occupies her present literary position by default. It is Mr. Reid's intention, apparently, to drag Miss Stein from the dizzy height to which ignorance, calumny and neglect have raised her. But there has been a "sizable flurry" of books about her; Yale is unaccountably printing her previously unpublished work; and while no one reads her "everybody continues to talk knowingly and concernedly about her." Mr. Reid must have been standing on this shore of his confusion when he subtitled his book "a dissenting opinion," for these words imply the presence in it of a carefully composed and calmly judicial argument, fashioned to overcome an opposition equally deliberate and well-defined, while his book is, in fact, a muddled and angry piece of journalese whose only value lies in how well it expresses the normal academic reaction and how superbly it contains and how characteristically it uses those malicious inferences fear lends so readily to anger.

The first of these inferences is double-jointed. It permits Mr. Reid

[1] Sutherland, Donald. *Gertrude Stein: a Biography of Her Work*. Yale University Press, New Haven (1951), p. 200.

[2] Reid, B. L. *Art by Subtraction: a Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman (1958).

to malign Miss Stein's work by maligning Miss Stein, and her work, of course, is the major source of evidence against her.

He begins his book with an anthology of critical exclamations, nearly all violent, amid which he tries to find his place as an impartial judge, one who will refrain from the mindless flattery or the vulgar abuse Miss Stein customarily receives. Too many critics, he complains, disturbed by the degree of their feelings, fail to bed their conclusions safely on a text and try to make their points by shouting. But Mr. Reid's claim to objectivity and scholarship is sheer pretense, a rhetorical stance that he assumes to aim his blows, most of which follow a feint toward generosity.

> There is no point in vilifying Gertrude Stein. She is the victim of her pathology rather than her villainy. (205)
> . . . one cannot, of course, impugn her sexuality. Dark suspicions are certainly possible, but I am more inclined to attribute her literary attitude toward sex to that pathological ability to compartmentalize her mind that I have called near schizophrenic. (74)
> If Gertrude Stein is a genius, she is one in the vulgar sense of the term: perversely elevated, isolated, inhuman. (170)

As Mr. Reid proceeds, like a warrior given courage by his own noise, he enlarges his anger, showing he can make his points as loudly as anybody.

> It is finally just to say that Gertrude Stein's true position is anti-literary, anti-intellectual, and often antihumane and antimoral. Her whole orientation is ruthlessly egocentric. (191)

Not satisfied with this list of crimes, Mr. Reid goes on to "document" what he repeatedly calls Miss Stein's schizophrenic pathology by complaining that she once confessed that anything in oil on a flat surface could hold her attention ("indiscriminate ingestiveness"), that she described a fire once as "one of those nice American fires that have so many horses and firemen to attend them" ("antihumane and egocentric"), that she referred to war as a form of dancing ("monumental detachment"), that she liked to arrange buttons and hunt hazel nuts ("enormous patience with triviality"), enjoyed Burma Shave rhymes ("unproductive catholicity") and never learned to speak French perfectly ("ivory tower").[3]

If in the first instance Mr. Reid replaces Miss Stein's work with

[3] Strangely Mr. Reid makes little use of Wyndham Lewis, who attacked Miss Stein in *Time and Western Man*, and he does not seem to know Katherine Anne Porter's essay, "The Wooden Umbrella," which is one of the most rhetorically effective personal attacks in modern literature.

Miss Stein, in the second he substitutes her critical writings for her creative ones. And these he systematically misreads. In a book that is heavily marbled with quotation, there are only a few examples from her creative work and even these are used for autobiographical purposes. There is not a single analysis of any of her stories, poems, and plays. Mr. Reid gives no concrete evidence of having read them, and surely this is the critic's first responsibility.[4]

The critical essays show Miss Stein at her best, Mr. Reid says, but he brings to their explication the willful literal-mindedness of an investigating congressman. He is so intent upon conviction that he often misses the tone of her language,[5] fails to follow the directions in the context,[6] supplies no historical background for her remarks,[7] blurs essential distinctions,[8] and is prevented from dealing justly with some of the ideas he does understand because he regards them, having come from Miss Stein, as peculiar and mad, even though they may be (and are) characteristic of an entire movement in modern literature that begins at least as far back as Gautier's preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and contains many of the most important literary figures of our time. One example of his way of reading should be enough.

In *The Geographical History of America* Miss Stein writes:

> It is only in history government, propaganda that it is of any importance if anybody is right about anything. Science well they never are right about anything not right enough so that science cannot go on enjoying itself as if it is interesting, which it is. . . . Master-pieces have always known that being right would not be anything because if they were right then it would not be as they wrote but as they thought and in a real master-piece there is no thought, if there were thought then there would be that they are right and in a master-piece you cannot be right, if you could it would be what you thought not what you do write.
> Write and right.
> Of course they have nothing to do with one another.[9]

[4] What should we think of someone who undertook to estimate the achievement of Henry James by reading the prefaces and *The Middle Years,* examining some of the letters, and studying Percy Lubbock?

[5] Her remark about the nice American fires, for instance, p. 193.

[6] *Ibid.* War is dancing.

[7] As, for example, her allusions to Shelley in the discussion of God and Mammon, Reid, chapter 3.

[8] Between the artist as artist and the artist as citizen, soldier, friend, etc. See below.

[9] *Geographical History,* pp. 198-99. Reid, p. 76. In other words: It is fortunate for science that its methods give only probable and fallible results, for absolutes halt inquiry. Only politicians and propagandists need absolutes. The purpose of art is not the enunciation of such Truths or their discovery, but rather that of presentation and rendering. Masterpieces do not depend upon being True but upon being faithful and exact, for if they depended upon being True, how many of them would there be?

And Mr. Reid declares that this passage makes the "full antimorality and anti-intellectualism of her position abundantly clear." [10] On a page following, Mr. Reid quotes Miss Stein again:

> . . . master-pieces exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity.[11]

This displays "the full preciosity, the distasteful hermetic quality" of her anti-intellectualism.[12] I cannot understand what is precious, distastefully hermetic or anti-intellectual about thinking that the values of masterpieces are intrinsic, or that they constitute a system in themselves or that they are composed for their own sakes, nor is there anything about the Kantian language Miss Stein uses that gives any strength to that impression.

It is clear from the opinions Mr. Reid expresses here and there that Miss Stein's work embodies principles that upset his whole notion of art, but he is so far from grasping what these principles are that he prefers to linger without, talking about her talk about it, where there is safety. And he is naturally upset that anyone should admire these mad babblings or their complacent author or that the English language should absorb any of the qualities of her absurd style. If only she hadn't written *Three Lives;* if only she hadn't insisted on the Picassos when she and Leo split their spoils; [13] if only she hadn't written all those compelling aphorisms or hadn't put together phrases that fasten themselves in the memory like great lines of verse (one wants to laugh at the pigeons on the grass, and does, but the pigeons aren't disturbed and fail to fly); if only William James had thought less highly of her or if Hugo Munsterberg hadn't called her "an ideal student"; [14] if she had lost her wit and magnetism and gone strange as her writing

[10] Reid, *ibid.* What is evident in this passage is the stumbling in the style, but Mr. Reid never complains about bad writing in this sense.

[11] *What are Masterpieces,* p. 90. Reid, p. 78.

[12] Reid, *ibid.* Compare F. M. Ford: "The one thing you can not do is to propagandise, as author, for any cause. You must not, as author, utter any views: above all you must not fake any events. . . . It is obviously best if you can contrive to be without views at all: your business with the world is rendering, not alteration." *Joseph Conrad.* Duckworth, London (1924), p. 208. Ford does not mean that an author, as a private person, ought to have no opinions. He means what Stein means, that write and right have nothing to do with one another. This may be a mistake but it can scarcely be evidence of pathology.

[13] Leo didn't want them. He wanted the Renoirs, as he didn't care much for Picasso. He always said that Gertrude knew nothing about painting. *The Flowers of Friendship.* Edited by Donald Gallup. Knopf, New York (1953), pp. 86, 91.

[14] *Ibid.,* p. 4.

did, and if her lectures had failed and the soldiers had been bored and if her writing had continued in its obscurity and hadn't, at the close of her life, clarified again and become strong at the end; if she hadn't been so sure of herself, so tough and so consistent; if, really, she hadn't written *Yes Is for a Very Young Man* or "The Coming of the Americans"; then it might be easier to dismiss her as a fraud or a neurotic lady with too much leisure, as a lesbian or a Jew or just another of the wild ones, or as a genius, even, destroyed by ego; Mr. Reid wouldn't have felt any need to write his book. Certainly he would not have felt, against all the facts, so alone with his anger, in the camp of "dissent"—with most of the world on his side.

The writings of Gertrude Stein became a challenge to criticism the moment they were composed and they have remained a challenge. This challenge is of the purest and most direct kind. It is wholehearted and complete. It asks for nothing less than a study of the entire basis of our criticism, and it will not be put off. It requires us to consider again the esthetic significance of style; to examine again the ontological status of the artist's construction; to try to fix, if we can, the location of value in the work; to state, once more, the relation between the artist's vision, his medium, and his effect. None of the literary innovators who were her contemporaries attempted anything like the revolution she proposed, and because her methods were so uncompromising, her work cannot really be met except on the finest and most fundamental grounds. *Finnegans Wake,* for instance, is a work of learning. It can be penetrated by stages. It can be elucidated by degrees. It is a complex, but familiar compound. One can hear at any distance the teeth of the dogs as they feed on its limbs. With Miss Stein, however, one is never able to wet one's wrists before cautiously trusting to the water, nor can one wade slowly in. There the deep clear bottom is at once.

In *Things As They Are,*[15] Gertrude Stein's first story, the pressures that shaped her style show plainly. The novel is a psychological analysis of the relationship among three women, one of whom, Adele, is clearly the author, and it is equally transparent that the fiction is a stratagem against the self to take its secrets, for the novel has no

[15] Written in 1903 and called, significantly, *Quod Erat Demonstrandum,* no effort was made to publish it until it was "discovered" among her things and sent to Louis Bromfield for his opinion in 1931. He found it "vastly interesting" but thought publication would be difficult. (*The Flowers of Friendship, op. cit.,* pp. 249-50.) It was retitled and published by The Banyan Press, Pawlet, Vermont, in 1951. The quotations that follow were taken purposely from the same scene.

other subject than the strength and character of its author's sexuality and the moral price she must pay if she wishes to indulge it. Such an intimate inquiry might have been lurid, should at least have been interesting, but is remarkably dull instead. The self is revenged and keeps its secrets.

The language of *Things As They Are* is not very promising. It is abstract, monotonous, pompous, vague. Circumlocution, euphemism, pedantry bring the story to its knees. Its rhythms are held back; they go with stilted care. Even those passages in which Miss Stein permits herself to touch the air are afraid, and the mark of the graduate essay is everywhere.

> One usually knows very definitely when there is no chance of an acquaintance becoming a friendship [*sic*] but on the other hand it is impossible to tell in a given case whether there is. (15)

The characters cannot pay one another compliments without getting them up like letters of recommendation.

> Adele you seem to me capable of very genuine friendship. You are at once dispassionate in your judgments and loyal in your feelings; tell me will we be friends. (15)

The wit is weary and rhetorical.

> 'You were very generous,' she said 'tell me how much you do care for me.' 'Care for you my dear' Helen answered 'more than you know and less than you think.' (15)

Thought is not permitted any real precision but, held off by the shame and intimacy of the subject, merely apes it. The result is protective speech. One way in writing of not coming near an object is to interpose a kind of neutralizing middle tongue, one that is neither abstractly and impersonally scientific nor directly confronting and dramatic, but one that lies in that gray limbo in between, composed of the commonest words because its objects are the objects of everyday, and therefore a language that is simple and unspecialized, yet one whose effect is flat and sterilizing because its words are held to the simplest naming nouns and verbs, connectives, prepositions, articles and pronouns, the tritest adjectives of value, a few adverbs of quantity and degree, and the automatic flourishes of social speech—good day, how do you do, so pleased. This desire to gain by artifice a safety from the world—to find a way of thinking without the risks of feeling—is the source of the impulse to abstractness and simplicity in Gertrude Stein as it is in much of

modern painting where she felt immediately the similarity of aim.[16]

Protective language names, it never renders. It replaces events with speech. It says two people are in love, it does not show them loving. Jeff and Melanctha talk their passion. Protective language, then, must be precise, for in a world of dangerous objects which by craft of language have been circumvented, there remains a quantity of unfastened feeling that, in lighting elsewhere, will turn a harmless trifle into symbol. Name a rose and you suggest romance, love, civil war, the maidenhead. The English language is so rich in its associations that its literature tends to be complex and carry its meanings on at many levels. Conrad, who, as Ford remarks, wanted to write "a prose of extreme limpidity," often bitterly complained that English words were never words; they were rather instruments for exciting blurred emotions.[17] Protective speech must cut off meanings, not take them on. It must find contexts that will limit the functions of its words to that of naming. Gertrude Stein set about discovering such contexts.

Dull, flat, repetitious, thin, and cowardly—these are the more obvious qualities of this euphemistic language. To these are added, in the experimental stage where disassociation is also sought, the qualities of confusion and tedious surprise. *Things As They Are,* largely written in the simpler style, gets at nothing as it is. Many later works (large portions of *Lucy Church Amiably* for instance), experimenting bravely, choke in the coils of their own locutions. I cannot imagine a language more thoroughly and obstinately inartistic, and Mr. Reid's objections would be fair and mild enough if her course had ended here; but she was often able to take another step, the last available to protective speech: that of giving to her words the feelings that arise from things; that of creating from her words real objects, valuable for themselves, capable of an independent existence, as physical as statuary. In *Things As They Are* one can mark the isolated moments when she struck her special note, but in *Three Lives* she plays a constant music all her own.

The transfer of emotion must be made by means of every physical resource (rhythm, pattern, shape, and sound). How interminably her lovers talk, and how abstractly, yet her rhythms and repeating patterns make an auditory image of the lovers' passion.

[16] Mr. Reid very frequently complains of the flat effect of this language and comments on its evasiveness.

[17] Ford, *op. cit.,* p. 214. In Reid see ch. 7.

> 'Well you trust me then Melanctha, and I certainly love you Melanctha, and seems like to me Melanctha, you and me had ought to be a little better than we certainly ever are doing now to be together. You certainly do think that way, too, Melanctha to me. But may be you do really love me. Tell me, please, real honest now Melanctha darling, tell me so I really always know it in me, do you really truly love me?'[18] (198)

The rise and fall of the name Melanctha, its marvelous quality as a sensuous pause and organizing sound, are used again and again, as here:

> 'I don't see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you're blue. I'd never kill myself Melanctha just 'cause I was blue. I'd maybe kill somebody else Melanctha 'cause I was blue, but I'd never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it'd be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I'd be awful sorry.' (87)

Nor is *Three Lives* an isolated success.

> Old ones come to be dead. Any one coming to be an old enough one comes to be a dead one. Old ones come to be dead ones. Any one not coming to be a dead one before coming to be an old one comes to be an old one and comes then to be a dead one as any old one comes to be a dead one.[19]

Like most dirges, all this says is that people die. In doing so it sticks closely to its point, more scrupulous in this than most. But it is not death that has the power, it has been deprived. The power is in the word.

> They stayed there and were gay there, not very gay there, just gay there. They were both gay there, they were regularly working there both of them cultivating their voices there, they were both gay there.[20]

Modern criticism has lived like a shrew upon paraphrase and explanation. Literature, it holds, is made of signs and the significance of literature, especially prose, lies in the meaning of these signs. The whole tendency of Gertrude Stein's work is to deny this. She was right to do so. Art is not a form of simple communication. It is this principle, explicit in her work, that, because he has failed to clearly grasp

[18] *Three Lives* (1909). Quotations are from the New Directions edition.

[19] *The Making of Americans,* Harcourt Brace, New York (1934), p. 419.

[20] "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," *Geography and Plays,* Four Seas, Boston (1922), p. 17.

and understand it, has perplexed Mr. Reid.[21]

Words have sound and shape. Even the written word wears a halo of unvoiced sound while the spoken word bears the image of its written shape. But sound and shape are accidental properties of words and make up what Aristotle might have called their material cause, for signs are perfectly transparent. They possess only spirit. The logician commonly distinguishes between the physical *token,* which is any actual instance of a word, and the conceptual *type,* which is the idea of the word apart from any particular specimen of it. The distinction removes the temptation to suppose that some one written word, for instance, is that word entirely, so that if the word is erased it ceases to exist in the language. Obviously all that ceases to exist are the marks that make that instance of the word (the token), and not the word itself (the type). Every effort of language to call attention to its indispensable though semantically irrelevant body is treasonous to its function, for the function of the physical is to bear the meaning, not to be the meaning; it is to point beyond itself to the notion it represents, not to grimace and grandstand and walk fearsomely on wire.

So ordinarily language ought to be like the gray inaudible wife who services the great man: an ideal engine, utterly self-effacing, devoted without remainder to its task; but when language is used as an art it is no longer used merely to communicate. It demands to be treated as a thing, inert and voiceless. Properties that it possesses accidentally as a sign it suddenly possesses essentially. Why should it matter that *bush* begins with a *b*? That any word has the sound or shape it has: that it is long or short, formed with the tongue or lips or teeth, uttered from the throat or through the mouth or nose, pronounced with a rising or a falling note, clipped or slurred, spoken slowly, fast; that it is stressed in one way or another, habitually whispered or mumbled or roared, surrounded by questionable gestures or impeccable clothes; that it is associated with other shapes and sounds because it happens to resemble them, or for reasons even more fortuitous; that it was Latin once or came from Greek or is used only by people who stammer at ladies as an exercise in discretion; that any word has or is any of these things, although they may explain the origin of its meaning or the limits of its social use or simply the way, in the language, it is produced, is a fact about the word as fundamentally irrelevant to its purely communicative function as the flavor of food to its nutritional value or the color of a locomotive to its force.

[21] Sutherland discusses this problem with what seems to me a good deal of intelligence, *op. cit.,* p. 83 ff.

In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means, and the impulse to make an artifact out of the materials of the medium and so to treat the medium as an end. Calligraphy is an obvious instance. The elaboration that can be accorded the letter *R*, for example, far outruns its meaning, yet it would receive no elaboration at all if it were not a letter. One is tempted, therefore, to see in the elaboration some explication of the meaning of the letter, some search for mystic essence even, while at the same time the elaborations reduce it to a pure design whose interest lies wholly in the movement and harmony of lines in space. A sign will tend to make more and more of its physical nature intrinsic to its function by placing more and more meaning on more and more parts of itself. In this way it becomes iconic and the distinction between the sign and its object is progressively broken down. Instead of reducing the strength of the token as one might expect, this attempt to increase the generality of the sign by scooping its material into its type increases immeasurably the uniqueness of the token until it is a token of nothing but itself, for continuously one is invited to wonder if there are not more properties of the sign that can be given significance, and the sign is searched with the thoroughness of a treasure island. So words become the objects they mean while objects are given qualities proper to their names. This is, of course, the action of magic. Levels of language are destroyed. Logical types are deliberately confused. Ends are telescoped into means. Types are merged with tokens. Signs are identified with things. In a sense, the serious aim of language is ignored and even made fun of. And in so far as the literary arts use signs in this way, it is wholly misleading to describe them as forms of communication. They are devoted, quite as much, to the manufacture of intentionally useless objects. The attraction to the artist of the word made flesh, the love of the word as a resonance or a shape in space, is the least understood of all esthetic phenomena, being perhaps so purely a property of the creative consciousness and the first quality of which the insensitive are usually deprived.

> Trembling was all living, living was all loving, some one was then the other one. Certainly this one was loving this Ada then. And certainly Ada all her living then was happier in living than any one else who ever could, who was, who is, who ever will be living.[22]

[22] "Ada," *Geography and Plays, op. cit.,* p. 16.

In her effort to escape a purely protective language and make a vital thing of words, Gertrude Stein unsettled the whole of prose. Her abstractness enlarged the vocabulary of exciting words and made for some of the dullest, flattest, and longest literature perhaps in history. Her experiments in disassociation enlivened many dead terms and made her a master of juxtaposition.[23] They also created bewildering and unpleasant scatterings of sound. Her success in uniting thought and feeling in the meaning and movement of speech showed that rhythm is half of prose, and gave it the power of poetry without the indecency of imitation. It also nearly made her a mystic and sent her wildly after essences and types. She studied grammar creatively, as few writers have, though little concrete seemed to come of it and she was sometimes made to sound an utter idiot by present tense and Time. She rid her works of anecdote and scene and character and drama and description and narration one by one and in both a theoretical and applied way raised the serious question of their need and function. None of her contemporaries had her intellectual reach, few her persistence and devotion, though many had more industry and insistence on perfection.

In some such way, it seems to me, rather than in the way of Mr. Reid, her measure should be made. But calmly, above all, and slowly. She reads easily when an impatient mind does not hasten the eye. We habitually seek some meaning and we hurry. But each word is an object to Gertrude Stein, something in a list, like the roll-call of the ships, and lists are delightful simply for the words that are on them.

> Winter and wet is on the apple, that means more handkerchief of any color, the size is the same when the pillow is little. That is the way to be conscious. A perfume is not neater.[24] (102)

I think that sometimes she brings prose by its own good methods to the condition of the lyric. And everyone knows some perfectly beautiful lyrics that mean hardly anything.

> Please the spoons, the ones that are silver and have sugar and do not make mischief later, do not ever say more than listening can explain. (102)

[23] This can be examined best in the latter half of *A Long Gay Book,* in *Tender Buttons,* and on a larger scale in *Ida,* a late surrealistic novel rich in symbolism, a rare thing for Gertrude Stein.

[24] This and the following quotation are from *A Long Gay Book* in *G.M.P. and* Two Shorter Stories. Plain Edition, Paris (1932).

EVAN S. CONNELL:

At the Crossroads

A silent, red-bearded tramp and an old woman who calls herself Letty are standing patiently at the intersection of two empty highways in the desert. The old woman feels death not far away so she is returning to West Virginia where she was born, but the tramp sees a different future—he is headed for California where he believes his luck will change.

It is almost noon. Old Letty, with head bowed, does not move, but the tramp is growing restless and begins to kick at the gravel. Now and again he shakes his head in despair. All at once Letty turns to him with a beseeching expression; she has just found out she cannot make it back to the town in the Cumberland Mountains where she was born. She has waited too long. Death is following her and will not wait. It does not seem possible. She is both weakened and thrilled by the idea, yet there can be no mistake—her time has come. Presently she is obsessed by a singular desire: she must explain to someone what life actually is. Now that she has been overtaken it is dreadfully important that someone remember her, remember and never forget that she too was once here on earth. A lazy vagabond is not the audience she would have selected but such is the will of God and to this man, therefore, whoever he may be, she intends to confide the meaning of her life.

Without preamble she walks over to him and begins in a quavering voice, "There was a time in Ely, Nevada, when the Lord appeared in the bright sunlight and said I was doing about as well as could be expected."

The tramp gazes at her incuriously; he wonders if she can be mad. He does not know where this old woman is going or where she came from or why, and cares not the slightest. His own plans are much too absorbing. It is very strange how any one man should have all the bad luck he has had, very strange indeed, but if only he can reach the coast things will surely be different. He thinks of the many stingy people there are in the world; while he broods on how they conspire against him his lips puff out through his beard. Shading his eyes he squints along the broad federal highway that comes sweep-