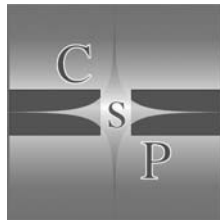
Susan Glaspell
New Directions in Critical Inquiry

Edited and Introduction by

Martha C. Carpentier



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INTRODUCTION

MARTHA C. CARPENTIER

The rediscovery of Susan Glaspell's *oeuvre* has been somewhat like that of Tutankhamen's tomb: one is astounded to find such riches buried so effectively for so long. Linda Ben-Zvi describes the moment of stunned revelation that most Glaspell scholars have experienced:

> I can still clearly remember my shock and anger when … [while] preparing a book on Samuel Beckett, I wandered over to the stacks that contained Glaspell material and realized for the first time the extent of her writings—over fifty short stories, nine novels, and fourteen plays—and the extent of her erasure from the American dramatic and literary canons.[1]

Paul Lauter has given some answers to the inevitable question of why—one being gender, of course. From the 1920s through the 1950s, in America women were systematically excluded from academia, while the American canon was sanctified by male literary critics trained in formalism, and seeking to establish an assertive national identity through an indigenous literature reflecting "the professoriat's concern that a truly American art be attractive to, embody the values of, masculine culture."[2] Naturally such values would be imparted through narratives of war, not love; the plains, not the kitchen; and the father, not the mother. Since Glaspell wrote about *all* of these themes over the course of a nearly fifty-year commitment to her art, it was only by some straining that her body of work could be effectively excluded, but so it was.

Generic and aesthetic biases came into play as well. Since American formalism derived, via T.S. Eliot, from modernism, the major stylistic components of American fiction, realism and naturalism, were shunted aside in

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[1] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), x.

[2] Paul Lauter, "Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties," in *Canons and Contexts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

favor of a highly allusive, experimental aesthetic—the famous New Critical "complexity, ambiguity, tension, irony," all conveniently affirming "the status of the literary critic"[3] as interpreter. Since, as we now know, Glaspell effectively mastered both realist and expressionist styles, again the attempt to marginalize her was put to the test. The first step had already worked well with other American women writers: a derogation of her fiction aided by superficial reading as regional, sentimental, written for pay, and to please female audiences.[4] And then, fortuitously, Eugene O'Neill came along to eclipse the overtly modernist aesthetic of Glaspell's significant contribution to the origins of American drama.

But somehow these answers no longer seem sufficient to explain the magnitude of the cover-up. American writers tend to mythologize themselves, the most paradigmatic twentieth-century (male) myth being that of the peripatetic, expatriate, alcoholic, generally angst-ridden, and preferably suicidal, rebel. Although Glaspell could never be called suicidal—she always had too much passion for life and work for that—ironically, she lived most of the myths of the American writer, too, in her fifty-year career. Always a rebel, she broke from gender-norms to attend Drake University at the turn-of-the-century, became a journalist, and by 1901 had dedicated herself to a life of writing. Feminist theatre and cultural historians and biographers have resurrected the pivotal role Glaspell played in the most important innovative moment in American theatre, with the Provincetown Players, 1915-1922. And, as Glaspell biographers Barbara Ozieblo and Linda Ben-Zvi have shown, far from being confined to the region of her birth, many years of Glaspell's life were peripatetic, as she moved with the waves of modernist migration, first to Chicago, visiting Paris and later London, and settling in New York and Provincetown.[5] As for being expatriate, her years in Greece were short—1922 to 1924—but I have argued that they were as significant to her artistic development as Paris for Hemingway or London for Eliot.[6] Ben-Zvi charts Glaspell's battle with alcoholism,[7] and while perhaps not angst-ridden, Glaspell was a deeply philosophical writer, who, as Mary E. Papke has done much to

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[3] *Ibid.*, 35.

[4] See Judith Fetterley, Introduction to *Provisions: A Reader from 19th–Century American Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1-40; also see my "The Burial and Resurrection of a Writer," *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 3-5.

[5] See Barbara Ozieblo, *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); also see Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*.

[6] See my "Greece/Greek as Mother's Body in *The Road to the Temple*," *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, 26-42.

[7] Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 359-72.

elucidate, ameliorates a naturalist despair with a determined belief in the capacity of human transcendence.[8] However, while Glaspell may have lived the myth of the American writer, not being a man, she could not, or did not want to, dramatize it as a contribution to her legacy. Her last decades, the 1930s and 40s, express, rather, some of the myths of the female American writer, living and writing in Provincetown hidden in solitary Dickinsonian domesticity, with some of the eccentric genius of a Flannery O'Connor raising peacocks in Milledgeville thrown in, capped after her death by the complete erasure of a Zora Neale Hurston.

What, then, is the myth Glaspell constructed of herself and how might it have contributed to her own erasure? As Barbara Ozieblo comments in her essay for this volume, Glaspell "did not leave much in the way of diaries, letters or theoretical essays on the theatre of her times, but she has given us *The Road to the Temple*, the biography that she wrote of her husband [George Cram Cook] to bestow on him the immortality he craved." The defining moment in that enigmatic book is one that has haunted every Glaspell scholar, many of whom have discussed it and continue to revisit it:

> If a reader is familiar with any story about Susan Glaspell, it is the one about her knowing nothing whatsoever about writing a play until her husband Jig Cook demanded that she do so nevertheless because he needed a play for his theater, out of which demand was born *Trifles*. The story was promoted in her paean to her dead husband, *The Road to the Temple*, a book in which Glaspell does a spectacular job of effacing herself to the point of nearly complete self-erasure so as to reserve center stage for the glorified account of her husband's life and contributions to American art.[9]

It is a paradigmatic moment, not only in a woman writer's conscious deconstruction of herself as an artist, but also in American modernism, because it portrays the instant of Glaspell's ambivalent commitment to playwriting and the consequent birth of *Trifles*, now commonly acknowledged as one of the greatest works of the modern American theatre. To quote it in full:

> "Now, Susan," he said to me, briskly, "I have announced a play of yours for the next bill."
> "But I have no play!"
> "Then you will have to sit down to-morrow and begin one."

[8] Mary E. Papke, "Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith," in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, eds. Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 19-34.

[9] Mary E. Papke, "Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith," 20. My italics.

> I protested. I did not know how to write a play. I had never "studied it."
> "Nonsense," said Jig. "You've got a stage, haven't you?"[10]

How Glaspell scholars have read this moment has shifted over time, from anger at him (for being a bully), bafflement at her (for betraying herself and all women) to an understanding of the ambivalence imbedded in the passage,[11] and—where I believe we are arriving today—a dawning appreciation for the supremely self-conscious artistry of everything Glaspell wrote, including this. For it is a self-consciousness parody that cries to be read through a post-structuralist lense, a truly Derridaian moment in its complex play. While she appears to grant all the power to him, she nevertheless undoes what she simultaneously does by portraying the beloved as midwife to her own genius (on a par, if we dare to say it, with Pound's midwifery of Eliot's *Waste Land* or of H.D. as "imagiste"), and she reverses, while seeming to affirm, the gendered order of male as creator and female as muse.

This volume of essays is entitled "New Directions in Critical Inquiry" for this reason: Glaspell scholarship now *begins* from an awareness of the supremely self-conscious artistry that characterizes all her work. Thus, Barbara Ozieblo looks beyond the ostensible "hagiography" of *The Road to the Temple*, to revisit sections of it as "a testament to their creative thinking on the theatre—the theory and the practice," and she discusses Glaspell's unpublished play, *Chains of Dew*, in light of Shavian "realism" and "idealism," as a conscious effort to join O'Neill on the Broadway stage. Ignoring Cook's role entirely in the birth of *Trifles*, Lucia V. Sander focuses on the proceeding moment in *The Road to the Temple*, perhaps one more deserving of fame, in which Glaspell "sat alone on one of our wooden benches without a back, and looked a long time at that bare little stage,"[12] until she saw the stage become a kitchen and the talkative men and two silent women, her characters, enter. Glaspell might have said then, in the words of Virginia Woolf's artist Lily Briscoe, "I have had my vision,"[13] and Sander goes on to explore the ways in which "dreams and the theatre are the two places where that which is dead can be revived, where that

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[10] Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1941), 255.

[11] J. Ellen Gainor combines the passage with a "testier account" Glaspell wrote much later in her life suggesting "resistance to her husband, despite her acquiescence," a "paradox" she feels Glaspell "inscribes into the play's subject, form, and composition." See J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-48* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 38.

[12] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 255-6.

[13] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1927), 209.

which seems to have disappeared can reveal itself." Glaspell's modernism is further explored by Marie Molnar, who reads *Antigone* as the consciously chosen classical subtext for Glaspell's heroic tragedy of self versus state, *Inheritors*.

That *Trifles* was far from being a solitary birth, is established by both legal scholar Patricia L. Bryan, and cultural historian, J. Ellen Gainor. Just as Glaspell based *Trifles* on the Hossack murder case and used it to challenge traditional ideas of legal jurisprudence based solely on the "'higher'… abstract principles" rendered by the symbolic, Bryan shows how, in an earlier story, "The Plea," she used another actual case, this time involving a child, John Wesley Elkins, who murdered his mother and stepfather, to portray "new ideas of reform, focusing on the necessity of positive environmental changes," and to advocate as she does in *Trifles* and "Jury of Her Peers" that "empathic understanding … might well be an essential part of achieving justice." In a similar vein, Gainor establishes that Glaspell's witty one-act play, *Woman's Honor*, may have been inspired by the murder trial of Joe Hill, in which he refused to provide an alibi, purportedly, to protect a woman's honor, as well as intended to critique the "Slander Per Se" laws which legitimized and perpetuated the ideology of female virtue.

Mary E. Papke discusses Glaspell's roots in American pragmatism and transcendentalism, as expressed in her lifelong "obsession with war as both destroyer and possibility," focusing particularly on her fiction of the Great War and the 1945 novel, *Judd Rankin's Daughter,* her "last word on America and war." Kristina Hinz-Bode, too, discusses *Judd Rankin's Daughter,* comparing it to other novels from early and late in Glaspell's career, to show her "continuous engagement with the implications of … the epistemological crisis of modernity" and, despite Glaspell's participation in the modernist presentation of reality as fragmented and uncertain, her consistent affirmation of the quest for truth.

There is another way in which Susan Glaspell inadvertently contributed to her own erasure from the canon. As Linda Ben-Zvi comments in her introduction to the first collection of critical essays on Susan Glaspell, her writing "assiduously works to evade categorization" and as such, it requires particular kinds of criticism "attuned to the nuances between the lines" and an ability to read with "a sense of the historical forces that the works were attempting to deconstruct."[14] In the post-war era of canon formation based upon establishing singular "masterpieces" and dividing literary works into "major," "minor," and other value-laden categories, Glaspell's very fertility and freedom from generic constraints worked against her. Was she a playwright or a

[14] Linda Ben-Zvi, Introduction to *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 6.

novelist? Was she an expressionist or a realist? Was she satirical or sentimental? Neither she nor her work could be pigeon-holed. She was, and is, all of these, resulting in an *oeuvre* that today continues to challenge and excite students, theatre professionals, and literary critics around the world. As this collection illustrates, scholars now bring nuanced textual readings to elucidate Glaspell's modernist rendering of the human psyche, as well historically informed readings to elucidate Glaspell's lifelong commitment to issues of social justice, grounded in the events and philosophical debates of her day.

SUSAN GLASPELL AND THE MODERNIST EXPERIMENT OF *CHAINS OF DEW*

BARBARA OZIEBLO

The pure theatrical spectacle, as envisioned by modernism, is problematical and has lead to a questioning of its very possibility. All the same, theatre partook of the modernist determination to propel art into the future, and to remove the stage from the quotidian, reinforcing its theatricality and creating a harmonious presentation for an elite audience that would be witness to the manifestation of beauty, a beauty that, as Susan Glaspell's Claire Archer predicts, "has opened as the sea" onto "immensity."[1] Glaspell, one of America's most underestimated modernist playwrights, wrought plays that exemplify the various routes that modernism took in the theatre: on the one hand, she sought the beauty and "otherness" advocated by Edward Gordon Craig or Wyndham Lewis; on the other hand, she held a Shavian conviction that the theatre could do more than offer an aesthetic experience and, having established an intellectual relationship with her audience, sought to reform society through her plays.

The contrast between the last two pieces by Susan Glaspell that the Provincetown Players performed, *The Verge* in 1921 and *Chains of Dew* in 1922, reflects this polarity of her theatrical ambition: *The Verge* literally seeks to create an "otherness" that will be a "gorgeous chance" to know the "humility" of success,[2] while *Chains of Dew* grapples more realistically with a number of dilemmas that result from the hypocritical social mores of the period. The reception given the two plays responds to their differences: *Chains of Dew* tends to be rejected as heavily reliant on obvious symbolism and written in too great a hurry. *The Verge*, on the other hand, has either been praised extravagantly or declared to be an incomprehensible depiction of an insane woman.

Glaspell understood the risks she was running in *The Verge*; she knew the Playwrights' Theatre audience well and she knew that at least one sector, her

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[1] Susan Glaspell, *The Verge*, in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 87.
[2] *Ibid*., 70, 98.

radical friends of the Heterodoxy Club, would respond to Claire Archer's predicament. When writing *Chains of Dew*, however, she had no such clear picture of her possible spectators; she was led by her ambition to reach a larger audience and to awaken them to the injustices of society caused by the double standard applied to class and gender issues. Set in the early 1900s, the play shows how Diantha, the wife of a mediocre Midwestern poet, attempts to transform their social life in order to allow Seymore to devote himself to his poetry. Seymore leads a double life, dividing his time between a bohemian New York crowd and the staid duties of a bank director in their small Midwestern town. His New York friend, Nora, a dedicated campaigner in Margaret Sanger's efforts to legalize birth control, erupts into his home life, determined to either transform his wife or free him from her. She soon realizes that it is Diantha that needs to be freed from Seymore's manipulative tactics. Both Diantha and Seymore's mother are eager to become involved in the birth control movement until they realize that Seymore has built his sense of identity on their dependence: without them, he is a rag doll with no stuffing. Both Diantha and Mother consciously sacrifice their longings for an independent interest in life in order to boost Seymore's ego, so giving the lie to Zarathustra's "The man's happiness is: I will. The woman's happiness is: He will."[3] While in *The Verge* Glaspell would create a protagonist willing to sacrifice life in order to maintain her independence and creativity, in *Chains of Dew,* the protagonist, however unwillingly, submits to the demands of her husband. Although written for different audiences, both plays are modernist dramas with protagonists that qualify as New Women—and as such, *Chains of Dew* and *The Verge* exemplify the complex and plural nature of theatrical modernism and early twentieth-century feminism.

Frequently bewildered by Glaspell's modernity, contemporary reviewers, in their attempt to place her within a recognizable theatrical context, compared her work to that of the great European dramatists of the turn-of-the-century; English critics in particular saw her as the founder of "the purely intellectual school of American drama"[4] in the tradition of Chekhov, Strindberg, Ibsen and Shaw. According to A. D. Peters, for Glaspell, "the play is a means to an end. Her main interests are psychology and sociology. She has the soul of a reformer." R. Ellis Roberts, on the other hand, insisted that "Miss Susan Glaspell is the

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[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. and intro. R.J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), 92. See Margit Sichert's "Claire Archer—a 'Nietzscheanna' in Susan Glaspell's *The Verge* (in ed. Herbert Grabes, *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literture*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1977, vol. 13, 271-97) for Glaspell and Nietzsche.

[4] A.D. Peters, "Susan Glaspell, New American Dramatist," *Daily Telegraph* (London), 19? June 1924.

greatest playwright we have writing in English since Mr. Shaw began. I am not sure that she is not the greatest dramatist since Ibsen."[5] Glaspell, as was George Bernard Shaw, would have been delighted to find that she had managed to administer a "sudden earthquake shock to the foundations of morality" with her plays.[6] Her well-known refusal to participate actively in political and social movements other than by her pen only heightens the political value of her writing and emphasizes her need to stir the audience to action. [7]

The relationship between the audience and the play vexed modernist playwrights in their crusade to renew the theatre; the most extreme exponents of modernism saw the actor as an unnecessary intermediary and advocated the use of marionettes, while others pursued the tantalizing vision of a theatre without an audience. Glaspell did not go to the lengths of Craig or Wyndham Lewis; neither was she led by the influence of the Japanese *noh* drama to strive for an alliance of all the arts on the stage as was W. B. Yeats. She was more attuned to the modernist desire to express the individual conscience and, in *The Verge*, she made use of expressionistic devices to render Claire Archer's mind. However, in most of her plays, as in *Chains of Dew*, Glaspell's experimentation with theatrical forms was less extreme, and therefore more performable and readily comprehensible to her audiences. She worked in the mode of Shaw, using her intellect to present issues of personal and political significance to the audience—and so gained for herself the reputation of a "talky" playwright, and a reformer.

From her very initiation into writing for the theatre, Glaspell was aware of her audience as much as she was aware of the physical space that the stage and the theatre implied. When she wrote her first play, *Trifles*, she wrote literally from the stage and for a very specific audience.[8] All the Provincetown Players playwrights necessarily had a special, pragmatic relationship with their audience—subscribers who made their very existence possible. Edna Kenton, in an article for the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1918, admits the close relationship that the Provincetown Players had with their frequently "bewildered" spectators who "shift[ed] uncomfortably" on the hard benches, and yet continued paying their subscriptions and coming to see the plays.[9]

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[5] R. Ellis Roberts, "A Great Playwright," *Guardian*, 17 July 1925.
[6] George Bernard Shaw, 1902 Preface to *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, in *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, ed. Lee A. Jacobus, 4th Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 867.
[7] Alice Rohe, "The Story of Susan Glaspell," *New York Morning Telegraph*, 18 December 1921, 4.
[8] See Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Stokes, 1927), 256.
[9] Edna Kenton, "Unorganized, Amateur, Purely Experimental," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 April 1918, Part 2, 9-10.

Alfred Kreymborg's account of the Players also testifies to audience fidelity: "No matter how the group tried their patience, Provincetown audiences were loyal down to the last subscriber," he wrote.[10]

The Provincetown Announcements frequently made direct mention of the audience, sometimes recalling Cook's statements as quoted by Glaspell in *The Road to the Temple*. Cook, co-founder of the Provincetown Players and Susan Glaspell's husband, a visionary who was convinced that the teachings of Wagner, d'Annunzio, Kipling, Whitman, and Nietzsche could, interfused, be put to use in a socialist democracy, believed that he had been selected to inspire an "American Renaissance of the Twentieth Century" by stimulating a chosen "one hundred" to kindle "communal intellectual passion."[11] Thus, in the announcement for the seventh season, that of 1920-21, we read:

> There exist today in New York City perhaps a thousand men and women who, as individuals, are the spiritual equals of those who saw the first performances of Aristophanes, Molière, or Shakespeare. . . . For six years this group [the Provincetown Players] has shown enough power in developing new playwrights to justify a chosen thousand in forming themselves into an audience of inspiration. . . . The future art of [the Provincetown] writers should not be left to be shaped by the vulgarity and dullness of the ubiquitous amusement-seeker of the city. . . . What playwright and actor need is not to look down on an audience, nor up to it, but to be one with it.[12]

The Provincetown Players' audience was, as were all Little Theatre audiences, a select group made up of enthusiastic friends and supporters, adept at appreciating the attempts at innovation and self-expression. As Dorothy Chansky argues, the Little Theatres not only gave "opportunities for training in production" but also taught the audience how it "should perform its role." Moreover, "Along with this technical, functionalist education comes the less overt message that to know these things is the mark of a superior, minority population."[13] This evaluation of audience training supports Cook's scheme of

[10] Alfred Kreymborg, *Troubadour: An Autobiography* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), 310.

[11] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 224-25.

[12] Announcement for seventh season, 1920-1921, Provincetown Scrapbook, Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[13] Dorothy Chansky, *Composing Ourselves: the Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience*, (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Press, 2004), 24-25.

awakening his chosen one hundred to what Shaw had called the "unbearable face of the truth."[14]

Glaspell shared Cook's thoughts on the significance of the audience; or perhaps she had led him to them during those long conversations on what the theatre "might be" that she relives in *The Road to the Temple*—after the entrancing experience of *Jephthah's Daughter* at the Neighborhood Playhouse, or over intoxicating bottles of wine drained on the sand dunes in Provincetown.[15] Unfortunately, she did not leave much in the way of diaries, letters or theoretical essays on the theatre of her times, but she has given us *The Road to the Temple*, the biography that she wrote of her husband to bestow on him the immortality he craved. The volume, frequently considered a hagiography, is a collage of scraps of Cook's writing, interwoven with Glaspell's authorial comments. Although Glaspell presents herself as an insignificant shadow trailing in Cook's wake, her selection of his fragmented thoughts achieves order and coherence and becomes a testament to their creative thinking on the theatre—the theory and the practice. Read together with the announcements for the Provincetowners' seasons, *The Road to the Temple*, in its middle section, shows not only that the Provincetown Players were aware of European theatrical innovations, but also that they were willing to adapt them to the artistic needs of their Little Theatre and to train their audiences to accept the modern and to think critically. Glaspell, a spectator herself, respected the participation of the audience in the communal endeavor of every performance, thus rejecting the empathetic model of the Wagnerian enthralled but passive onlooker. She wrote:

> The people who had seen the plays, and the people who gave them, were *adventurers together*. The spectators were part of the Players, for how could it have been done without the feeling that came from them, without that sense of them there, waiting, ready to share, giving—finding the deep level where audience and writer and player are one.[16]

Glaspell's optimism was not always shared by Cook—as, for example, when he scribbled the following lines, which she recovered to emphasize the role of the audience: "we need a public like [Aristophanes']" he pleaded, "which itself has the habit of thinking and talking frankly of life. We need the sympathy of such a public, the fundamental oneness with the public, which Aristophanes

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[14] George Bernard Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," *Major Critical Essays*, ed. Michael Holroyd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 50.
[15] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 249-56.
[16] *Ibid*., 254. My italics.

had."[17] The audience that saw the plays of Aristophanes and other Athenian dramatists was trained to interpret "signal-information" as "semantic information," and was thus able to produce meaning.[18] Aston and Savona see in such "operations of conventionalism" an invitation to the spectator "to work, in a creative collusion with dramatist and actor, towards a more complete realisation of the enacted text," participating in "the construction and operation of imaginative space, and [learning] such conventions as will facilitate effective participation."[19] Such a spectator was superceded by the bourgeois audience of the Renaissance "illusionistic" theatre that had become passive as it learned to "identify unproblematically with the character"[20] and to accept what Glaspell called the "patterned" plays of Broadway that "did not open out to—where it surprised or thrilled your spirit to follow."[21]

The third model of the historical development of theatre that Aston and Savona posit is that of "contestation of illusionism" and the Provincetown Players, as both a modernist and avant-garde theatrical venture, sought an audience willing to assume an "active role in the processes of meaning-production."[22] Although it is true that their New York theatres were equipped with the traditional proscenium arch, Glaspell assures readers that Cook did not want an arena, as did Max Reinhardt, nor a simple hall as Vsevolod Meyerhold planned for his proletarian spectators: as she writes, Cook dreamed of a "theatre of domes," that, in his words, would restore "to drama its Elizabethan power of story-telling," and Glaspell asserts emphatically, "I did know what he meant." What they both wanted for the theatre was to "begin new. Do it because we want to see what it is we can do," so echoing Ezra Pound's modernist credo.[23]

Glaspell's notion of a re-beginning, given her reformist and social agenda, did not lead her to radical experiments with theatrical illusionism except in *The Verge*; rather, it inevitably involved a revaluation of mores and convictions, in particular as these applied to women, but also to the potential of personal and artistic development of both men and women within society. Glaspell's theatrically most innovative play has been both performed and written about in the last two decades, but *Chains of Dew*, which Glaspell never published, still

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[17] *Ibid*., 249.

[18] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1994), 41.

[19] Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1994), 91, 160.

[20] *Ibid*., 160.

[21] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 248.

[22] Aston and Savona, *Theatre as Sign-System*, 93, 161. See also my "Avant-Garde and Modernist Women Dramatists of the Provincetown Players: Bryant, Davies and Millay," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 16:2 (Spring 2004):1-16.

[23] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 307-09.

awaits critical reinterpretation. The history of the writing and production of this play is crucial to an understanding of Glaspell's ambition as a playwright and explains why she chose to people it with women who betray the feminist principles of independence and inner strength that generally characterize her protagonists.

Glaspell had spent the fall of 1919 in Provincetown working on *Chains of Dew* and in January 1920 she confided to Agnes Boulton, Eugene O'Neill's wife, that: "she didn't quite know what to do with it."[24] A little miffed by O'Neill's successes and contacts outside the Provincetown Players, she too wanted to try for a wider audience and greater recognition; after all, she had been selflessly influential in getting O'Neill's first play performed, and had continued to support him.[25] Glaspell's role in O'Neill's intellectual development as a playwright has not received sufficient attention, in spite of Linda Ben-Zvi's early articles on this subject. More recently, Joel Pfister, in his study of O'Neill, is categorical as to the significance of Glaspell's influence on his writing, stating that she "taught O'Neill . . . about the pervasive effects of discourse on subjectivity."[26] Although, according to Cook's daughter, Nilla Cook,[27] Glaspell always gave herself generously to the protégés she adopted, she did not lack ambition for herself, and if O'Neill offered to help get her onto Broadway, she must have been happy to accept—even if perhaps she did wonder what a Broadway success would do to her relationship with her husband, who, at that time, still categorically rejected its commercialism.

That O'Neill did try to help, we know from his letters to Boulton who, after reading *Chains of Dew*, and liking it, sent it on to him. Although there is no mention of the title of the play in the O'Neill correspondence, it is identified in similarly dated letters from Glaspell to her friend Lucy Huffaker and, from comments on the play by Boulton we can infer that it was certainly not *Inheritors* nor *The Verge*, as Bogard and Bryer suggest in a note in the *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill*.[28] O'Neill wrote to Boulton from New York asking her to "Tell Susan I spoke to [the Broadway producer George C.] Tyler and that he is genuinely eager to have a look at it." O'Neill went on to say: "I like her

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[24] Agnes Boulton to Eugene O'Neill, n.d., Agnes Boulton Papers, Houghton Theatre Collection, Harvard University.

[25] See my *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 84-87.

[26] Joel Pfister, Joel, *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 194.

[27] Quoted in Marcia Noe, *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland* (Macomb, Ill.: Western Illinois University,1983), 10.

[28] Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer, eds., *Selected Letters of Eugene O'Neill* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 103.

play tremendously and think it has a fine chance with him—or anyone else."[29] However, the play was rejected by Tyler, and also by John D. Williams. Glaspell then sent it to the Theatre Guild and, in February 1920, was impatient to know "the great world's attitude to *Chains of Dew*," as she confided to Huffaker.[30]

Chains of Dew was eventually performed for a Provincetown audience and the legend that has been built up around that production has done the play a considerable disservice. This legend, as most of the Provincetown legends, originates in Edna Kenton's history of the Players[31] in which she, unwittingly, set the example for future reception and analysis of *Chains of Dew.* Although the decision to perform the play as the sixth and last bill of that season was taken before Glaspell and Cook left for Greece, Kenton reported in a letter to Glaspell on 5 May 1922 that "*Chains of Dew* was to have been swept out of the back door," and it was only her decisive action that prevented an O'Neill revival in its stead. As discussions to sabotage the production of Glaspell's play were under way, Kenton writes that she "just quietly and without taking any counsel announced in the public press that 'Chains of Dew' was going on. We were committed and the gang[?] was out." It is impossible to know whether her determination to see that "The season goes through as planned before Jig [Cook] sailed" was due to sheer stubbornness, fidelity to Glaspell and Cook's plans in general or, specifically, to Glaspell's desire to have her play performed. The long letter of 5 May recounts Kenton's struggles to find a director, cast the play, and minimize the cuts, and she was far from pleased with the result; she assured her friend that, "If you had been there, subtleties and ironies would have stayed in that went." It is clear from Kenton's letter that she had received, and incorporated into the script, some changes that Glaspell had made while revising her play on the journey to Greece. However, Kenton also says that "Your script has never come,"[32] implying that Glaspell had sent a revised text that has been lost. The text that we have of *Chains of Dew* is the original, so far unpublished text, meant for a Broadway production, which Glaspell filed at the Library of Congress in 1920.

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Susan Glaspell to Lucy Huffaker, n.d., Edward Goodman Papers, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

[31] Edna Kenton's *The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre 1915-1922* was available only in manuscript form till 1997 when it was edited and published by Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer in the *Eugene O'Neill Review* 21:1 & 2 (Spring/Fall 1997), 1-160.

[32] Edna Kenton to Susan Glaspell, 5 May 1922. Edna Kenton Papers, Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

In her history, Kenton, her trials with the Players uppermost in her mind, transferred her sense of having been cast to the lions after the departure of Glaspell and Cook onto her friend, and allowed herself to be influenced by the critical reception of the weak production of the play in her assessment:

> Susan had made the last sacrifice in letting *Chains*, an immature play, go on the last bill. As the young Roman threw himself into the gulf to save Rome, Susan cast her play into the chasm, narrow but fraught with a thousand dangers, that yawned between *The Hairy Ape* and the close of the season.[33]

Critics have echoed Kenton and exonerated Glaspell by saying that she reluctantly handed over an unfinished piece of work to the Players just before she left for Greece. Even Linda Ben-Zvi is satisfied with such an approach, although she comments that "the surprise is how well much of the play works."[34] It is unlikely that Kenton would have fought so determinedly for the production of the play if she thought Glaspell was in any way reluctant to have it performed. She herself clearly admired the play, which had so many good female parts. As she wrote to Glaspell on 5 May, bemoaning the difficulty of finding good actresses: "That part [the Mother] could make an actress."[35]

Boulton, when she forwarded the typescript of *Chains of Dew* to O'Neill, had insisted on the "good fun" of the piece which, she thought, would appeal to the more open-minded Broadway directors. This "good fun" is reminiscent of the arch humor we find in plays by Shaw or Noel Coward, but also of the feminist reforming spirit of Rachel Crothers. The *Theatre Magazine* reviewer of Crothers's *Young Wisdom* (1914) had praised her for having turned the so-called problem play into light comedy, creating a "clever satire of modern ideas" that was, however, "imbued with feminine delicacy."[36] With *Chains of Dew*, Glaspell was clearly attempting something similar but, accustomed to the easy tolerance of the Provincetown subscribers and not as familiar as was Crothers with the Broadway audience, she chose to eschew "feminine delicacy" when she brought the topic of birth control into the play. However, when *Chains of Dew* was finally performed at the Playwrights' Theatre in 1922, reviewers tended to reject this topic as merely redundant, but if the play had been performed on Broadway in 1920, it might well have garnered comments similar to those bestowed on Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in New York in 1905:

[33] Edna Kenton, *The Provincetown Players and the Playwrights' Theatre 1915-1922*, 156.

[34] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 257.

[35] Edna Kenton to Susan Glaspell, 5 May 1922.

[36] Review of Rachel Crothers' *Young Wisdom* in *Theatre Magazine* (February 1914): 60.

"revolting, indecent, and nauseating where it was not boring."[37] Although revived in New York by the Washington Square Players in 1918 (with Diantha Pattison in the role of Vivie, a possible inspiration for Glaspell's central character, Diantha, in *Chains of Dew*), Shaw's play was not cleared of charges of indecency in England till 1925, when it was performed in Birmingham.

The Comstock Law of 1873 had made it illegal in the U.S. to mail obscene matter such as information on birth control; doctors were forbidden to speak of such practices to their patients and for many people, including the provincial Mrs. MacIntyre of *Chains of Dew*, it was a taboo topic—especially when speaking to women considered social and moral inferiors, such as a laundress. As Mrs. MacIntyre says to Diantha, "One doesn't like to talk to those people about—things."[38] The movement to decriminalize birth control had started before World War I and had been headed, in America, by Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman, the latter related to the Provincetown Players through family and friends; both women attracted notice by jail sentences for their activities. By 1919, the year Glaspell was writing *Chains of Dew*, their radical protests were giving way to more law-abiding tactics; Goldman would be deported in December of that year, and Sanger enlisted the help of the medical profession and the today questionable ideology of eugenics to her cause. This move elicited the help of the affluent, morally correct women in New York and other large cities; as Nora facetiously explains to Mrs. MacIntyre, "Birth control is the smart thing in New York this season. It's rather a bore—the way they run after us. When suffrage grew so—sort of common—the really exclusive people turned to birth control" (II, i, 26).[39] Also in 1919, Mary Ware Dennett—a member of the Heterodoxy Club whose meetings Glaspell attended—founded the Voluntary Parenthood League whose objective was to legalize the giving out of birth control information. Thus if the play had been produced in 1920 as Glaspell had hoped, it would have been extremely topical even though perhaps offensive to Broadway audiences; by 1922 the subject had faded, and the focus of Greenwich Village protests had moved on to other issues.

Chains of Dew exemplifies the tensions of society as depicted by George Bernard Shaw in his essay "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" (1891). In this play

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[37] Quoted in *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, ed. Lee A. Jacobus, 863.

[38] Susan Glaspell, *Chains of Dew*, unpublished typescript, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. All subsequent references to this play will be cited parenthetically.

[39] Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote in the U.S. in 1919; in August 1920 a sufficient number of states had ratified the Amendment for it to become law. During the years leading up to this moment, the suffrage campaigns had been the dominant political rights movement in the lives of many women and men. By 1922, when *Chains of Dew* was finally staged in the last bill of the Provincetown Players, Nora's reference to suffrage would have lost its political edge.

Glaspell recreated Shaw's—and Ibsen's—world of Philistines and idealists and examined the difficult role of the realist in a spirit of Shavian humor, reserving Ibsen's tragic approach for *The Verge*. Writing on Ibsen's family dramas—most of Glaspell's plays and novels are also based on family conflicts—Shaw explains his division of society into three categories:

> let us imagine a community of a thousand persons, organized for the perpetuation of the species on the basis of the British family as we know it at present. Seven hundred of them [the Philistines], we will suppose, find the British family arrangement quite good enough for them. Two hundred and ninety nine [the idealists] find it a failure, but must put up with it since they are in a minority. The remaining person [the realist, is] . . . the man strong enough to face the truth the idealists are shirking.[40]

Shaw recognized the "verbal ambiguity" of the labels he had attached to his classification and his further definitions attempt to clarify the difference between the idealists and the realist. The idealist "has taken refuge with the ideals because he hates himself," while the realist (to whom Claire in *The Verge*, Madeline in *Inheritors,* or Bernice in Glaspell's play of that name could be compared) "has come to have a deep respect for [her]self and faith in the validity of [her] own will."[41] Shaw clarifies still further why he despises the idealist for whom "Realism means egotism; and egotism means depravity," when he states that:

> The realist declares that when a man abnegates the will to live and be free in a world of the living and free, seeking only to conform to ideals for the sake of being, not himself, but 'a good man', then he is morally dead and rotten.[42]

The Midwestern town of *Chains of Dew* is inhabited by self-righteous Philistines; Seymore is the idealist who thrives on his sense of "otherness" and therefore does not wish to rebel, while Nora is the courageous realist with a will to transform society. Diantha and Mother have the courage of the realist but they knowingly decide to revert to their previous unsatisfying idealist stance in order to save Seymore from the personal annihilation he dreads, thus proving themselves to be "good women." Shaw's description, of course, fits Seymore very neatly; but the motives of Diantha and the wise all-comprehending Mother, who both forgo Shavian realism for the good of another, are more complex. These two women are not exemplary modernist, independent New Woman as

[40] Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," 48-50.
[41] *Ibid*., 52.
[42] *Ibid*., 53.

are other Glaspellian protagonists; instead, they submit, most unwillingly, to the mold imposed by their established social roles. It would, however, be unjust to consider them "morally dead and rotten."

When we first see Diantha, she is doing her best to refashion Seymore's social life, thus re-writing the old Pygmalion story in a Shavian recourse to inversion of accepted social patterns. In order to do this, she is more than willing to refashion herself—something Shaw's Higgins would never have contemplated for, as he arrogantly states: "I can't change my nature: and I don't intend to change my manners."[43] Eliza of course had expert tutoring from Higgins and Pickering, but Diantha works alone, hoping to surprise her husband; she believes that she should—and that she can—reduce Seymore's social life in such a way as to give him more time to write, and that she could be the intellectual companion he craves. Although her motives seem totally altruistic, she is, in fact, on a deeper level, seeking to empower herself by pleasing her husband and, ultimately, by controlling his activities. Seymore senses this, and his initial reactions are couched in a patronizing tone of supercilious mockery that Diantha must know well. Ever the traditional patriarch, he resents her overt manipulation, quite unaware, of course, that Diantha is rebelling against the strict control he has always exerted on her life.

In Seymore's absence, Diantha has started taking literature classes in order to understand his writing and, innocently oblivious of Seymore's high-handed dismissal of the town's intellectuals as "frump[s]" and "jays" (II, i, 5), she has sought the company of the high-school English teacher. She also attempts to redecorate their home so as bring it in line with her husband's artistic pretensions; she wants to remove the print or copy of Raphael's Sistine Madonna that hangs in their living-room, a picture that Seymore enjoys joking about, but then she realizes that she does not know what to put in its place. This transformation, on which she has already embarked, from the traditional wife to the modern New Woman, educated and independent (and so better able to aid her husband), is furthered by Nora's arrival. Nora finds both Diantha and Mother tired of being the mirror that reflects Seymore's magnanimity in allowing his artistic urges to be sacrificed for their well being. Diantha's search for empowerment is broadened and led into new channels by Nora's decision to set up a birth control league in the town and to name her its president; this newly-found interest gives her a sense of self-worth not related to Seymore and offers her a way out of the undemanding, but frustrating role of submissive incompetence imposed by her husband.

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[43] Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1951), 132.

It is Seymore's Mother who first understands why her son is so angry at the transformations in his wife and his home and she then decides that "we must leave him his bondage" (III, 29). She sadly accepts what she sees to be the obligations of a mother, and following Freudian psychology, assumes responsibility for her son's weakness: "You see, I knew him as a little boy. . . . Perhaps we could have scaled it out of him in his youth; but to take the yearning away now after he's hid behind it all his life . . . Oh, I'm terribly to blame" (III, 33). She recognizes that her son, in order to be happy, must always be the "alien" or the "other" (III, 29). And so she takes it upon herself to convince Diantha where her duty lies, hoping that she "loves [Seymore] enough to be his cross" (III, 33) and that she will follow her example. Diantha takes in only too quickly what is required of her and why; she immediately recognizes as true her mother-in-law's horrified realization that Seymore needs the limitations he has created for himself. Mother's exclamation is charged with inexpressible consequences: "If at this late date you take away the longing, by giving what he's longed for—forcing him to face what he wants—(*shudders*)" (III, 32). Mother, who amuses herself by making rag dolls—one of the highly symbolic elements in the structure of the play—empties a doll of its stuffing and "*flaps the rag*" (III, 32) to show what Seymore would be like without what he considers to be his sacrifices for the benefit of those he loves.

A matriarchal chain is thus created through which the injustices of the patriarchy are given continuity and strength by women's voluntary submission motivated by love and a sense of responsibility to others. The need to choose between freedom and duty to those one loves, that is, the dichotomy of freedom and bondage as posed by Hegel, appears in much of Glaspell's writing; she had dealt graphically with this conflict in her early short story, "The Rules of the Institution" (1914), but Diantha, unlike the protagonist of the earlier story, has no doubts as to how she should behave; once Mother points out to her that Seymore "is so made that he must have a burden" (III, 32), and that she is his burden, the "cross he loves" (III, 33), she accepts the fate that her love of Seymore carries with it. Nora, unable to understand or accept this reversal of feminist values, admits her disappointment and Diantha, in tears, accuses her of ignoring the "nice things—the delightful things and the *great* things" about Seymore (note that she speaks in the abstract, unable to give a single concrete example). She then admits that she is disappointed in herself: "I can't help being—the way I am. Oh, I *wanted* to be different!" (III, 34).

Nora, the Shavian realist, but also a realist in the usual sense who perceives "reality," can only accept defeat and leave Diantha to her chosen fate. Her unobtrusive departure prevents any further discussion of Diantha's tragic decision and avoids all confrontation. She is Glaspell's reply to Ibsen's *The Doll's House*; according to Shaw, family life in that play is based on a fiction

"in which they have been playing at ideal husband and father, wife and mother."[44] With *Chains of Dew*, Glaspell deconstructs this fiction, all the while aware that no amount of door-slamming will transform it. In a previous play, *Bernice*, Glaspell had created a protagonist who was willing to sacrifice herself posthumously to her husband's need for wifely submission. In that play, Margaret deciphers Bernice's action through a series of revelations that provoke her to admire her friend's circuitous maneuvers, but in *Chains of Dew*, perhaps believing that the Broadway audience she was writing for would not tolerate the sober, introspective musings of a Margaret, she eschewed explanations in favor of a tearful reconciliation. The traditional, patriarchal conception of marriage can only result in a fictitious "happy family" in which woman must be prepared to sacrifice her ambitions to the egotism of man—or, at least, make him believe that her happiness and well-being depend entirely on him.

The Broadway directors Glaspell approached with *Chains of Dew* may have been uncomfortable with its taboo theme of birth control, but they must have been even more incommoded by Seymore, its unmanly protagonist, a man who was not convincing as a banker, a vestry man or a poet, the three activities that defined him in society.[45] Boldly, Glaspell created a husband who does not unambiguously uphold the traditional social values of his Midwestern town, thus making Seymore into a problematic character and drawing attention away from the female protagonist. Seymore would be the perfect example of the existentialist "Other" if this condition did not give him the pleasure that it clearly does. He almost boasts that he is as much an alien in the Midwest as in New York where he is surrounded by fellow artists, and wallows in their inability to understand him, clearly considering himself to be somehow superior:

> SEYMORE: Dear Babes!—I'm glad you've been so gently handled. It is a bit amusing, though, to see you with this pleased sense of having emancipated yourselves. . . . You've never been caught by living.
> NORA: You don't have to be caught by living if you don't want to be.
> SEYMORE: Um-hum. All that shows is that you've never been caught. (I, 19, 23)

This superiority, however, does not prevent him from peevishly complaining about his loneliness; when Nora teases him, "It must be lonely to the only grown up person in the world," he reacts "*violently*," affirming "It *is* lonely" (I, 19).

[44] Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," 88.

[45] G.B. Shaw was elected vestryman in London, 1897-1903. However, a vestryman in England was not the same as a vestryman in the Midwest, where the position was linked to a church, and not to the government of a town.

Seymore's bondage to social conventions is opposed to Diantha's drive for individual freedom and development, which she eventually stifles for his sake. Seymore and Diantha exemplify what Jessica Benjamin, in "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," identifies as a stereotypical male/female dichotomy: the traditional male "overemphasizes self boundaries" while the traditional female posture is that of "relinquishing of self."[46] Seymore, however, has constructed his boundaries or his sense of identity in such a way that he is utterly dependent on Mother and on Diantha—a surrogate mother figure for him—for their configuration. At some level, Seymore must know that he is not a great poet and thus he builds his sense of identity not, as Walt Whitman did, on an image of himself as the great American bard, but on the much less demanding role of martyr to the needs of others. He can then take pleasure in being unable to reach the goal of greatness and the role of "other" becomes his only possible identity. His selfhood is defined by the sacrifice of his non-existent, or at best, mediocre, poetic gift and, never having satisfactorily separated from his Mother, his narcissism cannot recognize the selfhood of either Mother or Diantha. For him, they are not subjects in their own right but objects against which he measures himself;[47] thus he refuses to induct them into his world, to teach them to enjoy his poetry or to consider them his equals. Seymore believes that Mother has had a hard life and it is now his obligation/satisfaction to give her the luxuries that she had been denied when he was a child; as for Diantha, she must be pampered and eternally reduced to the level of a spoilt child, so proving his mastery and manhood to society. Seymore, knowing that the source of his power lies in the two women's compliance, uses the patronizing language of the patriarchy to enslave them. The question he frequently puts to Diantha is self-revelatory: "haven't I always been willing to arrange things so you can be happy? Well, then, isn't it a little ungrateful for you not to be?" (III, 40)

Although our interest in act I is centered on Seymore as the poet *manqué* and on the absent, mysterious Diantha (Nora even asks Seymore if his wife is an invalid), it is Nora who sets the tone of the act and the play. Glaspell sympathetically portrays her as the obsessed worker in the campaign for the legalization of birth control and so indicates to her intended Broadway audience that it is about to witness an "improbable farce," as Noel Coward was to subtitle his *Blithe Spirit* twenty years later. But, although Nora is the image of the flippant young woman whose voice Edna St. Vincent Millay captures so

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[46] Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," *The Future of Difference*, eds. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 43.

[47] *Ibid*., 45.

unequivocally in her “Fig” poems, she is serious in her commitment to the birth control movement. One can imagine that she could well have “gone back and forth all night on the ferry” and been “very tired” and “very merry”[48] but one cannot imagine her leaving a job unfinished. As Glaspell tells us, she is “*young and vital and charming—devotion to a cause really doesn’t hurt her looks in the least*” (I, 2). Her repartee with the three men, Leon Whittaker, James O’Brien and Seymore, is witty and well-paced and just sufficiently flippant, tinged with a knowledgeable irony, to raise conspiratorial laughs.

Glaspell had written comedies before; many of her short plays—*Suppressed Desires*, *Woman’s Honor*, or *Close the Book*—are serious attempts to reform society through a farcical vision of cherished assumptions. She had turned to a more sober treatment in *Bernice* and *Inheritors*, but she took for granted that Broadway required a lighter touch. Although writing for an audience she did not fully understand, Glaspell felt sufficiently confident to end the play on a note of parody—that was, however, totally missed by the Provincetown subscribers who had so enjoyed the tearful “Silly One’s” exaggerated proclamations of love in the short play *Woman’s Honor* (1918). Diantha’s charade of sobbing submission at the end, if overplayed by an insensitive actress/director could easily antagonize a thinking audience; it could also reduce Diantha to a sentimental heroine who unthinkingly obeys the Zarathustran precept “Let woman be a plaything, pure and fine like a precious stone.”[49] Reading the play, however, we can only sympathize with her and acknowledge the power of the social mores that determine her sacrifice.

Diantha is one of Glaspell’s most complex women and she reveals her creator’s ambivalence in the face of an individual’s duties and obligations with regard to others. She is an amalgam of the New Woman who dares to assert herself, and the older model of the True Woman who upholds the conventions of society. When considered within the spectrum of Glaspell’s women, Diantha must fall somewhere between Bernice, who successfully manipulates her husband’s ego, and Claire, who accepts madness in order to free herself of the institutional conventions she despises.

The modernist rebellion at the chains in which society was bound, what Michael Levenson has called the need to “challenge an unfreedom” is most unambiguously expressed in Glaspell’s next play, *The Verge*.[50] But although *Chains of Dew* is written from the restrained stance of the thoughtful reformer, it is, nonetheless, a play that refuses to conform to established models of

[48] Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Collected Lyrics*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 95.

[49] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 92.

[50] Michael Levenson, Introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

playwriting. The *New York Herald* reviewer complained that it was "written with a saucy disregard of the necessities of dramaturgy,"[51] a remark that would not have worried Glaspell at all if she had read George Bernard Shaw's dismissal of such "necessities" in a 1911 preface: "the manufacture of the 'well-made play' is not an art: it is an industry."[52] Indeed, there was no predictable plot, development or denouement in *Chains of Dew*, no discovery of conventional wrong-doing, no mysterious strangers arriving unexpectedly, no letters, no incriminating evidence. Glaspell does subvert some of these conventions however: both Nora, the birth-control advocate and Whittaker and O'Brien from the *New Nation*, a journal that published Seymore's poetry, arrive somewhat unexpectedly at Seymore's Midwestern home. But they had announced their trip and so we, the reader/audience, not only expect them but also relish the dramatic irony of their arrival. As in *Bernice*, crucial understanding of the situation is arrived at by dialogue—between Whitaker and Mother and then Mother and Diantha—and not by some spectacular histrionic event designed to please Broadway audiences.

J. Ellen Gainor[53] notes that the lack of sympathetic direction and the editorial cuts to the text made it difficult for reviewers to recognize Glaspell's voice in this play; however, a few reviewers did seem to have some intimation of what Glaspell was doing, although, on the whole, they focused on the dilemma of the poet, and not that of his wife. Alison Smith felt that Glaspell was "wabbling dangerously" between "hilarious satire" and "grim sincerity,"[54] while the *New York Herald* critic thoughtfully wondered if "perhaps [*Chains of Dew*] could be enjoyed by many of those living above the spiritual dead line of Washington Square,"[55] thus intuiting Glaspell's intended audience. The short run of *Chains of Dew* and contemporary accounts, such as that of Edna Kenton or Deutsch and Hanau[56] who barely devote a sentence to the play, added to the lack of a published text, have led today's scholars of Glaspell's work, with the exception of Gainor, to virtually ignore it.

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[51] Anon. "Susan Glaspell's 'Chains of Dew' is Sharp Satire." *New York Herald*, 28 April 1922.

[52] George Bernard Shaw, "Against the Well-Made Play," in *Modern Theories of Drama: A Selection of Writings on Drama and Theatre*, *1840-1990,* ed. George W. Brandt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 102.

[53] J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-48*. (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2001), 193.

[54] Alison Smith, "The New Play," *New York Evening Globe*, 28 April 1922.

[55] Anon. "Susan Glaspell's 'Chains of Dew' is Sharp Satire." *New York Herald*, 28 April 1922.

[56] Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* (1931), New York: Russell and Russell, 1972.

And yet *Chains of Dew* is a theatrical experiment in modernist thought, easily accessible to audiences not familiar with the innovative devices advocated by Gordon Craig or Wyndham Lewis, and presented with the hope of effecting reform in behavior patterns. It offers a comprehensible exploration of both Freudian and Hegelian notions of the creation of identity: of how we establish our "chains" or our "crosses" and try to make the best of our limitations. The modernist concern with the workings of the mind, with evolution, with freedom and with institutional norms, all part of Susan Glaspell's thought, are brought to the fore in *Chains of Dew* and examined. Although Diantha and Mother's submission to Seymore's will in the final act is basically tragic, Glaspell eschewed the sober tones of Ibsen's dramas and clothed her characters and their actions in the light, flippant language of Shaw's comedies. That Diantha's submission to the institution of marriage worried Glaspell, however, is clear from the fact that she returned to the theme in the novel *Ambrose Holt and Family* where a stark realism replaces the farcical turnings of *Chains of Dew*.

Shaw believed that the popular audience did not like to use its brains, and that only a "masterpiece or two" of the New Drama could revive the London theatre and awaken the audience.[57] On the other side of the Atlantic, Glaspell knew that the Broadway audience she aimed for, like Shaw's London spectator, also preferred the ease of established patterns. She had hoped to shake her audience out of its lethargy by making it laugh at, or with, her characters and so lead it to reconsider accepted behavior, in particular the double standard of morality which still held and the concomitant lack of freedom for women. Unfortunately, the uninformed and unsupervised cuts and the bad acting and direction made it impossible for the text to generate the meanings, moral and political, with which Glaspell had infused it. If Glaspell had been present during the rehearsals of *Chains of Dew*, she would have been able to adjust and fine-tune the dialogue and the action with regard to both audience and actors—and to control the cutting. *Chains of Dew*, in order to be as successful as her other plays, requires a perceptive, sympathetic director who would know, even without Glaspell standing over her shoulder, how to bring out the humor and the personal drama contained in this play, how to find that "deep level" demanded by modernism, "where audience and writer and player are one."[58]

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[57] George Bernard Shaw, "Preface: Mainly about Myself," in *Man and Superman and Three Other Plays*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2004), 11-12.

[58] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 254.

I wish to thank Martha C. Carpentier for her encouragement, suggestions and patience with this essay.

A TREMBLING HAND AND A ROCKING CHAIR: GLASPELL, O'NEILL, AND THEIR EARLY DRAMATIC EXPERIMENTS

LUCIA V. SANDER

A hand. What's in a hand? It is indeed a part belonging to a man and, in the case of the first performance of O'Neill's *Before Breakfast*, in 1916, the hand that stuck out on the stage set arranged to be a kitchen belonged to Eugene O'Neill himself. In the same year of 1916, *Trifles* was first performed with Susan Glaspell in the role of Mrs. Hale, a farmwife who finds herself in a kitchen Glaspell had visited sixteen years before she wrote the play.

That writers seem to show their hands more clearly in their early works than in their later writings has been argued by many; that there is plenty of autobiographical material in the early plays by Glaspell and O'Neill has also been a topic of discussion among critics. Though it can be very productive to evoke the writers' biography in the critical reading of their works, in this essay I do not mean to dwell on the toils and tribulations of O'Neill's and Glaspell's married lives. If I direct my focus to the hand that sticks out in *Before Breakfast* and to the hand that rocks the chair in *Trifles*, it is to investigate the ways in which Glaspell's and O'Neill's personal touch as writers is apparent from the start of their career in the theatre.

O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* and Glaspell's *Trifles* have several aspects in common: they were both written for The Provincetown Players by the company's two major writers, they were first performed in the year of 1916, they are both one act plays with women in the main roles, they deal with marriage relations, violence and death. Such similarities have occasioned the pairing of the plays in production and in the classroom. In this essay, nonetheless, I mean to reflect on some of the dissimilarities in such works that mark the beginning of Glaspell's and O'Neill's dramatic career, or rather, of their career as playwrights—which seem to have been dramatic in more than one way.

Trifles and *Before Breakfast* are usually referred to as experimental works by two emerging playwrights. Experimentation is hard work; it can be as

challenging as life is to a child, as risky and lonely as adolescence, for what is there before the conventions seduce us with their promised comfort, recognition, legitimation—before we are arrested and handcuffed when we get too tired to resist by writing, behaving, thinking otherwise? In experimentation there is no one but oneself, running alone against the winds, hair blown up, no make-up, no clothes, no purse—just as we are before breakfast. A hair pin, a shawl, an apron—are not trifles but a way of survival. One is naked when experimenting, and that shows in one's first or early play, novel, child, casserole, one's first night out. . . .

O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* is said to be an experiment in audience tolerance for extended monologues, that is, in putting a whole lot of words in the mouth of a single character to see how long the audience will endure. *Trifles*, on the other hand—a hand Glaspell, as a writer, didn't show for she did not volunteer to write a play—seems to be an experiment with silence, long pauses, broken dialogue, hoping the audience will remain attentive throughout this noiseless play. Furthermore, while in *Before Breakfast,* O'Neill's talkative Mrs. Rowland is a restless woman constantly moving about the stage, in Glaspell's *Trifles,* Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are as economical in their movements and gestures as they are in their words. By constructing a frantic woman who talks too much and two women who are still and talk too little, in *Before Breakfast* and *Trifles* the two playwrights to be seem to have gone separate ways in their representation of gender, that is, of women on the stage, or rather, of wives in the kitchen. Thus beginnings can be very revealing.

But I don't mean to discuss gender representation either, or not here where my title is not "Two ways to kill a husband". In this essay I'm interested in a particular experiment conducted in both plays, although perhaps for different purposes and with different effects, that is, O'Neill's and Glaspell's use of the invisibility effect, which I prefer to call, after Brecht, the i-effect. In *Before Breakfast* and in *Trifles*, a character who is central to the plot of the plays is kept in the wings, denied a stage presence: Rowland and Minnie Foster Wright remain invisible to the audience—although Rowland does stick out his hand and groan, which I will consider further on.

"Visibility is a trap,"[1] wrote Michel Foucault, and, I say, so is invisibility. We know only too well what invisibility has done to women writers of the past, or to women then and again. "Absence disembodies—so does Death,"[2] wrote Emily Dickinson. Nonetheless, invisibility does have its advantages—and not

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 200.

[2] Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston, Toronto and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 211.

only to celebrities on holidays, secret agents in action, internet lovers in lying, etc. According to Peggy Phelan, "there is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal."[3] In the theatre, that which is given to see and that which is hidden from the sight of the audience is the result of a strategic choice that is never innocent. Can the theatre ever be innocent?

There are many ways to tell a story, and one will choose according to what one wants the story to do to the world who listens. In *Before Breakfast*, O'Neill's way is through creating an invisible Rowland (or partially visible, as some consider), so he can experiment with the monologue and the audience can concentrate exclusively on the wife who fills the stage with her ceaseless talking, not leaving any room for her husband—except briefly for his hand. An overwhelming Mrs. Rowland is constructed to hold the attention of the public singlehandedly as she mentally tortures her husband, and perhaps her listeners as well. As for Rowland, O'Neill seems to be interested in him not so much as a character, but as a point of reference or a direction towards which the woman on the stage addresses her monologue—in the manner of Strindberg's laughing woman in *The Stronger* (1889), a play said to have inspired O'Neill. Rowland's death in the end, one the audience does not see, may be felt as a kind of relief for it finally makes the woman shut up. After all, there's a limit to the audience's endurance and O'Neill seems to have got it just right.

If, as a strategy, the i-effect suits O'Neill's purposes in *Before Breakfast*, Rowland's invisibility does more to the play than give its writer a chance to experiment with the monologue: it protects Rowland from exposure. All we see of the character is a trembling, sensitive hand, a poetic image of an aspiring poet who, according to his wife, also happens to be an unemployed drunkard who pawned all their money, impregnated his lover, who is too spoilt or too lazy to face the facts, and so prefers to stay in bed and live off his wife—at least this is what his wife says; he doesn't show up to give his version of the facts. In his experiment with the monologue, O'Neill hides the bohemian husband, the poet to be, as he is tortured by an oppressive wife who, in spite of not having read J.L. Austin, knows only too well how to do things with words.[4] And while the man's trembling hand and pitiful groans may draw the sympathy of the audience, his wife's endless bragging is more likely to draw our desperation and, perhaps, our fury. In *Before Breakfast*, Rowland is too oppressed to be blamed, and Mrs. Rowland is too exposed to be saved. She is constructed as a

[3] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.

[4] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962).

prototype of the nagging wife and, I'd say, one of the best nagging wives ever written for the stage.

In *Trifles*, Susan Glaspell seems to be more interested in her invisible character as a character than O'Neill is in his in *Before Breakfast*. In Glaspell's play, we see neither hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to Minnie Foster Wright; nonetheless, she is referred to by the critics as the protagonist of the play. In *Trifles*, "the absence of evidence is not an evidence of absence," as Juliet Mitchell writes in another context.[5] Unlike Rowland in *Before Breakfast*, Minnie Wright is not separated from the public by a wall or a door in the set of Glaspell's play. In *Trifles*, it is the architecture of the play itself that obstructs our vision of its protagonist. If the audience gets to know the unseen Minnie Wright so well and so deeply, if we follow her wherever she went in the past and wherever she is gone now, it is not only because we are in her kitchen, not only because the two women on the stage constantly refer to her past and present life, but also because, in *Trifles*, there is plenty of time and space to be filled with thought. The pauses, the silences, the stillness of the characters—that with which Glaspell seems to be experimenting—are an invitation for the audience to wander away from the stage towards her who is invisible.

One can do things with silence as well as with words—and Austin knew it, or else he wouldn't have written a book and articulated a theory to prove that words do have the power of action. No matter the reasons why Glaspell chose not to give Minnie Wright a face and a voice, whether practical or conceptual or both, *Trifles* is a testimony to the power of silence in the theatre. All is still when Glaspell's hand, or rather Mrs. Hale's, touches Minnie Wright's empty rocking-chair and it rocks on its own in what, to me, is the most touching as well as revealing moment of the play:

> (With a sigh, [Mrs. Hale] is about to sit in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.)[6]

While in *Trifles* Minnie Wright has no physical appearance whatsoever, in *Before Breakfast* we do see the hand, Rowland's hand, we hear his groans and, therefore, we are assured that there is indeed a husband, that Rowland does exist, that he is alive in the room next door, that the wife is not hallucinating, that she is not another mad woman talking to herself in some attic where she

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[5] Juliet Mitchel, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria* (London: Penguin Basic Books, 2000), 221.

[6] Susan Glaspell, *Trifles*, in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 39.

can't be heard. Mrs. Rowland—the wife, as her name indicates—is where she ought to be, in the kitchen making breakfast, while Rowland—the husband—is still in bed. O'Neill's Mrs. Rowland is a wife like every other wife, every other nagging wife.

By showing Rowland's hand, O'Neill gives the character a stage life and a role in *Before Breakfast*, that of his wife's interlocutor and, simultaneously, he makes the audience aware that, though unseen, there's another drama going on at the same time in the room next to the breakfast room. We can hear it, or hear him, he whose hand we get to see. At the end of the play, O'Neill kills Rowland with his own hand, that is, with Rowland's hand, or with his own if you wish, not quite in the presence of the audience, but in the present of the play, a play that ends with the husband's death and the wife's silence. At last.

Be it so as to experiment with the monologue that O'Neill chose to half-hide Rowland, be it so as to fully expose the oppressive power of a nagging wife, be it for both reasons, in *Before Breakfast*, O'Neill creates a monologue disguised as a dialogue and, in doing so, he imparts such dynamism to the play as to raise the level of the audience's tolerance for the staged monologue. By showing the hand, Rowland's or his, O'Neill breaks the potential monotony of the monologue and turns us, in the audience, into witnesses of an unseen crime. More than an experiment in the staged monologue, *Before Breakfast* is, to me, already an achievement, and one that gave O'Neill's trembling hand the confidence to further explore the dramatic potential of the monologue in some of his later and most acclaimed plays for the stage.

Trifles begins rather than ends with death. In Glaspell's play, the murder of John Wright has already happened the night before the play begins. As for Minnie Wright, the prime suspect of the crime, all we are given to see of the supposedly murderous wife is what her rough, rather than sensitive, hands had been doing before she left. "Farmwives have their hands full," says Mrs. Hale, "men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be" (38). Presently, Minnie Wright is in jail, away from the scene and, therefore, dead to the stage.

Several critics do not agree that a play can be written about the day after. Theatre is in the present tense, they say, and therefore, there were those who, writing before the 1980s, concluded that there is no action in this and other plays by Susan Glaspell. But in this essay I don't mean to discuss the gender bias in the traditional concept of dramatic action; I have already done that in relation to Glaspell's plays elsewhere.[7] It suffices here to say that, as many have argued, including Austin, the nature and transcendence of an action, in drama

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[7] Lucia V. Sander, *Double Exposure: Gender, Genre and the Plays of Susan Glaspell*, Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York, Stony Brook, 1997. Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences, March 1998, 58 (9): 3530.

and elsewhere, can only be measured in relation to the context in which it is performed, and that “the world of women”, as many have called the setting created by Glaspell for most of her plays, only allows the performance of certain specific actions and not others. Furthermore, actions require the presence of an agent so they can be performed and, if Minnie Wright is absent in *Trifles*, that can be perceived as a clue that, after all, Glaspell’s play may not be about a crime we do not see; that, although it originates with a murder, *Trifles* may not be about the untimely death of John Wright.

Critical readings of *Trifles* after the 1980s have referred to the absence of Minnie Wright in Glaspell’s play as a literal representation of women’s invisibility in the patriarchal world; they have described Minnie’s invisibility as a performative rendering of women’s life stories of being invisible; they have argued that Glaspell presents the audience with a character who is away from sight in order to generate insight into women’s oppression. Glaspell’s use of the i-effect in *Trifles*, or the strategic invisibility of Minnie Wright in the play does open the space for the dramatic representation of women’s oppression, but it does more to the play than that. If *Trifles* exposes or, as some would prefer, instructs the audience about gender difference and what the world of women is all about, it can also be read as a lesson on, or a performance of what the theatre is all about.

Trifles dramatizes the course of a trip to the past taken in the present by the two female characters on the stage, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters. Their destiny is an encounter with that which is gone and cannot be seen or held, but can be revisited in one’s thoughts, recreated on the stage. And that is not all. Glaspell’s play also stages the effect of such a voyage to the past upon the voyagers. The process of recollecting the past, of scanning the life of those who have disappeared, is never innocent nor free of consequence. In *Trifles*, such a recovery process is performed by the two women on the stage, and closely followed by the audience. By recollecting the life and experience of an absent friend, Minnie Wright, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters discover not only the motive of the crime committed the night before, they also find out that, as farmwives, they have much in common with her who is accused of the murder. It is Minnie Wright’s absence that occasions the recollection of her life story and produces the women’s insight into their own predicament.

One needs to be dead in order to be revived. The dead have to die and disappear so they can come back, if not in flesh, in memory. Minnie Wright needs to be away so she can be brought back to the stage and produce the transformation that takes place in *Trifles*. The recollection of her life, performed in the present of the play, is the after-effect of her disappearance, of a loss that had to be lost in order to be regained afterwards. “Afterwardness” is one of the translations of the term used by Freud to describe a radical revision of the past

within the present. According to Peggy Phelan, of whose theories I will here make extensive use, "afterwardness allows us access to the co-presence of the past and the present simultaneously."[8] In the afterwardness represented in *Trifles*, as in other memory plays by Glaspell,[9] Minnie Wright can appear as a protagonist precisely because she does not appear on the scene, or because she is dead for the stage.

To Phelan, "death occurs (at least) twice: once in terms of biology, the second time in terms of its interpretation," and she continues, "It is the interpretation of death that completes the act of dying."[10] It is in scanning the message left by Minnie Wright in her kitchen, and only then, that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters understand the life of their friend, as well as their own in their full complexity. It is the interpretation of Minnie Wright's absence, and not her actual absence, that has a transforming effect upon the interpreters, that is, upon the two female characters present on the stage of *Trifles*. According to Phelan, "It's in the belated interpretation of the past within the drama of the present that we begin to understand history."[11]

Having dealt with Minnie Wright's absence throughout the performance of *Trifles*, when the play comes to an end, the audience has to deal with the absence of those who were present on the stage and who have become as invisible as her whose life they have recollected. "Live performance," writes Phelan, "plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility."[12] Though we hear no bells but the clapping of hands, when the curtain falls, the performance dies never to come back to life on the stage, never to be the same performance. If and when it does come back from the dead it is to traffic in another stage, in the memory of the audience. After the final blackout, and like the characters present on the stage of *Trifles*, we, in the audience, begin to remember and recollect the performance we have just seen so as to recover that which is gone. We need to resurrect the dead in order to interpret their death and to complete their dying. "One place we might learn to rehearse our multiple deaths is in theatre and performance," writes Phelan. Defined as a rehearsal for death, the theatre, as

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[8] Peggy Phelan, "9/11," *Connect: arts, politics, theory, practice*, Arts International 3 (Fall 2001), 5.

[9] Besides *Trifles*, Susan Glaspell wrote two other plays in which the protagonist is absent, i.e., *Bernice* (1919), and *Alison's House* (1929).

[10] Peggy Phelan, "Trisha Brown's *Orfeo*: Two Takes on Double Endings," in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. Andre Lepecki (Wesleyan: Wesleyan University Press, March 2004), 26.

[11] Phelan, "9/11," 5.

[12] Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148.

suggested by Phelan, can train the audience on how to survive loss again and again—and again.[13]

I suggest that Glaspell's *Trifles* can be read as a staging of the effect produced by the theatre upon the audience, in other words, as a staging of that which performance is all about. In the present and in the presence of the audience, *Trifles* raises a mirror up to the future that awaits the audience after the play is over. Having followed step by step the revealing interpretation of Minnie Wright's absence, it is our turn now, as the lights go off, to interpret the absence of the interpreters who have disappeared from the stage and left us alone in the dark. According to Phelan, "the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself."[14]

In their early articles about "A Jury of Her Peers," Annette Kolodny and Judith Fetterley write that Glaspell's short story version of *Trifles* "not only invites a semiotic analysis, it performs that analysis for us,"[15] that it not only proposes a theory of reading explicitly linked to the issue of gender, it illustrates such theory.[16] I would say that *Trifles* not only invites an analysis of the act of disappearance, not only proposes a theory about the effect of death, it also performs death, disappearance, and its effect. In her experimentation with the theatre, Glaspell stages a process to be later experienced by the audience: that of interpreting and recovering a live performance that will never come back to life on the stage.

There are many ways to tell a story, and one will choose according to what one wants the story to do to the world who listens. Glaspell's way, in this and other plays, is through reaching towards that which once was, so as to change that which will become. To anticipate loss is most of the time painful, to see into the future is sometimes frightening, but to survive death is an art the living need to master. If the theatre is a site in which to practice such an art, in *Trifles* Glaspell shows us, in a quasi-didactic way, how theatre's lesson on survival is conducted through and by the impermanence of performance.

Disappearance is a baffling event that often blinds those who remain under the sun as to its meaning and import. One may try to forget that which has

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[13] Peggy Phelan, "Not Surviving Reading", *Narrative, A Journal of Narrative Theory* (January 1997), 3.

[14] Phelan*, Unmarked,* 148.

[15] Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 56.

[16] Judith Fetterley, "Reading about Reading: 'A Jury of Her Peers,' 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" in *Gender and Reading,* eds. Elizabeth A. Flyn and Patrocinio P. Schwickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 147.

disappeared from sight, but the dead never die before we interpret their death. "Could we learn to revalue the failure to appear," writes Phelan, "we could perhaps develop a different relation to the given to see."[17] Could we learn how to revisit and revalue the past, we could perhaps develop a different relation to the present.

By not seeing Minnie Wright, in Glaspell's *Trifles* we are given to see our future as well as the possibility to change the course of our own present trip. That critics did not or do not see the action staged in this and other plays by Susan Glaspell and, therefore, called them "undramatic," may be the effect of the so-called "ideology of the visible," which, according to Phelan, "erases the power of the unmarked, unspoken, and unseen."[18] To those who fear that the future may be changed, perhaps the insights produced by the so-called "undramatic" sights portrayed in *Trifles*, and elsewhere in Glaspell's writings for the stage, constitute a threat and an omen: the dead will be resurrected and walk among us, if not in flesh, in writing and in performance.

"Only a fool is not interested in his past,"[19] Freud once wrote. In *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are not the fools the men in the play suppose they are. They revisit Minnie Wright's past and, in so doing, they reinterpret their own lives and find the strength to act against the law, their trip to the past having changed their notion of justice. But that's not all there is about the process of recovery staged in *Trifles*. The women in the play are not alone in their recollection, and the past they evoke is not only their own past and that of Minnie Wright. Compelled by her own voyage back in time Glaspell wrote *Trifles*; through evoking the memory of a woman who had long disappeared from her life Glaspell found inspiration to start to write for the stage.

In *The Road to the Temple*, Susan Glaspell writes about the genesis of *Trifles* and describes the very moment when she began to write her first play:

> I sat alone on one of our wooden benches without a back, and looked a long time at that bare little stage. After a time the stage became a kitchen—a kitchen there all by itself. I saw just where the stove was, the table, and the steps going upstairs. Then the door at the back opened and the people all bundled up came in—two or three men, I wasn't sure which, but sure enough about the two women, who hung back, reluctant to enter that kitchen.[20]

[17] Phelan, *Unmarked,* 91.
[18] Phelan, *Unmarked,* 7.
[19] Quoted by Suzanne C. Bernfeld, "Freud and Archeology", *The American Imago*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (June 1951), 111.
[20] Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1941), 255-6.

The kitchen she saw on the bare stage was not unknown to Glaspell. Following the narrative about her vision, Glaspell adds: "When I was a newspaper reporter out in Iowa, I was sent down-state to do a murder trial, and I never forgot going into the kitchen of a woman locked up in town." That Glaspell had this vision of the past while looking at a theatre stage is not at all surprising. Dreams and the theatre are the two places where that which is dead can be revived, where that which seems to have disappeared can reveal itself and produce unexpected revelations. "I had meant to do it as a short story," Glaspell continues, "but the stage took it for its own."[21] *Trifles* is born of a memory of a long gone past which reappeared to Glaspell in an empty stage as a proof that it had never been gone. "I never forgot," she wrote.[22]

The murder referred to by Glaspell had happened sixteen years before she wrote *Trifles*, on December 2, 1900, in Indianola, Iowa, when a sixty year old farmer was killed while he was asleep. His wife, Margaret Hossack, was accused of the murder, tried on April 11, 1901, and sentenced for life to hard labor in the state penitentiary.[23] The reason why Glaspell carried that memory so vividly as to have the vision she had on the empty stage may be related to facts she chose not to include in her narrative of the genesis of *Trifles* in *The Road to the Temple*. That, while covering the crime for the *Des Moines Daily News*, Glaspell wrote twenty-six articles, means that "Glaspell was actually a primary contributor to the shaping of public opinion about the woman being tried," as writes Linda Ben-Zvi.[24] After visiting Margaret Hossack's kitchen and meeting her at the courthouse, Glaspell changed the tone of her writing about the farmwife and became more sympathetic towards the woman accused of the crime. Nonetheless, as the only female reporter covering the trial, she who later wrote *Trifles* never wrote in defense of Margaret Hossack.

Glaspell's vision of Margaret's kitchen brings back the memory of a time that was long gone, revives the woman who had disappeared from her life, recreates a past so it can be revisited and reinterpreted. It was a vision that changed Glaspell's past and future. In *Trifles*, the play that opened a new career in the theatre for Glaspell, she reverts the verdict which sent Margaret Hossack to life imprisonment. Instead of the twelve men who, sixteen years before, had convicted the accused, Glaspell creates a new jury of two women who, like

[21] In 1917, a year after she wrote *Trifles*, Glaspell wrote a short story version of the play which she called "A Jury of Her Peers", first published in *Newsweek*, March 5, 1917.

[22] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 256.

[23] Patricia L. Bryan and Thomas Wolf, *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 2005), 196.

[24] Linda Ben-Zvi, "'Murder, She Wrote': The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles,"* in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 22.

herself, could evoke a presence that had disappeared from sight, could see beyond the visible, could bring back the dead.

Susan Glaspell put an end to her journalistic career after she reported on the outcome of Margaret Hossack's trial and, therefore, she may not have known that, in 1903, there was a second trial in which Margaret Hossack's case was dismissed. Margaret went back home and died in August 1916, in the same month *Trifles* was first performed with Susan Glaspell in the role of Mrs. Hale, for whom she had written the following lines, perhaps so she herself could say them out loud and in public:

> MRS. HALE: I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—I might have known she needed help! Oh I wish I had come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that? (42-44)

Trifles was created out of the memory of a crime, John Hossack's murder, and it may have been an opportunity for the expiation of another crime: Glaspell's omission in the case of Margaret Hossack. Glaspell may have never forgotten her visit to Margaret's kitchen, nor the sad face of the farmwife who she saw away from her home. What she did, or rather, what she did not do to help the woman when her life was at stake, may have been a haunting memory to Glaspell for almost two decades. As she wrote in *The Verge* (1921), "It's hard to—get past what we've done. Our own dead things—block the way" (77). Perhaps, having written *Trifles*, she may have been able to get past some of her own dead things and finally bury that part of her past. There is no death without interpretation; "it is the interpretation of death," writes Peggy Phelan, "that completes the act of dying."[25]

"Drama is not Ms. Glaspell's congenial medium", wrote Brook Atkinson in *The New York Times* of May 10, 1931. To Thomas Dickinson, "all her [Glaspell's] plays have been developed out of a conception so minute and fine that it might appear to lie outside of the dramatic entirely."[26] Glaspell's plays were frequently referred to by some of her contemporary critics as "strange" and often times as "queer"—ignorant as they were of how precise they would sound some ninety years later when the term "queer" underwent a process of resignification and gained a positive connotation. Indeed, "The Queerness of Susan Glaspell" is the title of the article by Gordon Young published in *Drama* in July 1925, where he writes about "... the fallacy of assuming that a playwright who is a metaphysician, good or bad, is of necessity superior to one who is

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[25] Phelan, "Trisha Brown's *Orfeo*: Two Takes on Double Endings," 26.
[26] Thomas H. Dickinson, *Playwrights of the Modern American Theater* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 208.

merely an efficient and intelligent dramatist"[27]—the latter being a reference to Eugene O'Neill. According to the OED, "efficient" means "productive with minimum waste of the desired effect." In the case of the efficient playwright, one should inquire into who's desire and which effect the playwright is to produce. The answer will be found in the conventions, previously established by tradition, that constitute the dramatic genre as a genre. O'Neill's genre. He experiments and innovates in order to master the genre, so as to excel in his dramatic writing. Glaspell, on the other hand, preferred to write novels; her becoming a playwright was circumstantial, if not compulsory. According to some of her contemporary critics, in *Trifles*, Glaspell's first solo play, the debutante fails to honor the conventions of the drama. Nonetheless, "the act of failing," as writes Shoshana Felman, "opens up the space of referenciality not because something is missing, but because something else is done."[28] *Trifles* is something else, either shy of, or in excess of, conventional drama.

Previous to *Before Breakfast*, O'Neill had not only studied drama, he had already written several plays—he was said to have "a whole trunk full of plays"[29] when invited to join the group which later became The Provincetown Players and start a career in the theatre. He knew what he was at. Although in his playwrighting he extended the frontiers of the genre, he knew its limits too well to go beyond the red light, and so he survived. Eugene O'Neill may be one of the most effective playwrights ever; as for Susan Glaspell, she is one of the most radical innovators in American theatre history. She didn't see or did not want to see the stop sign raised by the conventions of the drama; she didn't slow down or step on the brake to follow the norms that regulate the traffic of the stage, and that may be one of the reasons why we have had to dig in order to find her.

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[27] G. Gordon Young, "The Queerness of Susan Glaspell," *Drama* (July 1925).
[28] Shoshana Felman, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 84.
[29] Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*, 253.

ANTIGONE REDUX: FEMALE VOICE AND THE STATE IN SUSAN GLASPELL'S *INHERITORS*

MARIE MOLNAR

In 1899 Susan Glaspell graduated from Drake University with a bachelor of philosophy degree. She had been able to waive two years of college "because of her Latin certificate" earned in high school. Her "rigorous program" at Drake included Greek[1] among other subjects and, like Virginia Woolf, Glaspell understood the importance of the classics, an arena of learning previously reserved for men, to becoming a literate person. Moreover, Glaspell loved classical literature and Greek drama, and her work is peppered with references and allusions to Socrates, Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Like many modernist writers, Glaspell was profoundly influenced by Nietzsche in her own right, but also through her husband George Cram Cook, who has been described as a would-be "Nietzschean superman"[2] and a "fanatical Hellenist,"[3] whose Nietzschean vision fired the mission of the Provincetown Players.[4] In 1917 during the Great War, Glaspell worked closely with Cook on his play *The Athenian Women,* modeled upon Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which, after Cook's death, Glaspell published in a bilingual edition.[5] Linda Ben-Zvi describes in detail the two years Glaspell spent with Cook in Greece, from 1922 until his death in 1924. While "the dream had been his not hers … once there she shared in the splendor of the country,"[6] and Martha C. Carpentier shows how this experience provided renewed impetus for Glaspell to incorporate ancient Greek

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[1] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University press, 2005), 35.
[2] Veronica Makowsky, *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 96.
[3] Martha C. Carpentier, *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 28.
[4] See Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).
[5] Barbara Ozieblo, *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 116-17.
[6] Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 264-289.

ritual, myth and literature into her own writing, a textual strategy she, like so many other modernists—Joyce, Eliot, Pound, H.D., etc.—was already committed to. According to Carpentier, Glaspell's novels, *Fugitive's Return* and *The Morning Is Near Us*, written after her return from Greece, demonstrate Glaspell's adept handling of the modernist, Joycean "'mythic method'" in "using a subtext of ancient myth as a new way to structure writing."[7] Set in Delphi near the ruins of the Temple of Apollo and the ancient Dionysian stage, *Fugitive's Return* is filled with allusions to Dionysus, Apollo, the Delphic Oracle, and Eleusinian ritual, which Carpentier explores. Further, the title of *The Morning is Near Us,* as well as the epigraph, are both taken from Euripides' *Rhesos* "provid[ing] added evidence of her deep familiarity with the classics," and Carpentier goes on to discuss the thematic parallels between Euripides' play and that novel.[8]

Nevertheless, aside from Carpentier's work, the influence of classical scholarship on the works of Susan Glaspell remains relatively unexplored despite Glaspell's close connections to the literature and people of Greece. Once such a connection with classical literature is acknowledged, more subtle allusions to classical texts become evident in Glaspell's writing alongside the explicit ones. One of the more subtle instances in which Glaspell links her work to a classical text occurs in her three-act play *Inheritors*, written and first staged by the Provincetown Players in 1921, where she uses Sophocles' *Antigone* as a subtext and a basis for the structure of her play. The closest parallel between the two texts exists in the characters of Antigone in Sophocles' play and Madeline, Glaspell's young female protagonist. Madeline, like Antigone, becomes the voice that struggles for expression against the dominant discourse that controls nearly all modes of expression on both the level of the state and of the individual. Also, like Antigone, Madeline, having decided to which members of her family she owes her loyalty, must make the choice between protest and silence.

Sophocles' *Antigone* establishes a paradigm in western literature and culture of the individual who sets him or herself up in opposition to the state. In this opposition are inherent the ideas not only of the individual versus the state, but also those of the private sphere versus the public, "natural" law versus human-created law, and woman versus man. The last pairing—that of woman setting herself up in opposition to man—is integral to all the others in the *Antigone.* At no point in the play can the reader disregard the gender of the main character. The fact that Antigone is a woman immediately places her outside the sphere of the public, the state, the law, and all other elements governed by the

[7] Carpentier, *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, 8- 9.
[8] *Ibid*., 143.

phallologocentric discourse and its representative, Creon. As the daughter of Oedipus and sister of Polyneices, she is made Other by both her gender and her familial relationships, yet, even without those affiliations, she would always be separate and marginal. In writing *Inheritors* Glaspell was inspired by the Antigone myth to create a character who chooses to ally herself with those who are considered Other in her own society and to deny patriarchal law its power to decide what is right or wrong. Like Antigone, Madeline's power resides in her denial and her refusal to say what the patriarchy dictates to her; both characters present an alternate morality and an alternate ethical discourse in which to describe that morality. Just as Antigone herself provides a paradigm for Madeline, so, too, does the criticism of Sophocles' play provide one for Glaspell's, and an examination of how Antigone's discursive methods function in the play can lead to a discussion of Madeline's.

Many critics comment on Antigone's position as Other and the distinction of her discourse as markedly gendered. Froma Zeitlin discusses how woman, despite being played by a male actor, is always "assigned the role of the radical other" and that Greek theatre, in its featuring of the suffering body and its expression of emotions, is characterized by the feminine.[9] Tina Chanter examines the ways in which Sophocles' tragedy presents a modern figure in the character of Antigone, including the "opacity of Antigone's desire" and how that desire "is not up for question, does not become a question, cannot be articulated."[10] This lack of articulation stems from the decentralization of Antigone's speech, which has its meaning in gaps, spaces, caesurae, and aporetic dialogue instead of in the firm, fixed, and central *logos*. The lack of center in Antigone's feminine speech is a "curious intersection of multiple discourses of ethnicity" according to Lisa Walsh, who also points out how Creon attempts to silence the female challenge to the "patriarchal order of civil society" by sentencing Antigone to a death outside the city, hidden in the womb-like tomb of the cave.[11] Yet, Antigone, in taking her own life, chooses quick death over the long silence of wasting away inside the grave and thus robs Creon of his agency and control over her voice.

The intersection of female speech and morality merits more attention as Helen Foley presents an extensive discussion of Antigone's discourse in "Sacrificial Virgins: Antigone as Moral Agent," demonstrating the "way that Sophocles' Antigone offers an alternative mode of ethical reasoning to that

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[9] Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Theatre," *Representations* 11 (1985): 66.
[10] Tina Chanter, "Tragic Dislocations: Antigone's Modern Theatrics," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 10.1 (1998): 75.
[11] Lisa Walsh, "Her Mother Her Self: The Ethics of the Antigone Family Romance," *Hypatia* 14 (1999): 96-125.

adopted by Creon" and showing how "the gendering of ethical positions permits the public exploration of moral complexities that would not otherwise have been possible."[12] Antigone's defense of her actions differs in fundamental ways from that of Creon—the ways the audience would recognize as normative. Her focus, especially when speaking with her sister, Ismene, where she invokes the language of a *philia*, is on private concerns, the bonds between family members, and "emotional commitment."[13] Antigone uses a discourse separate from the phallogocentric one to represent a moral stance that also is separate from the one that characterizes the *demos*. Recognition of this discourse and stance as inextricably feminine and other is central to Sophocles' work and is emphasized when Antigone claims she would not take the same risk if it were her husband or child for whom she had to take this stance. Her argument forces the audience to realize that there are "only specific circumstances in which a virgin daughter should contemplate taking autonomous action in life-threatening circumstances" and to understand that "her heroic action cannot serve in any simple sense as a timeless, gender-free model for civil disobedience."[14] According to Foley, Antigone's words and deeds are heroic, autonomous, and cannot be seen as "gender-free," and these are the ones that Glaspell replicates in *Inheritors*.

When Madeline stands up and denies the state its power over her voice, it is impossible not to be reminded of Antigone. Two of the issues that are of primary importance in the *Antigone*—those of family and discourse—are just as important in *Inheritors*. In fact, family is so important to *Inheritors* that even the issues surrounding the use of different types of discourse intersect with those that surround the different definitions of family in the play. Madeline's struggle against the dominant, patriarchal discourse is not just a struggle against the unnamed, impersonal state apparatus, but a struggle against members of her own family. Nearly all the characters in the play are related in some way and when Madeline speaks out against the state, she also challenges the members of her own family who are allied with the state and its discursive systems. Inseparable from her disclaiming of the patriarchal discourse and its proponents within her own family is Madeline's claiming as her true family those whose voices have been suppressed. The Hindu students, whose cause Madeline adopts, become members of the family that Madeline creates for herself. In addition, Madeline also needs to hear the story of her mother, formerly untold, and to make it part of her own discourse before she can make her final act of protest. Discourse and family are inextricable linked by Madeline's decision to speak for the members of her family that remain voiceless and unheard.

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[12] Helen Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 172.
[13] *Ibid*., 175.
[14] *Ibid*., 182.

Glaspell aligns Madeline with the Hindu students, who are the "Others" in this state and those most threatened by its laws and attempts at regulation. When asked by her uncle why she has chosen to make herself "guardian of these strangers," Madeline replies that she does so "perhaps because they are strangers."[15] She recognizes the Hindu students' position as outsiders and does not see them as a destructive element, unlike her cousin, her uncle, and the senator. Instead, Madeline realizes that their position as strangers will not earn them a voice in American society, the same society whose discourse about its values and freedoms has proven itself false. The Hindu students' status as foreigners from the East also carries with it all the connotations of Orientalism, including the ideas of the East as feminine, decadent and soft. The transgression of women beyond social norms, when linked to transgressive acts by a different yet similar Other, compounds the status of both as alien. By showing her allying herself with the Hindu students, Glaspell grants Madeline the choice to claim these Others as her cousins and at the same time to deny her real cousin, Horace, who functions as a representative of the patriarchal law. Instead of letting Horace defend her in front of police officer or make excuses for her behavior, Madeline tells him that he had "better apologize for himself" (129). She sees his behavior as disreputable, as one that demands explanation (note the emphasis on speech—Madeline does not tell Horace to act differently, but to make up for what he's done through a speech act), and as one that is in direct conflict with her own actions. The Hindu students function as Madeline's Polyneices, unable to speak for themselves or to accord for themselves the protection and justice they deserve. Her willingness, not only to speak, but to act for them and suffer arrest along with them signals Madeline's extension of the family (her *oikos*) beyond the walls of the home in which she grew up.

This extension of the private into the public sphere forces Madeline, like Antigone, to appeal to a law higher than those established by man. Where Antigone looks to the unwritten (and thus not codified by the phallologocentric discourse) laws of the gods, Madeline looks to the myth of "America" and its promise of equality for all human beings, regardless of origin or belief. In the scene with her uncle in the library, Madeline defines the foreign students as "people from the other side of the world who came here believing in us, drawn from the other side of the world by the things we say about ourselves" and that she is "going to pretend—just for fun—that the things we say about ourselves are true" (139). If "true Americans" cannot speak for their country, then another voice needs to make itself heard. Madeline's choice to speak *for* the Hindu students is also a choice to speak *to* them and once again to make true "the

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[15] Susan Glaspell, *Inheritors*, in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 139. All subsequent references to this play will be cited parenthetically.

things we say about ourselves." Later in the play, during her second encounter with the police, Madeline will proclaim that she is "talking for Morton College" (143). Her defense of the Hindu students is the one that ought to be taken up by America and by Morton College, but is the voice that those two institutions strive to suppress. What ought to have be natural extensions of her family, Morton College and the American nation, whom Madeline would willingly speak for and defend with just as much vehemence, try to silence her and drive Madeline into extending her familial associations into a broader public sphere.

Emphasis on the speech act continues throughout the play, especially in Madeline's own discussion of her act of public dissent. When told by Emil that she does not understand what she is talking about, Madeline counters with "I did realize what I was saying, and every word you've just said makes me know I meant what I said. I said if this was what our country has come to, then I'm not for our country. I said—and a-plenty more—and I'll say it again!" (145). The emphasis is completely on her speech act and her knowledge of what that act represents. Repetition of the word "said" demonstrates awareness on Madeline's part of how central speaking and understanding is to the conflict between her and the institution of racism she is opposing. Emil claims that she does not understand what she was talking about, but Madeline knows both the meaning of her own words and the significance of the words that people like Emil, her uncle, and even Professor Holden use in response to her dissent. Their reply is a continual plea for her to keep silent, for her voice, the feminine voice and the voice of opposition, is something they do not know how to answer or even acknowledge. Ira, her father, tells Madeline to talk to her Uncle Felix: "Then go see your Uncle Felix. Make it up with him. He'll help you—if you say you're sorry" (143). As long as Madeline complies and speaks the discourse that the patriarchy has sanctioned for her, then she need not worry, for in speaking the discourse chosen for her, she silences the voice that challenges the patriarchy. Her voice, like Antigone's, speaks to the unidentified people and the unnamed, empty places in the laws set up by the state. It is also the voice of denial that rejects the patriarchy and that refuses to accept the "America" that has come to represent the "patriarchal order of civil society." Yet, the patriarchy cannot understand its own discourse—Horace misreads Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg and only the Hindu students and people like Madeline, who hold the place of oppressed other in society, understand the original meaning of "America." This is the voice the state wants to silence, the one that can read between lines and words and can find the truth between the layers of revision and interpretation.

Before Madeline can perform her final act of dissent, another element needs to be added to the gendered discourse in which she takes part—her mother's story. Madeline's life follows a pattern similar to Antigone's in that her mother dies when she is very young, her father is responsible for raising her to

adulthood, and, by the end of the dramatic cycle, her weak father has been replaced by a powerful uncle who is more closely associated with the state than with the family, as in Antigone's case. Up until Madeline's act of speaking out against the patriarchal order, her mother remains the unspoken element in her familial discourse. Madeline's Uncle Felix can only speak of his sister with "*reserve*" and "*effort*" and is "*pulled to an old feeling*" that makes it difficult for him to articulate both his sister's story and his own feelings about her (121). Madeline's father has told her nothing about her mother; the only information that Madeline has about her is that "she was beautiful—not like other people" (153). When she thinks of her mother, Madeline conjures up a feeling of "something from far away," "from long ago," a "rare" feeling (153). However, this vague sense of mystery and nostalgia is not what Madeline needs. She must hear the story of her mother. The story of her grandfather donating the land to create Morton College has become the central *logos* in the family discourse, and, although Madeline is the true inheritor of her grandfather's vision, she feels that the speeches about him have only served to make her the "granddaughter of a phrase" (127). Her mother's story, on the other hand, has been silenced for nearly twenty years and has become the unspoken and inexpressible element, marked by its absence and its inability to influence Madeline's life. On the brink of committing herself to her protest, Madeline demands that her father "talk" to her and that he tell her how her mother died (153). If they cannot become part of the familial discourse in which Madeline was raised, the words of her mother's story must become part of her own discourse. What Madeline discovers is that her mother died helping those who were outside the dominant sphere of influence, Swedish immigrants who existed outside American language and society. Not only did Madeline's mother die, but, according to her husband, "she choked to death in that Swede's house" while "they lived" (154). Even this act demonstrates the importance of discourse to the act of female protest. Madeline's mother "chokes to death" and suffers the cutting off of her own voice so that someone who is Other in her society can have the chance to live and to speak. The rest of her family considers this act unspeakable, but Madeline thinks it "lovely" and she recognizes that her mother "was worth so much that she never stopped to think about how much she was worth" (154). This worthiness is the sort that Madeline herself will aspire to in her decision not to remain silent or to allow her story and her speech to remain buried under years of patriarchal discourse.

The silencing of Madeline's voice, like that of Antigone, is to be effected by her removal from the public sphere and placement in complete isolation. However, Madeline, again like Antigone, turns that conviction into a choice that is one only she can make for herself. Besides being an agent of morality in the play, Madeline is also the agency by which her own fate is decided. Antigone

made the choice to hang herself rather than waste away in silence and her death leads to the downfall of Creon and with him, the state. Conversely, threatened with hanging, an act that represents in the most drastic way the choking off and silencing of her voice, Madeline makes the decision to go to prison and to keep proclaiming her beliefs whenever she gets the chance. Having heard the story of her mother, Madeline sees no other course of action than to follow her mother's generous act and take it upon herself to grant voice to those who have none. Unlike Antigone who had no other choice than the same tragic death that her mother, Jocasta, must endure, Madeline chooses to continue to speak and to let actions, like her pantomime of the imprisoned conscientious objector, Fred Jordan's, prison cell, and her own departure for prison, speak for her.

Madeline's questioning of the state's definitions of fairness and justice isolates her in her struggle, a position which she shares with Antigone and does not abandon even though it threatens her life and perceived freedom. In addition, the use of a distinct discourse, marked both by gender and otherness, creates another strong link between Antigone and Madeline, despite the thousands of years and varied cultural institutions that separate them. Both women struggle for expression in the public world of the *demos*, in the sphere of patriarchal power and against the *logos* and law defined by that power. For Madeline, the ideas of family and discourse are united so closely that speaking about one in *Inheritors* invariably leads to discussion about the other. When Madeline protests against the state, she also protests against the values of her uncle and cousin and against the "false" discourse that has appropriated the myth of America and the myth of her grandfather. However, when Madeline chooses the path of protest, she also draws into her own discursive tradition the story of the mother. Madeline's task is to allow those to speak who have suffered silence; the suppressed discourse in Glaspell's work, like so many other feminist writers, is empowered by the voice of the mother as it encompasses the voice of the "Other." As Glaspell rewrites the myth of Antigone, she draws on the framework set up by Sophocles, granting her protagonist a distinct, gendered discourse that is potent enough to challenge the phallogocentric discourse of the state and society. Glaspell makes the story her own by allowing Madeline to extend the realm of the *oikos* into society while, at the same time, connecting Madeline to the matriarchal discourse and imbuing her with the power of the female voice as it shouts from the formerly silent, empty spaces.

Foreshadowing "A Jury of Her Peers": Susan Glaspell's "The Plea" and the Case of John Wesley Elkins

Patricia L. Bryan

Susan Glaspell is increasingly recognized as one of the leading American authors of the twentieth century, and many of her works have been praised for their innovative style and contemporary themes. While her novels, plays and short stories often raise issues of social equality, several also reflect her concerns with legal justice—especially the question of how judgments are reached under the law. Over the last decade, Glaspell's story, "A Jury of Her Peers," has become an especially popular text in law school courses, including traditional subjects such as criminal law and civil procedure, as well as others of more recent origin, such as feminist legal studies and law and literature.[1]

Glaspell published "A Jury of Her Peers" in 1917, adapting it from a one-act play, *Trifles*, which she had written the year before. As is well known by now, both works were inspired by Glaspell's own exposure to criminal law. Early in her career, working for the *Des Moines Daily News*, Glaspell reported on a crime—the bloody ax-murder of John Hossack, a respected farmer in his late fifties—and then, just a few days later, on the arrest of his wife of thirty-three years, the mother of their nine children. For almost two weeks in April 1901, Glaspell observed and wrote about the murder trial of Margaret Hossack, a courtroom drama that was controlled by male authorities and decision-makers; the lawyers, the judge, and the jury members were all men. The defendant consistently claimed she was innocent, but the prosecutors, relying on evidence that she had been abused by her husband, argued that she had a motive to kill him, and they were successful in convincing the jury to find her guilty of first-degree murder.

[1] For discussion of the use of Glaspell's fiction in law schools, see my "Stories in Fiction and in Fact: Susan Glaspell's 'A Jury of Her Peers' and the 1901 Murder Trial of Margaret Hossack," *Stanford Law Review* 49 (1997): 1294-95.

Glaspell's assignment—starting with the investigation into Hossack's death and ending with the verdict more than four months later—was an experience she would never forget.[2] Soon after the trial ended, Glaspell left her job and moved home to Davenport to write fiction, but she wasn't ready yet to write about the Hossack case and its controversial issues of domestic violence and the oppression of women. Fifteen years passed until, at the instigation of her husband, George Cram Cook, and remembering the story of Margaret Hossack, she wrote *Trifles* and later "A Jury of Her Peers." In both versions, a woman has been accused of the murder of her husband, but the story takes place not in the courtroom, but in the isolated farmhouse where the couple lived. Several men are there in their official capacities to investigate the crime, and they are accompanied by their wives, who have been asked to gather a few clothes for the jailed woman. The men search the premises, looking for clues, but it is the women, working together in the kitchen, who uncover the full story.

Glaspell shapes her narrative to raise questions about the law and the legal process. The law is supposed to punish crime, but its definition of crime seems too narrow to capture moral culpability. And the male decision-makers, empowered to decide legal questions of guilt, also seem inadequate, quick to judge the defendant on the basis of erroneous preconceptions. In contrast, the two female characters suggest the possibility of a different kind of knowledge: an empathic understanding that originates from shared context and then expands from their attempts to imagine the circumstances and experiences of the other person—to put themselves in her place. It is the men who are authorized under the law to decide whether the woman is guilty or innocent, but the reader finishes the story with a sense that they are incompetent to do so. Justice, it seems, demands something that the men are unwilling, or unable, to bring to bear: an emotional and empathic engagement, which offers an appreciation of the complexities of other people's lives and relationships.

These celebrated works by Glaspell were not her only, nor her first, expression in fiction of concerns about law and justice, nor were they her first to be modeled upon an actual murder case. One of Glaspell's earliest short stories, published in *Harper's* in 1903 as "In the Face of His Constituents," distinctly foreshadows "A Jury of Her Peers." The story follows a debate in the state legislature over whether a young male prisoner should be pardoned and released from jail; he had committed his crime—the murder of his father and stepmother—more than a decade earlier, when he was just a child of eleven.[3] In

[2] For more on this trial and Glaspell's use of it, see Patricia L. Bryan and Thomas Wolf, *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2005).

[3] Susan Glaspell, "In the Face of His Constituents," *Harper's* 107 (October 1903): 757-62.

1912, Glaspell changed the title to "The Plea" and, with minor revisions, included it in *Lifted Masks*, her collection of stories published that year.[4]

While doing research several years ago at the Anamosa State Penitentiary in Iowa, where Margaret Hossack was imprisoned for a year beginning in April 1901, I discovered by chance the original case that inspired "The Plea." One of the prison employees who was helping me sort through the archives for relevant records, commented that Margaret Hossack was not the most famous prisoner among the hundreds there at the time. In fact, that honor belonged to a young man, also a convicted murderer, who was twenty-three years old in 1901. His name was John Wesley Elkins. Twelve years earlier, at the age of eleven, Elkins had killed his father and stepmother, shooting his father in the head while the man was asleep, and then beating his stepmother to death with a wooden club. According to newspaper reports, Elkins had confessed to the crime just a few days after the killings, and, after pleading guilty to the charge of first-degree murder, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.[5] The handwritten convict register for January 14, 1890, the day he arrived at Anamosa, records his occupation ("farmer"), his social status ("single"), and his mental culture ("poor"). At twelve years old, the boy weighed 76 pounds, stood about 4 feet 7 inches tall, and wore a size four boot.[6]

The register also showed that Elkins hadn't served out his sentence. His release date was recorded as April 19, 1902, and I was intrigued to see that Elkins had left the prison just one day after Margaret Hossack was released. I knew that Margaret Hossack had the Iowa Supreme Court to thank—it had reversed her conviction after concluding that certain evidence had been improperly admitted in court—but freedom for Elkins had come about differently. After twelve years in prison, Elkins had been paroled by an act of the governor. Under the laws of Iowa at the time, the governor could issue a parole to a prisoner with a life sentence, such as Elkins, only upon a recommendation passed by the state legislature. From newspapers in the prison archives, I learned that the statehouse debate over Wesley Elkins had taken place in the spring of 1902, and that the arguments had been long and passionate in both the House and Senate.[7] The newspaper accounts gave me much of the history of the case, and I found out more from the Iowa state archives, which included transcripts from various legal proceedings, and many other primary sources. Gradually, I put together the story of John Wesley Elkins, Susan Glaspell's inspiration for "The Plea."

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[4] *Lifted Masks* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1912), 26-40.
[5] "Against Elkins Pardon," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, January 23, 1902.
[6] "A List of February Arrivals," *Anamosa Journal*, February 13, 1890.
[7] "Senators Talk on Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 2, 1902; "Sweet's Appeal for Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 3, 1902.

The murders, which took place in the quiet farming community of Elk Township in northern Iowa, occurred in the early morning hours of Wednesday, July 17, 1889. The victims were husband and wife, married for seven years: John Elkins, a forty-five-year-old sawmill operator and Civil War veteran, and his twenty-three-year-old wife, Hattie. Their bodies were found that morning in the bedroom of the home the couple shared with two children: Wesley Elkins, the eleven-year-old son of John and his first wife, and a baby girl, the daughter of John and Hattie. The small, three-room house was located in an isolated spot—nearly half a mile from the public highway and just as far from any other residence. Neighbors hadn't heard a disturbance, but, early that morning, one of them had spotted young Wesley, with the baby beside him, driving a single-horse buggy on the road away from his house. His face and clothes were spattered with blood, and, when he was stopped, the boy volunteered the news that his parents had been killed in the night: his father shot and his stepmother "pounded to death."[8]

The authorities were alerted, and the sheriff found that the couple had died just as Wesley reported. John Elkins had been shot with a rifle, apparently his own, in the left eye while he was sleeping in his bed, and then beaten. Hattie had apparently tried to help her husband after he had been shot and had then herself been violently assaulted; her skull was crushed, her jawbone broken, and her legs repeatedly struck with a blunt object. The walls and the ceilings were covered with blood, and blood was pooled on the floor and in the bed. A bloody track of footprints—small and barefoot—marked a path from the bed where the corpses were found to the second bedroom, and the sheets on the bed in that room were found to be stained with blood. In the words of a reporter who was one of the first to arrive, the house "present[ed] a scene that tried the nerves of the strongest."[9]

Under oath at the coroner's inquest, Wesley testified that he had eaten supper with the family on Tuesday evening, and had then gone to the barn, where he slept in the hay; it was cooler there, he said, than in the house. He was awakened by the noise of a gun firing, followed by a woman's scream. After

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[8] "Saturday's Sentences," *Elkader Register*, January 16, 1890. Facts in the text about Wesley's early life, the murders, the inquest and the investigation are taken primarily from this article and from "Horrible Murder!" *Elkader Register*, July 18, 1889 (the first detailed report of the murders); "Story of the Crime," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, January 23, 1898; "Interest in Elkins Case," *Des Moines Daily Leader*, March 19, 1902; Transcript of testimony at the Coroner's Inquest on July 17, 1889; Transcript of testimony at the Grand Jury hearing in October, 1889. The two transcripts are located in the Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa; I have omitted page references to them since both are relatively brief.

[9] "Horrible Murder!" *Elkader Register*, July 18, 1889.

about thirty minutes—he said he waited because he was afraid—he walked to the house and entered the bedroom, calling out for his parents. It was light enough for him to see the clock, showing that it was half past three, and also to see the bodies on the bed. He didn't touch them, but he thought right away that they were dead, and then he heard the baby, lying on the sheet near her mother's head, "crying bad, as hard as it could." He lit a lamp in the other room, and then carried the baby to that bed, where he changed her out of her blood-soaked clothes and put on her stockings and shoes. He took her outside to the buggy, hitched the horse, and started off to find his older brother, Mark, who boarded with neighbors.

Ten neighbors, in addition to Mark and Wesley Elkins, were questioned by the inquest jury. The jury was interested in Wesley's relationship with his father, and in reports that the boy had been mistreated at home. Wesley was considered to be a bright child—he had won a prize for recitation at Sunday school and teachers said he did well at his lessons—but it was known that he had an unhappy childhood. And there was a shameful story in his past: it was said that his mother had taken a lover when she was pregnant with Wesley, and had tried unsuccessfully to kill his father, first with poison and then, with the help of her paramour, by arranging logs in the mill yard to fall on him. Eventually, she left John Elkins, obtained a divorce, and moved to Waterloo, where Wesley was born. Wesley lived with his mother and her new husband for the first seven years of his life, but, when his mother died, he was forced to leave. At the age of seven, Wesley traveled alone to his father's house, where he had lived since then. While neighbors had few details to share about Wesley's current life, they knew that the boy had run away just a few weeks earlier, and that his father had angrily brought him back home. According to Wesley's statements at the inquest, his father had beaten him badly only one time, many months ago, but was mostly "kind" to him. It was only after he was in prison, first in private conversations with the warden and then later, in letters pleading for his release, that Wesley described abuse and mistreatment in his childhood.[10]

The inquest jury didn't implicate anyone in its verdict, which stated only the manner of the two deaths. Within a few days, the local paper published the announcement that the Governor of Iowa was offering a $500 reward for information that led to an arrest,[11] and the sheriff hired a detective from Chicago to investigate the scene.[12] But neighbors began to suspect that Wesley was

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[10] Wesley Elkins to Governor Frank Jackson, December 3, 1895. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa; "Sweet's Appeal for Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 3, 1902.

[11] "The Elkins Murder," *Elkader Register*, July 25, 1889.

[12] Affidavit of Sheriff J.J. Kann, May 17, 1890. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

involved. The boy, who had gone to live with his aunt and uncle nearby, acted strangely when adults tried to talk to him, and exhibited no sorrow over the deaths of his parents. Some people noted inconsistencies in his story, although it was difficult to believe that a boy so young and physically immature could be capable of such violent acts. One day, when Wesley came to town with his uncle, a crowd gathered around him, marveling at his small size and speculating as to whether he could have committed murder; a man lifted Wesley into the air to prove how light he was.[13]

Five days after the murder, the sheriff took Wesley to live with him and his family, hoping to shield him from the public and obtain his help in the investigation, as well as to provide the opportunity for some private conversations.[14] It wasn't long before Wesley confessed to the murders. A signed statement from him was published in the newspaper, and his story did not provoke sympathy. Wesley admitted that he killed his father and stepmother, and had done so, he said, because he was tired of doing chores, especially caring for his baby sister. He wanted "to be at liberty to do for myself." He had thought of the murders a few days ahead of time, and had found a wooden club in the shed and taken it to the house to use as a weapon. He had gone to sleep on Tuesday night and had then awoken around 3 a.m. "crazy" with the pain of a very bad headache. Wesley described the attacks in vivid detail. When asked why he hadn't killed the baby, he stated that he liked her. And why didn't he run away after the murders? He said he didn't want people to think he had done it. According to those who heard him, he showed no remorse and was "perfectly cool and self-possessed with no tremor in his voice."[15]

Although many had suspected his involvement, members of the community were shocked by Wesley's confession. Some had expected that he would implicate an adult—at least to say that his brother or a neighbor had encouraged him in his feelings against his father—or that he would mention circumstances, such as abuse or mistreatment, that might be viewed as extenuating. But he said nothing like that and, according to his story, he had not committed the crimes in the heat of emotion. Instead, he had planned the killings and had secured the murder weapon several days before. In the minds of many who read his confession, young Wesley Elkins seemed an example of innate evil, proof that a child could inherit a criminal disposition with a viciousness that could not be

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[13] "Story of the Crime," *Elkader Register*, July 25, 1889.

[14] Affidavit of Sheriff J.J. Kann, May 17, 1890.

[15] Grand Jury Transcript (testimony of L. O. Hatch). The confession was reported in "Elkport and Vicinity," *Elkader Register*, August 1, 1889, and the signed statement published in "Saturday's Sentences," *Elkader Register*, January 16, 1890. Other statements Wesley Elkins made to authorities at the time of his confession are described in the Grand Jury Transcript.

controlled or changed. As one newspaper wrote, "it seems almost too terrible to be true that a little boy less than twelve years of age should be found within the borders of our county who could coolly plan and carry out a crime so horrible in all its details, and yet the evidence is too plain to admit of dispute, and a fitting punishment awaits the young fiend."[16]

After Wesley confessed, the legal process moved quickly. He was indicted on two counts of murder in the first degree, and, on the advice of his lawyers, he pled guilty to the murder of his father. Most offenders under the age of fourteen were sent to a reformatory for delinquent boys, with the sentence up to the discretion of the judge, but there was no discretion allowed when the crime was murder.[17] Wesley was sentenced to life at hard labor at the state penitentiary at Anamosa.[18]

In the late nineteenth century, some still believed that criminal types were identifiable by observable physical anomalies reflecting inherited tendencies toward crime, and so, when Wesley arrived at Anamosa in January 1890, his appearance was of great interest. After meeting the boy, a reporter for a local newspaper described the unusual "breadth of the head between the ears," which could suggest "abnormal development of the part of the cranium where the phrenologists say the impulse to do murder has its origin." But even the reporter admitted that the theory seemed outdated—"more humbug than anything else"—and he emphasized Wesley's positive attributes: the winning smile, the truthful look in his dark blue eyes, the facial features which seemed to indicate "intelligence, energy and amiability," and his willingness to work.[19] To the warden, Wesley seemed just a child, small for his age, pale and delicate-looking—and utterly incapable of understanding the enormity of what he had done. The boy's reactions suggested that he "had never had many kind words spoken to him." There was no rule that juveniles be segregated, but it was

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[16] "Confessed the Crime," *Elkader Register*, August 1, 1889. During the years that Wesley Elkins was imprisoned, from 1890 until 1902, many residents of Clayton County remained strongly opposed to his release. See, for example: "Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, February 12, 1902 (editorial reprinted from the *Arlington News* describing Wesley as a "born degenerate"); "Interest in Elkins Case," *Des Moines Daily Leader*, March 19, 1902 (describing the "violent prejudice" and "bitter antagonism" against Wesley Elkins in Clayton County). Unpublished letters from Clayton County residents to the Governor, located in the Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa, also express strong opposition to parole or pardon. See, for example: Robert Quigley to Governor Leslie Shaw, February 2, 1898 (claiming that Wesley would be a danger to society at any stage of life, since his "moral nature is of the coolest steel."); H. P. Tubbs to Governor Leslie Shaw, February 7, 1898.

[17] "Sweet's Appeal for Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 3, 1902.

[18] "Saturday's Sentences," *Elkader Register*, January 16, 1890.

[19] "A List of February Arrivals," *Anamosa Journal*, February 13, 1890.

decided right away that Wesley should be kept away from the other prisoners, many of them "criminals of the professional class."[20]

In recognizing the benefits of keeping Wesley separate, the warden identified with those who rejected the notion of "born incorrigibility," believing instead in the impact of environment. As other correction workers of the time, the warden had concluded that education and moral instruction were the keys to rehabilitation, and that reform was most possible for the young, who were undergoing significant changes in their mental development. In his mind, especially when it came to children, prison officials were responsible for providing positive guidance.

For the first year, Wesley was kept under the direct supervision of the warden, doing small chores at his direction, and then the boy was assigned to duty in the prison library. Illiterate prisoners were required to take classes there, and the library had grown to meet that need. In 1890, it housed more than 3000 volumes, and the collection would more than double over the next ten years. Working in a position that would change his life, Wesley became familiar with many of those books. He had learned to read in school, and now he made his way through classic works of literature, philosophy, and history. The warden and the chaplain, who both met frequently with Wesley, encouraged the boy, and, as they later reported, his progress was "nothing less than phenomenal."[21] The prison library included law books, and, when he was fourteen, Wesley found a case suggesting that a child under that age was incapable of forming the criminal intent requisite for murder.[22] Three years later, he wrote directly to the governor, making his first official request for reconsideration of his case. [23]

Wesley's exceptional skill as a writer could only have come from his years of reading great books. Later, when he wrote his eloquent appeals for parole, people doubted that a young man isolated for so long in prison could be the author. How could he have learned such grace of expression, such facility with language? On one occasion, several reporters came to interview Wesley, then

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[20] Warden P.W. Madden to Professor James Harlan, January 25, 1898. Information in the text about Wesley's years at Anamosa, as well as the opinions of the wardens who knew him, are from this letter, and also from: Warden Marquis Barr to Professor James Harlan, March 2, 1902; Warden P.W. Madden to Whom It May Concern, January 25, 1898; and Warden W.A. Hunter to Professor James Harlan, February 18, 1902. All of these letters are in the Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

[21] Warden P.W. Madden to Whom It May Concern, January 25, 1898. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

[22] Warden P. W. Madden to Governor Horace Bois, October 27, 1892. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

[23] John Wesley Elkins to Governor Frank Jackson, November 16, 1895, and December 3, 1895. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

twenty years old. They handed Wesley a letter addressed to him and asked him to write a response in their presence. Only then, when he produced yet another missive with elegant diction and style, were they convinced that he had written the published words appearing under his name.[24]

Wesley's fight for his release started in 1895 and continued for the next seven years. The warden, who publicly declared that he favored parole in this case, arranged for statements from Wesley to be published in local newspapers, and they attracted the attention of men who became influential supporters. One was Professor James Harlan, who taught psychology at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Harlan visited Wesley every few months, and argued his case to legislative committees, to the governor, and, eventually, in 1902, to the full Senate. Despite speculation that he was interested in the boy only as a scientific experiment[25]—a detail Susan Glaspell uses in "The Plea"—Professor Harlan's interest never faltered. He and his wife publicly promised to give Wesley a home and to oversee his education if he were released.[26]

Many people throughout Iowa came to support Wesley, but the young man was his own best advocate. He wrote emotional but logical appeals, letters that were addressed to the governor, to legislators and to the "Citizens of Clayton County," and often published in local newspapers or distributed on the statehouse floor.[27] His writings were praised for their "unusual thoughtfulness" and "literary merit" in addition to the "beauty of penmanship and correctness of punctuation, very unusual for one of his age."[28] His arguments were based on progressive theories that were increasingly accepted in criminal law at the turn of the century, and they made sense to many. According to Wesley, he had been "goaded" to commit the "rash deed" of murder by the extreme cruelty he had suffered as a child, and, only eleven at the time, he was simply too young to have formed the criminal intent necessary to be found guilty of murder and

[24] "A Remarkable Letter," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, January 25, 1898.
[25] "Lacked One Vote," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 4, 1902.
[26] "His Parole Received," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 24, 1902.
[27] Published letters from Wesley Elkins include "A Pathetic Letter," *Mt. Vernon Hawkeye*, February 5, 1897; "A Remarkable Letter," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, January 23, 1898; "Another Letter," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, January 23, 1898; "Remarkable Letter," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, March 23, 1898; "Elkins is Paroled," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 10, 1902. Unpublished letters, located in the Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa, include: To Governor Frank Jackson, November 16, 1895; To Governor Frank D. Jackson, December 3, 1895; To Governor Francis M. Drake, November 16, 1897; To Governor Leslie Shaw, November 11, 1899; To the Citizens of Clayton County, January 6, 1902; To the Honorable Members of the Senate and House Pardon Committees, March 4, 1902.
[28] "A Pathetic Letter," *Anamosa Eureka*, January 28, 1897; "Notes," *Anamosa Eureka*, January 25, 1898.

imprisoned for life.[29] Children, Wesley argued, must be judged differently than adults—and children, still in an early stage of maturity, also provided the greatest possibility of rehabilitation. Education, he claimed, presented the brightest promise of reform, for "in education lies the power which enables one to clearly discriminate between right and wrong and quickens us to that state of development in our moral nature when we know, to feel, that right is intrinsically better than wrong." Wesley offered himself as the strongest evidence of that, describing his own remarkable development as proof that "the evil tendencies in the boy had been permanently eradicated in the man." His letters and the reports from those who interviewed him showed his extraordinary intellectual attainments, while the wardens attested to his exemplary record in prison. Wesley claimed that he was now fit, both mentally and morally, to take his place in society as an honest, honorable and law-abiding citizen.[30]

However, Wesley's many accomplishments did little to diminish the passionate feelings against him on the part of residents in Clayton County, where the murders had occurred. When he filed his first application for parole, nearly seven years after the crime, hundreds of male citizens signed petitions against his release, as they would every year thereafter. They justified their opposition on the brutality of his acts, his lack of remorse at the time of his confession, his admission of premeditation and the dangers he would pose as a free man.[31] Representatives of the county, obeying the wishes of their constituents, presented the petitions to their fellow legislators and took leadership roles in the public fight against Wesley's release.[32]

The House and Senate Committees on Parole considered Wesley's annual requests for consideration, but his case was not brought forward for debate on the statehouse floor until the spring of 1902.[33] Political events made it an auspicious time for consideration. Since Illinois had established the first juvenile court system in 1899, supporters in Iowa, arguing that children should be treated differently than adults, had become more vocal. Arguments in favor of a juvenile court had been reported by newspapers throughout the state in the spring of 1900, when the National Congress of Mothers—an organization focused on the importance of parental guidance and education in early child development—held its meeting in Des Moines. The Iowa chapter, which formed immediately afterwards, had worked since then to publicize the modern thinking

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[29] Wesley Elkins to Governor Frank Jackson, December 3, 1895. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

[30] Wesley Elkins to the Citizens of Clayton County, January 6, 1902. Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa.

[31] "His Parole Received," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 24, 1902.

[32] "Against Elkins' Pardon," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, January 23, 1902.

[33] "Elkins Case on the Floor," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, March 28, 1902.

on the causes of juvenile crime—discounting the idea of natural depravity, and emphasizing the importance of social circumstances, with neglect, poverty, lack of education and the absence of parental guidance most responsible. New ideas of reform, focusing on the necessity of positive environmental changes, were also touted.[34] It was no wonder that Wesley's case was a popular one: the image of the abused child who murdered his parents exemplified emerging theories of juvenile crime, while the articulate and intelligent young man who pleaded for his release seemed to justify the hope that reform was possible.

When Wesley's case came before the Iowa legislature in April, the speeches were passionate on both sides. The representatives from Clayton County emphasized the petitions against Wesley's release, proving the bitter opposition of the people who knew him best. He was a "born degenerate," they said, with a criminal disposition inherited from his mother, and he was "beyond the hope of redemption." They quoted scientific findings that supported the notion of "instinctive criminality," warning against the serious danger that Wesley, as a free man, would marry and reproduce his own kind.[35]

Wesley's supporters cited more current trends, including new psychological studies in child development concerning mental capacity, and recent laws in other states providing that children under the age of fourteen could not be held responsible for criminal acts. They described the circumstances of his childhood: the mistreatment and neglect, and the lack of any adult encouragement. And they told of his extraordinary transformation: how he had overcome his early sufferings to become the educated and refined man he was now.[36] Wesley's supporters asked the listeners to try to identify with the boy, imagining how they, as children, might have reacted to such an upbringing.[37] One House member, an eighty-one-year-old Army officer, remembered his own impulses as a youth, relating a story of how he had been "beaten and abused" by a boy who was older and larger than he. In a speech that ended with many in the audience in tears, the legislator described how he had been driven "to

[34] The history of the juvenile court in Iowa, as well as the role of the National Congress of Mothers, is well recounted by Hazel Hillis in "Securing the Juvenile Court Law in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 23/2 (1942): 61-88. Discussions of the theories of juvenile crime that were becoming more accepted at the turn of the century are found in "The Juvenile Offender," *Bulletin of Iowa Institutions* IV (1902), 452-60; Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 46-74; Steven L. Schlossman, *Love and the American Delinquent: The Theory and Practice of "Progressive" Juvenile Justice, 1825-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 57-78.

[35] "Senators Talk on Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 2, 1902; "Senate Considers Elkins," *Des Moines Daily News*, April 2, 1902.

[36] "Sweet's Appeal for Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 3, 1902.

[37] "Senators Talk on Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 2, 1902.

desperation," and had been on the point of braining his tormenter with an iron bar. He was able to keep himself from striking back, he said, but the provocations in Wesley's childhood were so much more severe.[38]

In one of the more emotional speeches, a representative focused on a young male page to help convince his audience that a child could not be held criminally responsible. The eleven-year-old boy, who was "the picture of childish innocence and honest, open frankness," was walking among the gallery distributing photographs of Wesley, when the speaker called him to the audience's attention:

> I want you to remember that this boy here…is of exactly the same age…as was Wesley Elkins at the time the crime was committed. I ask you if this boy were this night to commit a crime so foul as the one committed by Elkins, would you—could you, declare that he was capable of discerning between right and wrong and of clearly reasoning the duty and relations he owes to his fellow men?[39]

As the newspapers reported, remarks such as these were persuasive to many of those listening, and the Senate passed the motion recommending parole for Wesley on the first vote, 27-20. The newspapers predicted that the House would follow suit, but, when the vote was taken there the following afternoon, the motion was defeated by the closest of margins: a single vote separated the two sides. The setback proved to be temporary. Within a few hours, a representative who had voted against parole called for reconsideration.[40] According to a later-published account, he had pledged his vote to his good friend, the representative from Clayton County, and having fulfilled that promise, he felt free to change his mind.[41] A majority of the representatives were in favor of taking a second vote, which was called for the next morning. According to the newspaper, Wesley's friends spent the evening trying to persuade opponents to change their votes, and apparently their appeals were convincing. Several who had first opposed parole—including the man who had called for reconsideration—now voted in favor; some were conspicuously absent when the vote was taken, and a few abstained. This time, the motion passed in the House by a majority of

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[38] "Lacked One Vote," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 4, 1902.

[39] "Sweet's Appeal for Wesley Elkins," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 3, 1902; "Elkins Stands Poor Show for Parole in the House," *Des Moines Daily News*, April 3, 1902.

[40] "Wesley Elkins Free," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 10, 1902; "Elkins is Paroled," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 10, 1902.

[41] "Pioneer Lawmakers Honored," *Annals of Iowa* 31 (1951): 15-17.

thirteen votes. A few days later, the governor signed the papers authorizing Wesley's freedom.[42]

The parole was conditional. For the next ten years, Wesley was forbidden to visit Clayton and adjacent counties. He was to refrain from drinking intoxicating liquors, communicate monthly with the governor, and conduct himself as an "honorable, orderly, and peaceful citizen." If he complied, he was promised a full, unconditional pardon.[43] Wearing new clothes—a dark blue serge suit, a blue bat-wing tie, and a fawn fedora hat—and with thirteen dollars in his pocket, Wesley Elkins walked out of the prison early on a Saturday morning. Professor Harlan was waiting in his buggy, and the two drove the short distance to the Harlans' home in Mount Vernon, close to the Cornell campus. The plan was that Wesley would live with the professor and his wife, and attend classes, with the goal of obtaining both high school and college diplomas.[44] As Wesley was enjoying his first taste of freedom, a final letter from him was read aloud on the Senate floor. In his typically eloquent prose, Wesley expressed his "earnest and heartfelt" thanks, stating his firm determination to prove to all that he was worthy of their trust by "leading a life upright in character, strong and thoughtful, gentlemanly always."[45]

Susan Glaspell surely read about the statehouse debate over Elkins's parole in April 1902. Certain details in "The Plea," about Elkins's life and specific arguments by legislators, are taken directly from the newspaper reports. Glaspell was living in Davenport at the time, having left her job in Des Moines the previous spring. She may well have known about John Wesley Elkins even before then. She was thirteen, just two years older than Wesley himself, and living with her parents in Davenport in 1889, when papers throughout Iowa carried the reports of the killings and then the startling confession of the young boy. And she was in Des Moines, first at Drake University and then working for the *Daily News*, during the years from 1897 until 1901, when Wesley's unsuccessful bids for parole generated statewide publicity.

The arguments made by Wesley and his supporters in 1902 were familiar ones to Glaspell. She had reported on the meeting of the National Congress of Mothers in Iowa two years earlier, and she was well aware of its ongoing efforts to establish a separate juvenile court system.[46] Glaspell's writings suggest that she agreed with the modern trend of thought: that biological theories of crime

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[42] "Wesley Elkins is Freed," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 5, 1902; "Elkins Free Saturday," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 17, 1902.
[43] "Elkins Free Saturday," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 17, 1902.
[44] "Wesley Elkins Walks Out of Prison," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 19, 1902; "Wesley Elkins' New Home," *Des Moines Daily Capital*, April 21, 1902.
[45] "Elkins is Paroled," *Anamosa Eureka*, April 10, 1902.
[46] "'News Girl on the Congress of Mothers," *Des Moines Daily News*, June 1, 1900.

should be replaced by a new appreciation of social and economic factors, such as environment and early parental influence.[47] Those ideas surface in "The Plea," but Glaspell's primary artistic achievement in the story is not in their restatement. It is, instead, in her depiction of the thought-process of a decision-maker who changes his mind once he comes to a new understanding of the case.

The central action of "The Plea" takes place during a debate in the state legislature over whether Alfred Williams, a boy modeled on Wesley Elkins, should be given his freedom (in Glaspell's version, the debate involves the question of pardon, while parole or conditional release from prison, was the subject of the 1902 debate in the case of Wesley Elkins). The style of "The Plea" is modernist, told from the internal perspective of Senator Harrison, with the narrative moving between outside reality—the words he hears—and his inner thoughts and memories. Harrison initially opposes the boy's release, but his perspective is broadened as he listens. He remembers incidents from his own childhood and sees in himself as a child something of what the boy must have felt; his memories allow him to appreciate the boy's life on a more subjective level. A champion of logic, the senator finds himself experiencing the boy's pain, his loneliness, his despair. And yet Glaspell suggests that his new feelings do not blind him to reason, but, instead, help him to appreciate the argument of the other side and to choose what seems, at least to the reader, to be the wiser course. "The Plea" thus foreshadows "A Jury of Her Peers" in portraying the importance of empathic understanding in legal decision-making. In this early story, justice seems to prevail at the end, but only after the protagonist comes to identify with another person in an empathic fashion.

When the story opens, Senator Harrison has just finished his speech opposing the pardon. Not intending to sway the emotions of his listeners, he had instead focused on a reasonable premise: that his constituents, who lived in the community where the crime had been committed, were entitled to make the judgment in this case, so that their united opposition should be determinative. Harrison perceives himself as taking a stand that rises above personal feelings or sympathy, characterized by Glaspell as "outraged justice" holding out against "the floodgates of emotion." He finds "more satisfaction…in logic than in mere eloquence."[48]

The facts of Alfred's life are related by Senator Dorman, a strong supporter of the boy, and the reader learns the story as Harrison listens. Just like Wesley Elkins, Alfred Williams is a young man in his early twenties who has spent

[47] Marcia Noe and Holly Hill, "Susan Glaspell's 'Plea' for Juvenile Justice," *Text, Kontext und Fremdsprachenunterrich* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 69-75.
[48] Susan Glaspell, "The Plea," in *Lifted Masks and Other Works*, ed. and intro. Eric S. Rabkin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 26. All subsequent references to this story will be cited parenthetically.

twelve years in prison for killing his father and stepmother when he was a child. The brief description of Alfred's early years is taken from the saddest facts of Wesley's life: the divorce of his parents; his mother's death; his stepfather's refusal to help; the boy's trip alone to his father's house; the neglect and mistreatment he suffered there. And the account of the night before the murders is taken from Wesley's narrative in later years: the beating from his father; his inability to sleep in his usual bed in the barn; his terrible headache when he awoke and walked to the house to commit the murders, described by Dorman as acts of "childish passion" (32-33).

No more details about the assault appear in the story, although Dorman admits that it was said to be "the most awful crime ever committed in the State" (28). The statement hardly carries the impact of the newspaper reports in the real case, describing the bloody corpses and the particularly violent manner of the attacks, but those images would not have aided the sympathetic portrait of Alfred that Glaspell attempts to create. Dorman appeals to the emotions of his listeners, seeking to convey the pain and loneliness of a boy who "knew only injustice" (30). The night before the murder, Alfred tried to sleep, but he could not: "the hay was suffocating [and] his head ached" (30). Possibly he was insane at the time, Dorman suggests, lying "in the stifling hay with the hot blood pounding against his temples" (30). And there was no one to help him, no "human being there to lay a cooling hand on his hot forehead, and say a few soothing, loving words to take the sting from the loneliness, and ease the suffering" (30).

A hint of Harrison's emotional side, suggesting his eventual change of heart, comes early in the story. As he listens to Dorman's statement that "every living thing [should] be given a chance," Harrison glances out the window, noticing "the green things which were again coming into their own on the State-house grounds" (26-27). The imagery of the budding trees—suggesting rebirth and the possibility that life can begin again after a period of dormancy—recurs throughout the story. As his character evolves, Harrison's strong emotional connection to the natural world becomes more important: he is repeatedly distracted by the sight of the budding trees outside the window, and, later in the story, his sympathies are swayed when he imagines what has been taken from the boy in prison: "the voices of the night, and the comings and goings of the sun" (36-37). And it is nature—the "softness of the April afternoon," and the trees, the birds and the earth—that comfort Harrison at the end, even when he knows he has sacrificed his political career to follow his conscience (39-40).

Dorman's story of Alfred's childhood is brief, but evocative, and he follows with a description of the next twelve years. Alfred was sent to the penitentiary, and Dorman tells "of how he had expanded under kindness, of his mental attainments, the letters he could write, the books he had read, the hopes he

cherished" (31). The boy's transformation is presented by Dorman as the strongest evidence in favor of his release. As he listens, Harrison is suddenly conscious that the plea is stronger than he had expected, "more logic and less empty exhortation" (31). The reasoning behind Dorman's argument—that environment is the crucial factor in development—becomes clear. Alfred's dramatic rebirth in prison refutes any claim that he was a born criminal. As Dorman argues, "it was not the record of a degenerate" (31).

Harrison's sense of certainty is shaken by hearing Alfred's story, but he is most strongly affected by a visual image: a male page of the legislature exhibited by Dorman as a model of youth and innocence. Here Glaspell certainly followed the reports from the Des Moines statehouse in the spring of 1902, adopting almost exactly the actual incident of the young boy used by a speaker to represent Wesley at that same age. In "The Plea," Senator Dorman declares:

> This page is just eleven years of age, and he is within three pounds of Alfred Williams's weight when he committed the murder. I ask you, gentlemen, if this little fellow should be guilty of a like crime to-night, to what extent would you, in reading of it in the morning, charge him with the moral discernment which is the first condition of moral responsibility? If Alfred Williams's story were this boy's story, would you deplore that there had been no one to check the childish passion, or would you say it was the inborn instinct of the murderer? (32-33)

Harrison's eyes fix upon the page, and he realizes that "eleven was a younger age than he had supposed" (33). The image opens up Harrison's memory, allowing him access to feelings from his own boyhood. Harrison recalls "his irresponsibility, his dependence," and then an incident from his own childhood, when he had responded to provocation (33). Classmates had teased him, and he had thrown a rock at them, perhaps acting upon the same "criminal instinct" that had triggered Alfred's act. As he identifies with the boy, Harrison also gains an appreciation of the differences in their lives. In Alfred Williams's case, there was no one to stop him from acting out his childish passion, no "countermanding influence" to check his violent impulse (33). And, it occurs to Harrison, maybe that was the only difference between Alfred Williams and other children his age. But if that was the case, could the child be blamed for what he had done?

Harrison is struck by a sudden understanding of the boy as the victim, "cheated" and "defrauded" by the world, first robbed of his childhood and then shut away, alone (33-34). Specific images of boyhood that carry emotional weight for Harrison himself convey a powerful sense of what Alfred has lost: he may never have gone swimming, to a ball game or to a circus, never owned a dog. And now, "all because in the crucial hour there had been no one to say a

staying word," he was locked up in his dark cell alone, cut off from the sun, the stars, the night (34-35). Harrison doesn't act immediately; the vote is taken, and, by a narrow margin, the motion for pardon is defeated. But Harrison has a new perspective on the consequences of his choice—on the difference that his vote will make to the boy. Self-interest motivates Harrison in part, as he fears that his own guilt will make it impossible for him to enjoy what the boy has lost: "the voices of the night, and the comings and goings of the sun" (36). But he is most strongly affected by specific images—the swimming hole, the circus, the dog—talismans from his own boyhood that convey an emotional understanding of the deprivations of Alfred's life, and those images bring Harrison to his feet. To the astonishment of the audience, he calls for a second vote.

Harrison can't explain what he has done, and, when asked to speak, he reverts to childlike behavior; he turns red and stutters "like a schoolboy who had forgotten his piece" (38). He knows, as they all do, that he has sacrificed his political career: changing his mind in the face of the united opposition of his district will lead to sure political defeat. The second roll call is taken, and Harrison is not alone in changing his vote. This time, the motion to release Alfred is overwhelmingly approved.

Senator Dorman congratulates Harrison for his heroic act, calling it "as fine a thing as I have ever known a man to do" (39). Harrison's immediate feeling is not pride, but humiliation; he knows that his constituents will say that he has fallen victim to eloquence and emotion. Comfort comes when he goes outside, "into the softness of the April afternoon" (39). The trees, he sees, have "another chance to bud"; the birds, "another chance to sing"; the earth, "another chance to yield" (40). Harrison realizes satisfaction in his own ability to change, his willingness to give up fixed convictions. Empathy for the boy has come at a great cost for Harrison—the prize of political victory—and yet, as he feels a "tranquil sense of unison with Life," he understands the great reward (40).

Susan Glaspell's concern with empathy, and its role in making decisions under the law, is reflected in "The Plea," as it is again in *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers." Harrison's evolution foreshadows the understanding achieved by the two women characters in those later works. Just as his growing identification with the boy is evoked through specific images and incidents from his own past, so Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters empathize with the accused Minnie Wright through memories of their own. While "The Plea" was surely inspired by the 1902 debate over Elkins, it also seems influenced by Glaspell's observations in the courtroom as a reporter during the trial of Margaret Hossack, which had ended just twelve months before the legislature began its consideration of Elkins. Certain similarities are obvious. Both defendants were guilty of murdering people who occupied important positions of power in their lives, and, in both cases, the victims were asleep when they were attacked, powerless to

prevent the assault or to fight back. In both cases, it might have been expected that the male decision-makers, the jury members in the Hossack trial and the legislators in the Elkins debate, would identify, at least initially, most closely with the adult male victims. And yet, in both cases, there was also convincing evidence of abuse suffered by the defendants at the hands of their victims, evidence that might be viewed as extenuating, or at least contributing to a more sympathetic perception of the one charged with murder.

There were similarities, and yet there were also striking differences between the arguments made by Wesley's supporters and those made by the lawyers who defended Margaret Hossack. In Wesley's case, many of the appeals were emotional ones, intended to sway the legislators by asking them to identify with the boy, to remember themselves at that age. The speakers wanted their listeners to imagine his subjective experience: the many provocations in his early life and his impulsive and violent reaction—the act of a mere child. They didn't rely on empathy alone to persuade; they also cited progressive ideas in psychology and criminal law, focusing on the impact of environment and the undeveloped mental state of a child, in favor of the boy's release. But these more abstract points were especially persuasive when combined with the emotional renderings of Wesley's life. In addition, the debate over Elkins took place twelve years after the murders. The details of his crime were far in the past, and certainly the sympathies of those who judged him in 1902 were greatly affected by the articulate and educated young man he had become. And these decision-makers were distanced by more than just time. The men were legislators from all over the state, and only the few from Clayton County would have known the victims and their relatives.

In contrast, the arguments over Margaret Hossack's fate took place only four months after the murder of her husband, so that the bloody details of the attack were still fresh in the minds of many. The courtroom was in the town closest to the community where John Hossack had been a well-respected leader and businessman. So perhaps it was not surprising that the strongest appeals for empathy in the Hossack case were made by the prosecution, with the lawyers asking the jury members to put themselves in John Hossack's place. The image of a man lying down in bed after a hard day of work, and then attacked while he slept, was an emotionally affecting one—especially, perhaps, to the men in the audience and on the jury. There was evidence that John Hossack was cruel to his family, but the prosecution was most interested in the fact that Margaret Hossack had talked about her fear of her husband, ignoring the details of what he might have actually done to her and the children. John Hossack was presented as an innocent victim, one who deserved the sympathy of the jury

because no tears had been shed by his family at his death.[49] The defense lawyers in the Hossack case did not seek to portray a different picture of him, nor did they describe the abuse that Margaret had suffered at his hands. Given her claim of innocence, her lawyers could not explicitly ask that her years of suffering be taken into account as an excuse or in mitigation. Instead, as her lawyers recognized, the story of her marriage, and her fears for the safety of her family, would only be used against her, as proof that she had a motive to kill him.[50]

And yet the question arises, just as it might have for Susan Glaspell and for others in the courtroom: what if the alternative argument had been possible? Could the jury members have empathized with Margaret Hossack, with the years of suffering she endured, in judging the extent of her culpability? Would they have been capable of putting their feelings for John Hossack aside, and then imagining themselves in her place, so they could glean some appreciation of the subjective experience of her life? And, if the answer is no, whether or not extenuating circumstances enter into the legal arguments, could the twelve men be considered a jury of her peers, competent to do justice in her case?

"A Jury of Her Peers" ends less optimistically than the "The Plea." The men, the ones who are empowered to decide guilt or innocence in that case, seem incapable of empathic understanding, raising the question of whether they will be able to render a fair judgment of the accused woman. Her side of the story is granted a hearing only in Glaspell's fiction, because two other women, who can identify with her, risk disobeying the law to become, in effect, the real jury of her peers. But both pieces convey the same message, one that is echoed today by many legal commentators: empathic understanding, or a willingness to try to appreciate the subjective experiences of another, can contribute to a more fair and just decision.

Glaspell had first written about the importance of empathic understanding under the law even before she covered the Hossack trial. In October 1899, seventy-three girls had rioted at the state reform school in Mitchellville, Iowa. Sent to the county jail, they were housed with older female criminals, provoking debate over whether juveniles should be segregated from other prisoners.[51] Glaspell visited the girls, and under her "News Girl" signature, she wrote about them. Despite their "air of bravado," she found that they were more like others of their age than she had expected, taking "hearty enjoyment" in singing a song for her, and responding to the sight of a baby with affection and delight, "petting

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[49] Bryan and Wolf, *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland*, 188-90.
[50] *Ibid*., 180-86
[51] "Hands Are Tied: Board of Control Can Offer No Relief for the Girls: Ministers Urge Action at Once," *Des Moines Daily News*, October 30, 1899.

it just as anyone would."[52] Reflecting on why they had gone astray, Glaspell presents the alternatives suggested by criminal law and psychology: were the girls innately evil and naturally depraved, or were they more affected by their unfortunate childhoods, being forced to live on the streets, and growing up without love, guidance or positive influences? As she considers the question, her imagination comes into play, and, just as she has her characters do in "The Plea" and in "A Jury of Her Peers," she puts herself in the position of those others, trying to imagine how she herself would have grown up under the circumstances of their lives. Her imaginings seem to justify the logic of the argument: if adversity could have brought her to the same low state, then perhaps the circumstances must be blamed, rather than the girls alone.

As Glaspell describes the girls, how they must miss the affection of their mothers and "wish they could feel kind hands smooth their hair from their foreheads," she seeks to provoke an emotional response in her readers. And yet she also warns against the danger of "misdirected sympathy." The caution comes in Glaspell's depiction of the "sentimentalist," a woman who perceives the girls to be just like her own daughters, but then lets her "motherly heart [get] the better of her discrimination." Her sympathetic feelings prevent her exercise of reason. In contrast is the "extremist," but she, too, is unbalanced: her conclusions may be based on reasoned analysis—economics and scientific abstractions—but they lack "humanity."[53] Glaspell leaves her readers with an unanswered question: how can one allow sympathetic feelings, without hindering the ability to form reasoned and fair judgments?

In "The Plea," as in "A Jury of Her Peers," Glaspell suggests the possibility that the two oppositions might be reconciled, combining the strengths of the "sentimentalist" and the "extremist." The characters in both stories—Senator Harrison in "The Plea" and Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in "A Jury of Her Peers"—show that empathy, coming from an identification with the other, can offer a kind of knowledge that is different than simply feeling the emotion of sympathy. With this theme, Glaspell's work is strikingly relevant to contemporary legal scholarship, and to those who argue for the importance of including a more humanistic perspective in legal discussion and analysis.

Traditionally, legal discourse has tended to banish any reference to emotion or human experience, encouraging instead references to "higher" values in the form of abstract principles. Those charged with applying legal rules, it was said, could not consider the human suffering or pain caused by their decisions without sacrificing important goals, such as predicting outcomes, generalizing the law to new situations, and retaining social control. Any explicit reflection on

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[52] "News Girl Talks to the Girls from Mitchellville," *Des Moines Daily News*, November 17, 1899. I thank Marcia Noe for bringing this column to my attention.
[53] *Ibid*.

the subjective reactions of affected individuals would only lead to irrational responses, making reasoned judgments more difficult, if not impossible.[54]

But in recent years some have argued against this approach, suggesting that empathy—defined as the attempt to understand the situation of another, often by explicitly imagining oneself in that position—can offer important insights, especially when the attempt to empathize with an unfamiliar experience is reflective and conscious. Stories and narratives, which often provide greater access to subjective experiences, can be important ways of achieving empathy, and, some have said, should be more fully incorporated into legislatures, courtrooms and law school classes.[55] The ideas are ones that are provoked by both "The Plea" and "A Jury of Her Peers." For the characters in those stories, emotional engagement does not obscure the recognition of what is morally right. In fact, these two works by Glaspell suggest that just the opposite might be true; empathic understanding, offering a way to expand the perspectives of decision-makers, might well be an essential part of achieving justice.

"The Plea" is a work that deserves attention. In its exploration of empathy under the law and its foreshadowing of "A Jury of Her Peers," the story provides an important link in the study of Glaspell's lifelong themes. The case of John Wesley Elkins enriches our appreciation of Glaspell's fiction, as well as providing a factual narrative in which appeals for empathic understanding were successful in changing the fate of one young man.[56]

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[54] Lynne N. Henderson, "Legality and Empathy," *Michigan Law Review* 85 (1987): 1587-93.

[55] *Ibid.*, 1575-87; Robin West, "Economic Man and Literary Woman: One Contrast," *Mercer Law Review* 39 (1988): 873-77; see also my "Stories in Fiction and in Fact," 1361-63.

[56] I want to thank Richard Snavely, Steve Wendl, and the Anamosa State Penitentiary Museum for their invaluable contributions to this article, first in locating the story of John Wesley Elkins and then in sharing their information and ideas with me; Gordon Hendrickson, Jeffrey Dawson, and Sharon Avery for their help during my search through the archives at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines; Thomas Wolf for his editorial suggestions; and Virginia Jordan, Sara Warf, and Ben Stanley for research assistance. My work on this article was supported, in part, by a grant from the North Carolina Law Center Foundation.

WOMAN'S HONOR AND THE CRITIQUE OF SLANDER PER SE

J. ELLEN GAINOR

In January of 2005, the legislature in Washington State began debating the possible repeal of its 1909 "Slander of a Woman" statute.[1] This law had been enacted at a time when women could not yet vote, when a "separate spheres" ideology that equated women with domesticity prevailed, and when the dominant, patriarchal culture felt it necessary to protect women against "verbal assaults on their purity."[2] Putting the issue in historical context, the *New York Times* noted that this Washington law remained on the books while, for example, a Florida law "forbidding unmarried women from parachuting on Sundays" and a Texas law that could imprison women for up to a year "for adjusting their stockings in public" had already been repealed. Deemed an "outdated relic of sexism"[3] by the Washington bill's sponsor, Senator Jeanne E. Kohl-Wells, similar legislation to protect women from such "verbal assaults" nevertheless still remains on the books in eight other states. Although there has been a decline in cases using these statutes since the early twentieth century, New York's law was invoked as recently as 1996, although the case was dismissed before it came to trial.[4]

When a colleague brought this news story to my attention, I immediately wondered what, if anything, such legislation might have to do with Susan's Glaspell's 1918 comedy *Woman's Honor*. This one-act play, which premiered at the Provincetown Players' theatre in the heart of Greenwich Village's bohemian community, appears to be built upon precisely this arena of gendered public

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[1] I am very grateful to my Cornell colleague Leon Lawrence for originally drawing this legislative issue to my attention, to Cornell law student Eric Lum for his research assistance on this project, to Cheryl Black for her insights on Joe Hill, and to Martha C. Carpentier and David Faulkner for their editorial suggestions on this essay.

[2] Sarah Kershaw, "Old Law Shielding a Woman's Virtue Faces an Updating," *New York Times*, 25 January 2005, online ed.

[3] Sarah Kershaw, "Washington: Senate Backs Repeal of Virtue Law," *New York Times*, 17 February 2005, A:20.

[4] Kershaw, "Old Law."

discourse and takes up, albeit farcically, the opposing sides of a debate that was still very much alive at that time. *Woman's Honor* explores this issue through its depiction of a young man who is prepared to give his life to protect a woman from slander, and a group of women whose perspectives on such valor complicate and ultimately unravel his idealism. In staging issues of her day, Glaspell participated actively in the Players' mission of developing an American theatre that spoke directly to contemporary audiences.[5] This essay, then, traces the evolution of this legislation and speculates on how and why Glaspell may have chosen to deploy it—perhaps in the context of recent historical events—as the foundation for *Woman's Honor*.

While researching my book, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-48,*[6] I was struck by the fact that most of her plays were impelled by very specific circumstances or issues. Glaspell's 1900-01 newspaper reporting on the Hossack murder trial in Iowa ultimately led to her creation of the one-act play *Trifles* and its short story counterpart, "A Jury of Her Peers" (1915/16). The repressive and jingoistic climate felt in the United States during the first World War, brought close to home by the trials of her friends and colleagues on *The Masses* editorial staff, accused of violating the Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917-18, in part prompted her to write *Inheritors* (1921). Her concern with the legal protection of free speech also manifested itself in *Chains of Dew* (1922), which looked at this issue in relation to the burgeoning campaign for birth control, championed by her Greenwich Village associates but hotly contested elsewhere. This list could go on, but suffice it to say that comparably concrete starting points exist for almost all her plays.

Other Glaspell scholars have rightly noted a resonance between her dramas and larger social and cultural trends. Liza Nelligan, for example, has pointed to the rapidly evolving concepts of womanhood that informed the late-nineteenth through early-twentieth centuries:

> The previously fixed concepts of female sexuality, maternal responsibility, and sex-determined intellectual ability aroused considerable debate and decisively challenged nineteenth-century definitions of woman's natural place. Perhaps most important, women were questioning the essentialist notion that "woman" was a unified subject with biologically determined characteristics. Many feminists turned to the Enlightenment ideals of individualism, long considered

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[5] For more details on the mission of the Provincetown Players, see Robert Károly Sarlós, *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

[6] J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics 1915-1948* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

> the province of men, to shape their politics, their activities, and their concepts of self.[7]

For Nelligan, such broad socio-historical structures and cultural movements can provide "the lenses" that we may use to focus on "Glaspell's own historical context" and that may "illuminate . . . what Glaspell's drama meant to the audiences of her time."[8] Nelligan's analysis of this large cultural backdrop for Glaspell's dramaturgy is cogent and valid, but it cannot tell us all we need to know to appreciate her plays fully. We must also read them in terms of narrower historical, cultural, political, and other contexts of her time. Yet I will admit that while working on my book I was not able to find such specific prompts for two of her fourteen plays, the one-acts *Close the Book* (1917) and *Woman's Honor*. I have always suspected that *Close the Book*, a comedy of marriage complicated by the revelation that the bride-to-be is a gypsy about to marry into a conservative white Midwestern family, evolved from her awareness (in that era of concern with immigration and racial purity) of struggles over an inter-racial or inter-ethnic relationship. Yet I have no firm evidence to support that hypothesis. Fortuitously, however, another Glaspell scholar, Cheryl Black, recently identified an historical event that may provide the key to Glaspell's creation of *Woman's Honor*. Black brought to my attention some little known (or perhaps long forgotten) background details to the story of Joe Hill, who had been executed for murder in 1915. Historians believe that Hill may possibly have been wrongfully convicted because of his refusal to name—and thereby slander—the (probably married) woman whom he was with at the time of the murder. While there is no direct link between Glaspell and Hill, his ties to her New York community, the coverage of his case in the media, and the parallels between his story and the plot of *Woman's Honor* suggest that we might plausibly make this connection between life and art.

Joseph Hillstrom (1879-1915) was an immigrant of Swedish descent who had come to the United States in 1902. Around 1910, he shortened his name to Joe Hill and joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the revolutionary labor organization also known as the "Wobblies." The IWW had been founded in 1905 by union activists who sought to organize and improve working conditions for those laborers that other unions, such as the American Federation of Labor, either ignored or considered "'unorganizable' or undesirable—the unskilled, immigrants, people of color, and migratory workers

[7] Liza Maeve Nelligan, "'The Haunting Beauty from the Life We've Left': A Contextual Reading of *Trifles* and *The Verge*" in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 86.
[8] *Ibid*.

in agriculture, lumber, and construction."[9] Hill became a hero of the IWW—a poet who wrote many of its best known songs, which had appeared in a widely circulated volume called *The Little Red Song Book,* as well as a cartoonist who captured images exemplifying the group's and its members' cause.

Numerous residents of Glaspell's Greenwich Village neighborhood knew, or knew of Hill, and were sympathetic to leftist politics, socialism, the labor movement, and the tactics of the IWW. Many participated in or attended the Paterson Strike Pageant, for example—an extravaganza staged in Madison Square Garden in 1913 to support IWW silk mill laborers from nearby Paterson, New Jersey. Several individuals who just two years later would become founding members of the Provincetown Players were centrally involved in conceptualizing and staging this event, including John Reed, who directed, and Robert Edmond Jones, who designed the set and the program cover. Glaspell assisted with the production and later wrote about it as an inspiration for the theatre company they subsequently founded.[10]

Reed, perhaps best remembered today as the author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1918), his first-hand account of the Russian Revolution, championed Hill and wrote this tribute a few years after his death:

> When you hear these songs, you'll know it is the American Social Revolution you are listening to. All over the country workers are singing Joe Hill's songs . . . Thousands can repeat his "Last Will," the three simple verses written in his cell the night before execution. I have met men carrying next their hearts, in the pocket of their working-clothes, little bottles with some of Joe Hill's ashes in them.[11]

One of Glaspell's and her husband George Cram Cook's closest friends, Floyd Dell, who was one of the editors prosecuted in the *Masses* trials, also some years later wrote about having attended IWW meetings in New York and the early influence they had had upon him.[12]

Joe Hill was arrested near Salt Lake City, Utah in January of 1914, accused of murdering an area grocer. Despite the lack of evidence linking Hill to the crime, he was tried and convicted. Hill's biographer, Franklin Rosemont, states succinctly that Hill's true "crime" was his membership and standing in the IWW, which had been very active in Utah mining communities and had antagonized state and local government and the police. Hill's execution caused

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[9] Franklin Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionray Workingclass Counterculture* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2002), 7.

[10] See Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129-31.

[11] Quoted in Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW,* 72.

[12] See Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW,* 34 *et passim*.

outrage among leftists across the country. The prominent Village periodical *The Little Review*, for example, featured quite incendiary coverage of the case in its December 1915 issue, which resulted in a police search of the magazine's offices for "signs of a revolutionary conspiracy."[13] Margaret Anderson had prompted the investigation by publishing this impassioned editorial:

> On Thanksgiving Day some five thousand men and women marched in Joe Hillstrom's funeral. Why didn't they march for Joe Hillstrom before he was shot, everybody is asking. . . . Incidentally, why didn't some one shoot the governor of Utah before he could shoot Joe Hill? It might have awakened Capital—*and Labor*. Or why didn't five hundred of the five thousand get Joe Hill out of jail? . . . Or why didn't fifty of the five thousand make a protest that would set the nation gasping? . . . For God's sake, why doesn't some one start the Revolution?[14]

Rosemont suggests that the wider public may not have known the full story behind the Hill case, however. According to Rosemont, "Hill's lack of an alibi for the evening [in question] . . . weighed heavily against him" in the trial.[15] To be precise, Hill refused to provide an alibi, although biographers believe that he indeed had one. The physician who treated him for the gunshot wound that prosecutors claimed was inflicted while committing the crime maintained that Hill had told him he had been shot by a friend in an argument over the friend's wife. During the trial, Hill refused to testify on his own behalf, supposedly because he did not want the identity of the woman revealed. A few years after his death, in an early biographical sketch of Hill, fellow Wobbly Ralph Chaplin proposed that "the IWW song writer permitted himself to be executed rather than betray the honor of a woman."[16]

Unfortunately, Glaspell rarely spoke of the direct influences on her work. She gave few interviews, kept only the sketchiest of diaries, and left behind almost no evidence of her creative process. In trying to determine what informed her writing, scholars have had to speculate on potential influences and dig deeply in historical records to uncover events that may have sparked her imagination. It is unclear—and at this remove very difficult to determine—who might have known about the *contretemps* over a woman and Hill's decision to say nothing publicly that might damage that woman's reputation, or even if this story is true.[17] Hill's story would, of course, have made a gripping drama in its

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[13] Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 205.

[14] Margaret C. Anderson, "Toward Revolution," *The Little Review* 2.9 (December 1915): 5.

[15] Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW*, 103, 113.

[16] Quoted in Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW*, 118.

[17] Rosemont speculates on the identity of the woman in question and brings as much

own right, but as we know from *Trifles* and its genesis in the Hossack murder case, Glaspell's dramaturgy reflects a process of cultural and political analysis; the plays that evolve from her experiences tell us much more than the stories that initially underlay them.[18] *Woman's Honor*, then, becomes an occasion for Glaspell to reflect upon ideas of womanhood so sacred as to be valued above a man's own life, as well as the cultural circumstances that might occasion such a belief system.

Woman's Honor, like *Trifles*, examines social constructs of gender within a judicial context, but *Woman's Honor* employs broad humor in the service of what is ultimately a serious theme. The play opens in a sheriff's conference room, where a prisoner is consulting with his lawyer. We learn that the prisoner, Gordon Wallace, has been arrested on suspicion of murder, but he is reluctant to provide an alibi, for doing so will force him to compromise the reputation of the woman he was with when the crime occurred. His lawyer, Mr. Foster, derides him, trying to provoke him into a revelation:

> Your silence shields a woman's honor. Do you know what's going to be said of you? You're going to be called old-fashioned! . . . A man will not tell where he is because it involves a woman's honor! How quaint![19]

When Wallace responds to these taunts with anger, Foster chooses to manipulate his client further, intentionally misinterpreting the emotion: "Yes, get red in the face. . . . Blush for shame. Shame of having loved a woman who'd let a man face death to shield her own honor!" (121).

Glaspell neatly sets up the conflict between the men by opposing their assumptions about women. Each of the them holds generalized, but polarized, ideas of womankind. For the lawyer, women are "cowards . . . afraid they won't be looked upon as the pure noble sensitive souls they spend their lives trying to make us believe they are" (122). Wallace holds a more "romantic" perspective, grounded in "different ideals" of females, including their need for protection from public comment by men (122). From our vantage point almost a century after this play was written, we can see Glaspell's prescient sense of the shifting

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evidence as possible to support his supposition on 118-123.

[18] For more information on the background to *Trifles*, see Linda Ben-Zvi, "'Murder, She Wrote': The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*" in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on her Theater and Fiction*, 19-48. See also, Patricia L. Bryan and Thomas Wolf, *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2005). The fact that Glaspell's creativity was sparked here and in the writing of *Inheritors* by criminal cases may lend further support to the idea that yet another trial prompted her to write *Woman's Honor*.

[19] Susan Glaspell, *Woman's Honor*, in *Plays* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1920), 121. All subsequent page references to this play will be cited parenthetically.

concepts of femininity that were underway at that time. Wallace's "romanticism"—a vestige of Victorian ideology—certainly held sway well into the twentieth century, as the legislative debates noted above demonstrate. And Foster's misogyny reflects the tradition dating back to the story of Eve—woman as duplicitous and cowardly, tricking man into doing her bidding. Glaspell uses *Woman's Honor* to stage a debate—not only between these two patriarchal notions of womanhood, but also between these culturally dominant perspectives and those of women themselves, precisely at the moment when women were just beginning to have an opportunity to oppose these traditional beliefs in both the private and public spheres.

Foster has already intuited the core issue of the "public" and the related medium of "publicity" that he may be able to spin in his client's favor. He has devised a strategy that will either prompt the woman in question to come forward to exonerate Wallace, or, failing that, will turn jury sympathy in favor of his client. Foster believes "wives—including, I hope, jurors' wives—will cry, 'Don't let that chivalrous young man die!'" and holds fast to his conviction that "women just love to have their honor shielded" (123-24). He has already planted the story of Wallace and his refusal to name the woman with the press so that the accused will receive favorable newspaper coverage. He pulls out the press release he's written, entitled "A life for a life," and reads his narrative, clearly devised for sensationalist impact:

> "While Gordon Wallace languishes in his cell, some woman is safe in a shielded home. Charged with the murder of John Erwalt, young Wallace fails to cut his chain of circumstantial evidence with an alibi. Where was Gordon Wallace on the night of October 25? He maintains a dogged silence. Behind that silence rests a woman's honor"—and so on, at some length. (123)

Wallace is appalled that his lawyer would disseminate such a story without consulting him and retorts fervently:

> Laugh at me if you will, but I have respect and reverence for women. I believe it is perfectly true that men must guard them. Call me a romantic young fool if it pleases you, but I have had a mother—a sister—sweetheart. Yes, I am ready to die to shield a woman's honor! (124)

And, with perfect comic timing, Glaspell then has a door open and a woman enter to proclaim "No! You shall not!" (124).

Of course, we learn quickly that Wallace has never seen this person before, and that she has come solely in response to the newspaper story. Shortly thereafter, more women begin to stream onstage, all claiming to be "the one" and professing their willingness to sacrifice what they see as this shibboleth of

virtue on Wallace's behalf. Part of the humor early on derives from Glaspell's bringing unlikely "candidates" for the sweetheart role into the scene, including a "plump, middle-aged" mother (127) who sits placidly knitting, waiting to play her assumed role as the men decide on their course of action. Glaspell subtly pulls the rug out from under the lawyer's earlier rejection of Wallace's chivalry when Foster is forced by circumstance to protect the very women he has earlier maligned. As they parade in, one after the other, he tries to usher them off stage precisely to safeguard their identities from each other, and, by extension, from public exposure. The stage action, with characters rushing on and off, popping out of and being pushed through multiple doors, evokes French farce and provides a visual confirmation of the ludicrousness of the men's attempts at valor.

Six women, identified in the published script only as types—The Shielded One, The Motherly One, The Scornful One, The Silly One, The Mercenary One, and the Cheated One—ultimately enter to present variants of an alibi for Wallace. In so doing, they reveal their individual personalities and pragmatic senses of the realities of women's lives. Glaspell has the female characters also express distinct notions of female identity and agency, thereby exploding the men's generic ideas about women. These exchanges simultaneously expose the hypocrisy inherent in the sexual double standard. As one of the women observes to Wallace:

> So you were thinking of dying for a woman's honor. . . . Now do you think that's a very nice way to treat a lady? . . . A life that somebody has died for is practically a ruined life. For how are you going to think of it as anything but—a life that somebody has died for? . . . Did it ever strike you as funny that woman's honor is only about one thing, and that man's honor is about everything but that thing? . . . Now woman's honor means woman's virtue. But this lady for whom you propose to die has no virtue. (133-34)

Legal scholars have articulated this precise irony—the contradictory meanings of "honor" when applied to each sex—in their analyses of the "slander per se" statutes that emerged in the nineteenth century. These critics point to the strategic inter-relationship of American culture and judicial practice in the development of this legislation, highlighting the coincidence of the enactment of such laws with the rising cult of domesticity and sexual purity movements in the United States. According to legal historian Andrew J. King, "For male lawmakers the belief in female sexual passionlessness sharpened their reaction to sexual epithets aimed at women." King quotes his fellow historian Robert Griswold to underscore this point: "'Men were now the more carnal sex, women the more spiritual gender; men were the sexual predators, women the

victims; men were in need of sexual reeducation, women in need of respect and protection.'"[20]

The trial records that these historians trace reflect the judiciary's promulgation of this ideology. As one nineteenth-century judge explained in finding for a female defendant, "The delicacy and frangibility of the female character is scarcely realized in poetic fancy. The breath of slander withers it in an instant. Touch it and it is annihilated."[21] Glaspell had already indicted in *Trifles* the inequities of the United States judicial system, which made it literally impossible for a woman to have "a jury of her peers" because women were not allowed to serve on juries until much later in the twentieth century. In *Woman's Honor* she is similarly calling our attention to laws that draw upon a separate spheres ideology and perpetuate the equation of a woman's reputation with her sexuality.

"Slander per se" arose through the evolution of the branches of defamation law that viewed "reputation as an earned asset capable of valuation in the marketplace."[22] These defamation laws embraced two categories: libel, for written communication, and slander, for spoken communication. Within the realm of slander, three subcategories emerged under which a plaintiff could seek legal redress and damages: for statements that undermined competence associated with business or a profession, for imputations of criminal behavior, or for accusations of having a loathsome or contagious disease. Each of these, clearly, would have implications for men "in the marketplace." But if a woman sought redress in the courts for slander, which often was of a sexual nature and impacted her marriage prospects or social standing, the courts initially would only recognize a claim if the plaintiff could prove financial damages. This essentially commodified a woman's sexual propriety, particularly in terms of her status as the "property" of a husband or father. Slowly, the courts began to recognize the legitimacy of a fourth category of defamation, "slander per se," which enabled women to seek redress even if they could not prove "loss of marital prospects or other types of special damages."[23] Yet in so doing, the courts demonstrated that this kind of defamation was highly gendered, for only cases involving accusations of sexual impropriety by women employed this statute, given either the inapplicability or the historical failure rate for litigation of their concerns under the other three categories. Historian Diane Borden has examined women's lawsuits in the period 1897 to 1906—a moment of rapid

[20] Andrew J. King, "Constructing Gender: Sexual Slander in Nineteenth-Century America," *Law and History Review* 13.1 (Spring 1995): 87-88.

[21] Quoted in King, "Constructing Gender," 69.

[22] Lisa R. Pruitt, "'On the Chastity of Women All Property in the World Depends,'" *Indiana Law Journal* (Fall 2003): 5.

[23] *Ibid*.

change for women, in terms of their entry into the workplace and their move into urban, public environments. Borden found that "only one female plaintiff brought—and lost—a defamation action . . . related to her business" during this period. By comparison, "forty-two women sued for defamation" under "the immorality category," prevailing in sixty-four percent of the cases.[24]

Borden and other scholars have speculated on the role the media played in this complex social issue. They have noted the simultaneous, and possibly related phenomena of women's transition into greater public visibility, the rise of sensationalist writing known as "yellow journalism" as well as other forms of gendered public discourse, and women's increasing recourse to such litigation, including the "libel per se" category that also emerged at this time. In the late nineteenth century, publishers realized that they could increase circulation by targeting a female audience. In both magazines and newspapers, editors developed content for this readership, soliciting fiction by and about women and creating regular columns devoted to domestic concerns and society news. We may recall that Glaspell's earliest professional writing was as a society columnist for the local paper in her Iowa hometown of Davenport.[25] In her subsequent work as a legislative reporter in Des Moines, Glaspell may have developed a heightened awareness of state law and its implications for women. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Iowa courts entertained a series of cases where female plaintiffs sought redress for slanderous accusations of sexual immorality. The judgments made clear that in Iowa, respectability in women was tied to sexual reputation and that "married women needed to maintain such reputations" to retain their social standing and community membership.[26] Such issues reverberate throughout Glaspell's fiction, the earliest examples of which appeared in publications like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Youth's Companion*—periodicals capitalizing on a female readership.[27] Thus the very potential for Glaspell to have such a writing career emerged from the media's identification of women as a significant force in the marketplace. Yet

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[24] Quoted in Lisa R. Pruitt, "Her Own Good Name: Two Centuries of Talk About Chastity," *Maryland Law Review* (2004): 9.

[25] For a description of this early stage of Glaspell's career, see Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 30 ff. and Barbara Ozieblo, *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 20 ff.

[26] King, "Constructing Gender," 105.

[27] A bibliography of Glaspell's short fiction can be found in Mary E. Papke, *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 117 ff. Glaspell collected and published some of her early short stories, including several based on her experiences observing state politics in Iowa, in *Lifted Masks* (1912), reissued as *Lifted Masks and Other Works*, ed. Eric S. Rabkin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

its sense of the limited parameters of interest for this readership equally defined what kinds of writing for women warranted publication.

As the competition among daily newspapers in particular increased, publishers pushed for content with ever-greater shock or titillation value, which led to the publication of features of dubious veracity and a rise in litigation for libel. One notorious case from 1898, Ida M. Gates v. the *New York Recorder*, arose from the reporting of Gates's marriage. The paper claimed she was a "'dashing blonde, twenty years old'" and "'said to have been a concert-hall singer and dancer at Coney Island.'" Gates had supposedly "secretly married" a man of 75, "'fond of pretty women.'" "In fact, the plaintiff was a thirty-five-year-old school teacher" who had never performed on stage or even attended such productions. Gates sued the paper, and the court found in her favor under the libel per se statute, determining the injury to the plaintiff so grave that it could not even be "'measured by mere money.'" The judges, reflecting the paternalistic and moralistic tenor of the time, decreed that such stories hold "'a woman up to the public gaze, not only as unchaste, but as belonging to one of the lowest classes of the great army of fallen women.'"[28]

Countless other unnamed and unseen women—who would join the ranks of the fallen, should the Joe Hills or Gordon Wallaces of that moment identify them—hover just outside representation, precisely because they do not require literal characterization. We already know them intimately through their depiction in the newspapers and magazines. Or do we? Writing *Woman's Honor* shortly after the heyday of yellow journalism, Glaspell and her Village audiences would well understand the lurid fascination such stories held, and how they had quickly become mainstays of the media as well as popular culture's means of disseminating ideology. As Glaspell scholar Sharon Friedman has observed, the explicitly moral valence of the title *Woman's Honor* resonates neatly, yet ultimately ironically, with Glaspell's calculated use of structural elements drawn from morality plays. Friedman observes that Glaspell repeatedly "calls attention to and then subverts the ethical codes and public discourses governing matters of the heart, sexuality, and notions of the self in relation to others." Indeed, what dramaturgical form other than the *morality* play could more appropriately suggest the history and ideology that promulgate both the virgin/whore paradigm and the trope of the saved and the damned, the embraced and the outcast?

Friedman ultimately deems *Woman's Honor* a "mock morality play . . . the imitation of a form designed to examine moral choices and applied to a mundane if not inappropriate subject—the hubris and folly of determining a woman's honor according to her sexual conduct."[29] The comedy's parade of

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[28] Pruitt, "Her Own Good Name," 10.

[29] Sharon Friedman, "Honor or Virtue Unrewarded: Glaspell's Parodic Challenge to

allegorical women—The Shielded One, The Motherly One, The Scornful One, The Silly One, The Mercenary One, and the Cheated One—provides another means of demonstrating both the constructedness of female identity and the related denial of individuality. In performance, we learn a name only for The Shielded One, "Mrs. Oscar Duncan" (126), itself, of course, yet another layer of constructed identity that denies female autonomy—we know her exclusively as the wife of a named man. Glaspell's selection of specific allegorical descriptors (as opposed to the character names given the men and used in the dialogue), moreover, ironically highlights the impact of such generic constructions on individual lives. We come to see the tensions between these allegorized identities (or socially constructed roles) and the real lives of the distinct people who embody them. The Motherly One, for example, explains her rationale in coming forward:

> You see, I'm in the habit of trying to save lives. I do [practical] nursing . . . and I didn't happen to be on a case just now. . . . Some of the folks I nurse for may be shocked [by the revelation of her "loss of virtue"]—but good sensible nurses aren't so easy to get. Of course my children may be upset about it—but they're awful nice children, and when they're a little older probably they'll be pleased to think their mother didn't want a nice boy to die. (136)

Such speeches neatly turn the table on male proclamations of self-sacrifice and valor: these women stand ready to relinquish easily and without any qualms the attribute their society both solely defines them by and privileges enormously, their sexual purity.

As each of the women tells her story, a complex persona is revealed from behind the nominative descriptor. One of Glaspell's most significant choices here is to show how women themselves embrace some aspects of the dominant culture's ideology about women. While the women assume stereotypes don't apply to each of them individually, they do assume they apply to each other. Thus when The Mercenary One coincidentally arrives, not about Wallace but about a stenographic position in the sheriff's office, the other women initially condemn her for what appears to be a form of prostitution—her interest in being paid for her services. Their presumptions, and resistance to acknowledging the fundamental transactional nature of all their efforts, ultimately become a lesson for all concerned. Glaspell thus reveals the invidious distinctions between the other women's sense of their own virtue and that of those fellow women who more literally participate in self-sale.

Ideologies of Sexual Conduct and the Discourse of Morality in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century," (Paper delivered at the conference "Writing, Teaching, Performing America," University of Kansas, March 2005).

Woman's Honor, like many of Glaspell's plays, follows a dramaturgical arc that begins in broad comedy and moves to a more serious and thought-provoking conclusion. In this instance, Glaspell uses the last of the allegorical women, The Cheated One (a role Glaspell herself played in the original production), to drive home the implications for women of this male-determined prerogative to defend them from sexual slander. The Cheated One tells the others bitterly:

> I've been cheated. Cheated out of my chance to have a man I wanted by a man who would have what he wanted. Then he saved my woman's honor. Married me and cheated me out of my life. I'm just something to be cheated. That's the way I think of myself. Until this morning. Until I read about Gordon Wallace. Then I saw a way to get away from myself. It's the first thing I ever wanted to do that I've done. You'll not cheat me out of this. Don't you try! (154)

Finding a sense of purpose, The Cheated One abandons virtue—the personal implications of which she abhors—for the chance to claim agency for herself, and perhaps also to assert a woman's right to a new and personally defined form of honor.

In her historical analysis of gender and defamation law, Diane Borden has parsed the rhetorical distinctions between the defamation statutes enacted to protect each sex. Borden traces in the legal discourse a pattern wherein women's reputations are linked to sexuality—"virtue"— whereas men's reputations "are cast in terms of honor."[30] The concept of honor goes back to ancient times and can be seen as distinct from the concept of "reputation as property" that underlies parts of defamation law. Within such codes of honor, according to legal historian Robert Post, "an individual personally identifies with the normative characteristics of a particular social role and in return personally receives from others the regard and estimation that society accords to that role." In societies that value the concept of honor, "reputation as honor is fixed" and distinct from "reputation as property," which "fluctuates according to individual effort and market conditions."[31] Yet, as Borden observes, by specifically invoking the term "virtue" for women, rather than "honor," defamation law, and the societies in which it developed, essentially invalidate the possibility of there even being such a thing as a "*woman's* honor."

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[30] Diane L. Borden, "Reputational Assault: A Critical and Historical Analysis of Gender and the Law of Defamation," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* (Spring 1998): 98.

[31] Robert C. Post, "The Social Foundation of Defamation Law: Reputation and the Constitution," *California Law Review* (1986): 699-700.

In choosing this very title for her play and demonstrating her understanding of the different meanings of the term as applied to each sex ("woman's honor means woman's virtue"), Glaspell is pointedly and ironically calling our attention to a legal and social construct just as impossible in her time as a "jury of her peers." While recent events in Washington State have shown that it is taking even longer for our culture to address this arena of defamation law than it took to change the United States jury system, we can, through *Woman's Honor,* marvel anew at Susan Glaspell's remarkable prescience and sensitivity to the gender inequities of her era and our own.

Susan Glaspell's Last Word On Democracy and War

Mary E. Papke

> We have learned as common knowledge that much of the insensibility and hardness of the world is due to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people…[;] we are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences, since the result of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life.[1]

I open with a quote from Jane Addams' 1902 *Democracy and Social Ethics* in service of the continued reevaluation of Susan Glaspell's work. Rediscovery of an author typically depends on the timely reappearance of one or two works that speak deeply to a particular contemporary issue and constituency. Glaspell's rediscovery was, as we know, sparked by the republication of *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers" during the second wave of feminist inquiry, these particular works appealing precisely because of their focus on women's silent oppression. One of the difficulties in further reevaluation is situating the author within her own time and milieu, regardless of our own contemporary concerns. Of course, in the best of all possible cases, the author's concerns at the moment of writing and our concerns at the moment of reading coincide.

Were we to transport ourselves to Chicago in the summer of 1902, we would find a young woman of considerable political conviction with a deep commitment to learning it all, an impulse toward the experience of pure knowing that will inform all her work. Majoring in English and philosophy in her non-degree graduate studies, Susan Glaspell would not have long remained unaffected by pragmatism, a major philosophical movement of that time, particularly since John Dewey, a principal articulator of pragmatism, had spent

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[1] Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 8.

the previous eight years reforming the University of Chicago's educational theories in all major disciplines. Further, she surely would at least have heard of Jane Addams' work since 1889 with Hull-House and Addams' opening there of the first Little Theatre in America in 1900. Addams, like Dewey, would publish in the next years a series of significant texts on pragmatism and women, democracy, war, art and America. Glaspell herself had already published works addressing these topics and would continue to explore the issue of a democratic America at war throughout her career. Indeed, from the prevalence of this subject in her work, one might almost call hers an obsession with war as both destroyer and possibility. This dual sense of war aligns her with the wartime transcendentalist Walt Whitman, Great War female modernists as various as H.D. and Edna St. Vincent Millay, with the Inhumanist poet Robinson Jeffers, and in intriguing ways with the men and women of the Chicago school of American pragmatism, which movement itself has tenacious roots in transcendentalism. I would like to explore further this philosophical investment evident in the fiction of Susan Glaspell.

As J. Ellen Gainor argues about Glaspell's dramatic opus, "The timing of Glaspell's career, spanning the era between the two world wars, probably influenced her more profoundly, and affected her dramaturgy more significantly, than any particular political affinity. References to war appear in almost every play she wrote, whether as passing allusions or as central themes. Her dramas reflect the impact of the war on a specifically American milieu: on the individual character, on social morality, on the commitment to action, and on a sense of national history and its foundational principles."[2] Glaspell's writing career, of course, began considerably earlier than the time of the Great War, her early narrative arguments foreshadowing both her noninterventionist stance of the Provincetown years and her careful reconsideration of personal isolationism thereafter. As her liberal writer Len Mitchell says in her late novel, *Judd Rankin's Daughter*, of such early experiences in Greenwich Village as hers, they engendered "a bewildered-and-alone aristocracy"[3] of pessimists who, like the writer character both Len and Frances Mitchell once admired, have turned now to rapacious individualism bordering on fascism. Glaspell's own process of coming to consciousness detailed in her fiction always set her apart from that aristocracy. Like Dewey and Addams, she believed, as Addams argued, that "the cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy,"[4] an experiencing of democracy not engineered by the elite but lived on a daily basis

[2] J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 9.

[3] Susan Glaspell, *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1945), 164. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically.

[4] Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 9.

by "the people," a term Glaspell uses repeatedly to celebrate a possible collective of distinct individuals bonded by shared beliefs in social progress for all. Her drama, as many critics recognize, focuses relentlessly on issues of embattlement and ownership—of land, of the right to self-determination, of the right of moral adjudication—and also each American's responsibility for all the dispossessed, whether these be Native Americans, the working class, or, more elementally, women. Most famously in her plays, she details the often silent, sometimes hysterical war between women and men, but the theatre of war is not limited to Glaspell's drama or gender trouble. In fact, her earliest and last word on marital, martial, class, and ideological warfare finds its fullest expression in her fiction. There, as in her plays, Glaspell uses war and the military habit to foreground what I have described elsewhere as her central philosophical paradigm—a naturalist despair over the futility of anyone's ability to effect a positive future ameliorated by a determined belief in the capacity of human transcendence.[5] One might also describe Glaspell's philosophical predisposition as a Bergsonian mysticism tempered by American pragmatism, a belief, that is, in adaptability and inclusiveness, in the absolute necessity of one's surrendering the safety of habit in thought and action in order to feel, then insist upon, and therefore act for a new way of being for all. Such pragmatic practice would constitute Bergson's *élan vital*,[6] and it is this pragmatic experience of experiencing anew the human connection of the other to one's self that is presented repeatedly in the stories of Glaspell's characters.

Linda Ben-Zvi in her detailed biography of Glaspell draws attention to Glaspell's very early writing in this vein, specifically her 1898 "The Philosophy of War," published while she was an undergraduate at Drake University. Focusing on the Spanish-American conflict, the story denies the glory of America's involvement and calls the war "a terrible waste of young lives."[7] *The Visioning*, her second novel published in 1911, is set, significantly, at an Army arsenal and illustrates that the military and the wars it requires for its continued relevance depend in turn upon social and class inequality, and a profound denial of the rights of others to flourish. As even the protagonist's brother, an accomplished inventor of weapons of destruction, admits, the way of war is an impoverished life, less a fighting for the spirit of democracy in the present than

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[5] See my "Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith" in *Disclosing Textualities: The Stories, Plays and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, eds. Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2006).

[6] See, in particular, Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (translated 1911) for his concept of *élan vital*.

[7] Susan Glaspell, "The Philosophy of War," first published in *The Delphic* 15 (October 1898); cited in Linda Ben-Zvi's *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36.

a devotion to embalmed "form … built on dead things," a form that "rattles dead bones."[8] The life-denying habit of military engagement is mirrored in the protagonist Katie's attempt to save a working-class girl from suicide by reinventing her as a girl of her class, complete with a new name and past. Glaspell purposefully commandeers the language of war to describe both Katie's spontaneous act of rescue (the girl "shot" "like a bullet" into Katie's life) and her subsequent charade on the girl's behalf ("She would have to fix up all her fortifications—look well to her ammunition" [116]). The novel then details Katie's failure to see this other girl as an individual with a past, a desire for self-expression, and a seemingly blighted future precisely because of people such as herself. In pragmatist fashion, while Katie's initial experience of engagement with the girl is sensational—"something whizzed into her consciousness like a bullet […,] bullet-swift, bullet-true, bullet-terrible—striking the center clean and strong" (5)—it becomes life-altering only after Katie accepts that her center should not hold, that her habits of thought and behavior are exclusionary and also only so much dead form. As Allen Dunn writes of the pragmatists William James and John Dewey, "both embrace the Bergsonian notion that experience precedes and outstrips thought or reflection. They insist that it is only by doing that thinking becomes possible."[9] And Katie, through a series of increasingly disorienting experiences after her first spontaneous action, learns to think seriously about what it means to fight for life by helping another to self-fulfillment (58).

A series of short stories published during and directly after the Great War recapitulate this theme in concentrated form and help make sense of Ruth Holland's assertion in Glaspell's 1915 novel *Fidelity* that "'It seems to me the war is going to make a new world—a whole new way of looking at things. It's as if a lot of old things, old ideas, had been melted, and were fluid now, and were to be shaped anew.'"[10] In the 1916 story "Miss Jessie's Trip Abroad," for instance, Jessie Holcombe plans a trip to Europe to acquire enough culture to attract the attentions of academic Richard Shirley. Culture, for her, is knowledge

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[8] Susan Glaspell, *The Visioning* (New York: A.L. Burt Company, 1911), 121, 23. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically.

[9] Allen Dunn, "The Devil in the Details: Modernism and the Dilemmas of Democratic Pluralism," unpublished manuscript distributed to the Pragmatism Reading Group, The University of Tennessee, spring 2005. I am indebted to Allen and other members of the group for their detailed and critical examination of pragmatism. For helpful background reading on pragmatism, see James T. Kloppenberg's "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?" *The Journal of American History* 83.1 (June 1996), 100-138.

[10] Susan Glaspell, *Fidelity* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, Publishers, 1915), 354.

that sets one apart and marks one as superior to others. However, the war intervenes, and after experiencing it through stories and pictures in newspapers, she is moved to feel connection to others, and becomes one of the "fellow women sorrowing for women." Her experience of war through reading is visceral—"*She was there*,"[11] Art, here of a popular form, forcibly positions her in the place of another, and so she sends her travel wardrobe to clothe the dispossessed. Not coincidentally, this generosity pays the dividend of her finding true love with an honest working man, a theme Glaspell had amplified in the relationship of Katie with Alan Mann in *The Visioning*. "The Hearing Ear," published in the same year, sets the story of Katherine Hoyt's increasing deafness and seeming loss of connection with others against the background of the Great War, what one of her friends calls that "madness of men."[12] However, as the male narrator discovers, Hoyt's deafness served to "make deeper channels" (241) of lived experience open up to her, and she thus represents hope after destruction, empathy gained through loss. As Glaspell insists, "'no matter how much may be lost—if we can feel there's something not lost, or, rather, if we can feel that some one has got something that can't be lost—,'" then, as the story's narrator sees, we are not "lost in the night" (239). Tellingly, that something not lost is Katherine's cross-gender, cross-class, and cross-age connection with another damaged person. "Good Luck," in turn, published in 1918, recounts the aftermath of two men going down together on the Alsitania (presumably standing in for the Lusitania). One is mistaken as a hero who forfeited his chance at survival for the sake of others, but he later unmasks himself to his fiancée as a coward who literally kicked his friend away from a makeshift raft to save himself. His friend, and, not coincidentally, competitor for Mildred's love, insists, however, on the rightness of such a life-force fighting for life in the face of almost certain death. The coward's bravery in self-disclosure wins the woman's heart; more importantly, the friend's defense conceals his own now doubled sacrifice for the security of others—for he was the hero. A nascent pragmatist, the true hero is granted the last word because, as he says, "'oh, facts are limiting and stupid, and only feeling is real.'"[13]

As Glaspell's 1919 story "The Escape" emphasizes, such right feeling for another must be given expression through action or speech to make a difference. Margaret Powers lives a "queer"[14] life in that she cuts herself off from feeling

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[11] Susan Glaspell, "Miss Jessie's Trip Abroad," *Woman's Home Companion* 48 (November 1916), 10.

[12] Susan Glaspell, "The Hearing Ear," *Harper's* 134 (December 1916), 239. All subsequent references to this story cited parenthetically.

[13] Susan Glaspell, "Good Luck," *Good Housekeeping* 67 (September 1918), 126.

[14] Susan Glaspell, "The Escape," *Harper's* 140 (December 1919), 29. All subsequent references to this story cited parenthetically.

too much—a sort of civilian shell-shock response to traumas such as seeing an orphan adopted and then exploited as cheap labor, a sick dog wagging his tail as he died, a woman slapping the joy out of her child, an old man tricked into going into an insane asylum. When her best friend's son, whom she has, tellingly, nicknamed Buffer, returns from the war, in which conflict his best friend was killed right before his eyes, he is seemingly untouched by the trauma, is too talkative, glib, filling up space with the inconsequential. In him, she recognizes the cost of their having "stopped" (35) after seeing the life force defiled and destroyed, and their complicity in continued suffering because of their refusal to connect meaningfully with others. Glaspell's 1921 "His Smile" similarly investigates personal isolation and the continual trauma of post-war life for those living with profound loss. In the story, a woman travels from town to town in order to sit in darkened theatres screening a film that by chance captured for a few moments the image of her husband, now dead from an accident in a munitions plant, walking out of a shop and stopping to help a dog with a too tight muzzle. Except for this momentary illusion of her husband, she is literally lost in darkness. Again, another mother's child is instrumental in her awakening, a child asleep beside her whom she instinctively embraces for the child's comfort. Through that instinctual act—"Now she was knowing"—she learns that the way to celebrate her husband's promise to life is through caring for others.[15]

Children and their lost innocence are often central in Glaspell's formula for a character's coming to consciousness. Indeed, the plays and novels almost compulsively focus on generations of families in which children bear the wounds of mothers and fathers. In *Brook Evans* (1928), for example, Brook herself is the child of her mother's dead lover and was made legitimate only by her mother's sacrificial marriage. She is also a war widow, although unbeknownst to her, but not her son, her husband died not of his war wound but of suicide, an act intended to assure her happiness. Rejecting the marriage offer of her husband's friend and fellow officer, thus effectively denying the military sense of purpose, order, and form, she realizes her love for another as they walk through a war cemetery, "passing many graves just alike—graves of men who would not love again…."[16] In turn, she sends her son to America, "the country of the future" (311), and it is in America that Brooks' son Evans experiences by the brook next to which Brook's mother conceived her the fluidity of time and the pure self celebrated by Henri Bergson.

The importance of children is also manifest in Glaspell's *Cherished and Shared of Old*, her 1940 Christmas card for her godchildren. If, as Glaspell

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[15] Susan Glaspell, "His Smile," *Pictorial Review* 22 (January 1921), 91.

[16] Susan Glaspell, *Brook Evans* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1928), 265. All subsequent references to this novel cited parenthetically.

wrote in *The Road to the Temple,* World War I revealed "a world trying to destroy itself,"[17] the Second World War called seriously into question the future of all children. Dismissed by most critics as trite, slight, and unrelated to her other fiction, this work needs to be appreciated as a radical children's book for its time. As John Dewey argues in his 1934 *Art as Experience,* and Glaspell herself articulates in her 1942 "Susan Glaspell Says We Need Books Today as Never Before," literature powerfully evokes the potentiality of each reader to experience both otherness and human community.[18] That is, art, as her children's story makes clear, can carry on the legacy of hatred of otherness, or it can allow us, through the experience of empathy, entry into a truly democratic dialogue that recognizes and celebrates cultural pluralism. In the story, the friendship of two women, one American born, one a German immigrant, is sundered over their fathers' dispute over land. Addie, the American, in mid-life takes in two Dutch children orphaned by the war, and, once again, these strange children—and a dog, another empathic figure in Glaspell's work—are instrumental in the protagonists' overcoming the habit of hatred demanded by family allegiance. "In a changing world of many sorrows," as Glaspell describes it, the innocence of the dispossessed trumps fear and base materialism. The story is less a moral than a hope, a much-needed "light burning" to vanquish "the darkness of our doubts and fears" for the children living in that wartime.[19]

The 1945 novel *Judd Rankin's Daughter* is Glaspell's last word on America and war. I do not find the novel as troubling as do many critics, but, then, I also do not read it in terms of gender antagonisms or the compromised subject position of women. Rather, I think it is more profitably viewed as a highly self-reflective work on Glaspell's own production of seeking and knowing individuals throughout her career. It boldly calls into question Glaspell's many unsaid words, or, as her writer character says, "Have an idea if you looked at what you've put down you might get a line on what you didn't have the nerve to say" (221). Here Glaspell revises old formulas even as she depends on them one last time. There is, for instance, the central absent female character, a palimpsestic technique she employs in many works. Adah's legacy, understood best by the men who knew her, is a belief in possibility and self-transformation. While her legacy is woven throughout the story, more important to the action of the text is one of the very few positive marital relationships in all of Glaspell's work, a sympathetic union of opposite others and sensibilities, both the rational

[17] Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple*: *A Biography of George Cram Cook* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 213; originally published in 1926.
[18] Susan Glaspell, "Susan Glaspell Says We Need Books Today as Never Before," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 6 December 1942, sec. 4, p. 11.
[19] Susan Glaspell, "Preface to the 1941 Edition," *The Road to the Temple: A Biography of George Cram Coo*k (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2005), 29.

and the emotional. Those often warring sensibilities are reflected in other characters, and it is the dissociation of those sensibilities that frustrates or drives characters mad in that they feel too much without understanding or think too much without opening themselves to feeling. Adah's legacy is her belief, as she said to Judd Rankin, that "You can do anything," and, indeed, he does, but only after his daughter urges him to make it new in his writing and to engage not with an idealized past but with the current war and a fragmented America.

Authors often write themselves into a particular character; in this work, I think Glaspell writes herself cross-gender and cross-age into several, and so critiques through them her own experiences that she translated into art: her idealization of the frontier, her naïve but compelling hope in the power of the people to effect change, her sense of the role of the artist as speaking to social and political issues and not merely for self-aggrandizement, and the temptation to give way to pessimism as so many other Greenwich Village artists had done. The novel begins on a series of thresholds, literal and metaphorical, of Adah's dying, Frances' waiting, and a young soldier soon to die seeking the word from Adah that would make life meaningful. Such a search drives many of Glaspell's other women mad, into confinement, or into crime, but these women have little support in their quest for self-salvation. In this last novel, Glaspell defines the type of support necessary to combat the death drive; it begins with the family but must embrace others regardless of religious, class, or racial affiliation who also celebrate the life-force. And, as in "Miss Jessie's Trip Abroad," this communal gathering together is a product of a war that affords a new hard-won appreciation of what "home" means.

Glaspell also makes crystal clear how difficult it is to maintain faith in the future of this America. Judd Rankin, still mourning the loss of his son in the Great War, argues that "John had wanted to give himself to a war to end war and make the world safe for democracy," but "Then what?...," Glaspell continues, "—those men who played their game with the life of the world.…Off go the boys—whistling and dying, and before you can hitch your pants the same thing starts all over again" (57). Judd's response is to close in on himself "out here," the title of his last book, isolated from world affairs. Rankin's grandson, in turn, returns from brutal engagement in those world affairs psychologically damaged after seeing his best friend shot in the face. In response, he isolates himself from his family whose commitments, he believes, are to dead forms. Frances, his mother, focuses for much of the story solely on her family, but as her husband Len points out, she too lives a kind of isolationism like her father in that they do not think about the others, especially the other mothers and sons, living and dying that day. Further, Glaspell insists that it is not enough simply to think "Way beyond where I can see—there they all are—those others" (161), but that one must then act for and with them. All the people are our family.

In her 1941 “Preface” to *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell wrote that “as we fight for a free world, more of us than ever before are thinking of what man’s life on earth has been—and can be.” In her last novel, a writer like herself thinks “Me? Who am I? What could I have done? I don’t run the world, do I?” Glaspell answers definitively, “Sure you do; everybody does” (57). From early story to last novel, Glaspell’s fiction continues to voice a crucial call for action and hope from which we can still learn, even in these our own war-torn times.

Susan Glaspell and the Epistemological Crisis of Modernity: Truth, Knowledge, and Art in Selected Novels

Kristina Hinz-Bode

Susan Glaspell, born in 1876, came of age during a time when inherited systems of belief and thought were radically called into question. In 1859 Charles Darwin had published his study *On the Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, followed in 1871 by *The Descent of Man*. Science had established that the human race descends from apes, a claim that fundamentally challenged all theological creation myths. In his 1864 *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Hippolyte Taine saw the works of writers and artists determined by "*race*" (biological heritage), "*milieu*" (social and climatic environment) and "*moment*" (historical moment), arguing a determinist stance that would produce a new school of writers, the naturalists. With all that science came to regard as evident about nature and humankind throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea gained impetus that the transcendental notion of truth itself must be called into question. "God is dead" Friedrich Nietzsche had his madman proclaim in 1882, calling instead for the superman who will overcome man as man has overcome the ape. And in a journal entry the German philosopher added his famous statement, predicting twentieth-century post-structuralist thought: "there are no facts, only interpretations." [1]

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science)* (Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1882). See section 108 "Neue Kämpfe" ("New Struggles") and section 125 "Der tolle Mensch" ("The Madman") for his statement "Gott is todt." The latter quotation is from Nietzsche's *Nachlass*, the philosopher's posthumously published notebooks. See, for instance, *Der Wille zur Macht* (*The Will to Power*) § 481. Darwin, Taine, and Nietzsche all play an important role in Susan Glaspell's work, both implicitly and explicitly. Darwin, for instance, is mentioned in *The Glory of the Conquered* as well as in her 1921 play, *Inheritors*; about Taine one character in *Norma Ashe* says: "I am reading Taine's *History of English Literature*, and I think it is beautiful that a Frenchman wrote so wonderfully about English literature, as if there are no separate countries in the mind," Susan Glaspell, *Norma Ashe* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1942), 130. For the influence of Nietzsche, see Martha C. Carpentier, "Apollonian Form and

Susan Glaspell's whole *oeuvre* is a continuous engagement with the implications of what has been called the epistemological crisis of modernity. In all her writings Glaspell acknowledged the wide range of artistic answers to the modern experience of doubt and disorder: the realists' project of enacting stories of self-empowerment, the determinist stance of naturalism, the ecstatic insistence on a truth beyond surface reality that drives the works of German expressionism, the retreat into the individual consciousness evident in modernist aestheticism, the socialist and Marxist explanations of the world, and the intellectual and philosophical position that art must fall silent in the face of the atrocities of modern warfare and terror. In the following, I will develop Glaspell's own view of the connection between life and art and her lifelong affirmation of the validity of the human search for truth, by comparing three of her novels: her first, *The Glory of the Conquered* (1909), written during the Progressive Era before the outbreak of World War I, and her two final long novels, *Norma Ashe* and *Judd Rankin's Daughter*, both written and published during World War II.

Like her early short stories, *The Glory of the Conquered* has been called part of Susan Glaspell's "apprentice fiction," a term that implies deficiencies both in theme and in style. In his early study of Glaspell's *oeuvre* Arthur Waterman judged that her first novel "does not show Miss Glaspell's maturity as a writer at all," that its unrealistic plot and vague language only expose "the kind of trite idealism [she] had to overcome as a writer before her art could achieve any structure."[2] And while later scholars have taken issue with many of Waterman's biased judgments, in the case of *The Glory of the Conquered* they usually agree.[3] Indeed, the book's plot revolves around "the story of a great love" (as the subtitle asserts), and this thematic focus, with its often somewhat sappy language, can be seen as belonging to the genre of popular sentimental fiction, as Linda Ben-Zvi implies: "In its execution the novel teeters on the brink of

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Dionysian Excess in Susan Glaspell's Drama and Fiction," in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, eds. Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 35-50.

[2] Arthur Waterman, *Susan Glaspell*, Twayne's United States Author Series 101, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), 32.

[3] Veronica Makowsky, for instance, comments on *The Glory of the Conquered* under the chapter heading "Cultural Confusions and Apprentice Fiction" in her *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 29. For Martha C. Carpentier, the observation that Glaspell's first novel does not "[show] the mature craft" of her later fiction was the reason to exclude it from her book, *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 8.

clichéd idealism. There are just too many glazed eyes, choked works, and obvious plays of light and dark."[4]

Beyond the novel's concentration on romantic love as the essential human source of energy, however, there is a surplus of sophisticated ideas in *The Glory of the Conquered* that clearly distinguishes this work from a pulp novel. Glaspell develops an idealist notion of truth and knowledge, and of the role of art as a medium for communication, which will play an important role in all of her later writings.[5] Already on the first page of *The Glory of the Conquered*, the subject of epistemological certainty or uncertainty is playfully introduced in the female protagonist Ernestine's musings about how it could have happened that she, an artist, "had promised to marry a scientist!"

> If, one month before, a gossiping daughter of Fate had come to her with—"Shall I tell you something? *You* are going to marry a man of science!"—she would have smiled serenely at Fate's amusing mistake and responded—"My good friend, it is quite true that great uncertainty attends this subject. So much to be expected is the unexpected, that I am quite willing to admit I may marry the hurdy-gurdy man who plays beneath my window. I know life well enough to appreciate that I *may* marry a pawnbroker or the Sultan of Turkey. I assert but one thing. I shall *not* marry a 'man of science.'"[6]

Now that she finds herself in love with a "man of science" after all (and one, to make matters "worse," who is internationally renowned), Ernestine is forced to admit that she had not known the first thing about either herself or the way the world works. The only reality to Glaspell's female protagonist at this first moment of the novel is the happiness of her love, and she lightly excuses her misconception on this ground: "When he took her face so tenderly in his two hands—looked so far down into her eyes—and told her in a voice she would follow to the ends of the earth that he *loved* her—was there any time then to think of paltry non-essentials like art and science?" (4).

Of course, this is the yarn of sentimental romance, the image of a youthful heroine who finds that her feelings for a man have turned upside down all her previous convictions, but Glaspell does not stop with this image. Instead, Ernestine's musings show that the supposed contrast between art and science

[4] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83.
[5] In this context of philosophical ideas, "idealism" is of course a neutral term. Compare the approach I take to Glaspell's works in *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression: Language and Isolation in the Plays* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2006).
[6] Susan Glaspell, *The Glory of the Conquered* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1909), 3. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically.

will be essential, indeed, to the argument of this novel. For as she begins to reflect on the unhappy marriage of her dead parents, we learn that their relationship had been defined by a struggle that impressed on the young Ernestine through "all the years" of her past that art and science could only lock in fatal combat (4). Glaspell suggests, in her portrayal of Ernestine's memories, that neither the heroine's mother, who looked for happiness in Romantic poetry, nor her father, a professor of biology who believed only in figures and formulas, had been in touch with the truth about human existence when they so bitterly denied each other's respective approaches to the world.[7] In contrast, Ernestine herself had always felt that the division between her mother's art and her father's science was an artificial one that went against the heart of life. "Even when a very little girl," Ernestine recalls, she "wondered why her father could not have his bottles and things, and her mother have her poems and the things she liked, and just let each other alone about it. She wondered that long before she appreciated its significance" (5). She is at this point the prototypical early 20th-century modernist youth, rejecting and moving beyond the gendered binarisms of her parents' Victorian generation.

As a girl, Ernestine had found peace only with her blackboard, given to her by her father so that she could do her sums, but employed in every unattended minute to sketch the world around her, an image thus representing her first effort to unite the art/science, spirit/body dichotomy she has inherited. When she worked on her sketches she had a feeling of certainty about the world and her own place in the great order of things that could not be attacked by other people's conflicting views:

> She never had that being-pulled-in-two-feeling when she and the blackboard were alone together. The blackboard seemed the only thing which made her all one, and she often wished her father and mother loved their things as she did hers, for if they were only *sure*, as she was, then what some one else said would not matter at all (6, Glaspell's emphasis).

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[7] See the way Ernestine characterizes her parents: "Her father had been a disciple of exact science, —a professor of biology. He believed only in that which could be reduced to a formula. […] He viewed life microscopically and spent his portion of emotion in an aggressive hatred of all those things which he consigned to the rubbish heap labelled non-scientific" (5). "His mind and his soul had never found one another—was it because his heart had closed the channel between the two?" (7). And after her mother died, Ernestine had tried to find out "the secret of her […] life" in the poems she had "written at intervals during the years … There was tragedy in those little poems—a soul's long tragedy in their halting lines, in the faltering breath with which they were sung. Indeed they were not the songs of a poet at all; they were but the helpless reaching out of an unsatisfied, unanchored soul" (9).

Consequently, the reason why Ernestine and her fiancé Karl epitomize the modernist ideal marriage is that it is a union of equals. In contrast to Ernestine's mother, she herself is a "true artist," and Karl—in contrast to her father—is a "true scientist." Both see behind the surface in their work and recognize a fundamental unity in all human creativity. "To Karl, work and life and love were all one great force" (44)—a view which, as we have seen, Ernestine shares.

As Linda Ben-Zvi and others have correctly pointed out, this idea of "the *oneness* of the world" (57), which Glaspell develops in the love story of Ernestine Stanley and Karl Hubers, is directly influenced by the philosophy of monism created and made popular on an international scale by the German zoologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel at the turn of the nineteenth century.[8] Haeckel, who lived and taught at the University of Jena from 1867 to 1908, has been called the "German Darwin." He argued along the same lines as his British colleague and is primarily responsible for spreading Darwin's ideas in Germany.[9] The label is nevertheless misleading, as recent scholarship has pointed out. In his books, which were translated into more than thirty languages in his own time, Haeckel developed a holistic philosophy (a kind of scientific pantheism) that attempted to reconcile the contemporary knowledge of the origin of species and the evolution of man with the need for religion he observed in Western societies. God and nature are one, mind and matter made out of the same substance, which he saw as proven by the empirical knowledge of his time. His *Riddles of the World* (1899), translated into English in 1901, became an international bestseller, and in 1905 Haeckel founded the German Monist League to spread his ideas—ideas which incorporated the stances of pantheism and atheism, the natural philosophy of Romanticism, as well as the thought of Goethe and Emerson.

Haeckel's mixture of Romantic natural philosophy and empirical Darwinian science obviously appealed to Glaspell, who discussed Goethe and Darwin, Haeckel and Nietzsche in the "Monist Society" founded by George Cram Cook and Floyd Dell in Davenport in 1907. Many of her works deal directly with

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[8] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 82-83. See also Mary E. Papke, "Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith," in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, eds. Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 25-28.

[9] In fact, Charles Darwin himself stated in his *Descent of Man* with regard to Ernst Haeckel: "Almost all conclusions at which I have arrived I find confirmed by […] this naturalist, whose knowledge on many points if fuller than mine," qtd. in Bernhard Kleeberg, *Theophysis. Ernst Haeckels Philosophie des Naturganzen* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), 2. For more on Darwin and Haeckel, and on the theological aspects of Haeckel's theories, see Kleeberg's study, pp. 3, 21, 28, 205, 239-263.

Haeckel's philosophy of the "oneness" of all things, which Glaspell combined with an idealist notion of evolutionary progressivism. Metaphorically, her hope for a progressive development of humankind is often represented by what she calls the "leap"—the evolutionary jump made by the first primitive life forms from water to land. In this step, for Glaspell, lies the cradle of the pioneer spirit, the daring to change life and make it better. In *The Glory of the Conquered*, Ernestine is certain that her husband is about to find a cure for cancer that will thus help humankind to make another great leap forward. By combining evolutionary theory and the philosophy of monism in this way Glaspell takes her cue from Darwin, but then transcends him in a significant way. For as Karl, bent on understanding "the thing as a whole" (7), strives to find a cure for the deadly disease, he ultimately works *against* natural selection, in the words of his cynical friend Dr. Parkman, "by bucking up against the law of the survival of the fittest, thereby rendering humanity the beautiful service of encumbering the earth with the weak" (42). Through her protagonist Glaspell argues that it is this very stubbornness to fight for life against all odds which provides the distinctly human spirit that might make the world more at the end of the day.

Yet Ernestine's (and thus, the novel's) glad certainty with regard to the harmony and purpose of "it all" is put to the test when Karl, through a careless handling of chemicals at his laboratory, infects his eyes and goes blind within weeks. The exceptional scientist cannot continue his work at the microscope, and tragedy sets in as the fundamental tone of the novel shifts. Karl is cut off from the possibility of realizing his inner drive for truth, and this fate profoundly threatens his sense of identity and meaning. After a brief period of shock and disorientation, Ernestine concludes that Karl simply must go on with his work, so there has to be a way. Someone needs to become his eyes, and if this should be possible at all it can only be her, the person closest to his soul. Only Karl's loving and devoted wife, Ernestine is convinced, will be able to sublimate her own personality and thereby serve effectively as his instrument. It is indeed the idea of love, then, which is the source of trust, faith and certainty in *The Glory of the Conquered*. Ernestine will have to give up her own calling as a painter—an occupation in which she is just as successful as her husband—spending long hours of training in the university laboratory in order to learn how to conduct the experiments he directs. But she is convinced that as long as there is this bond between her and Karl, the oneness of the world will find expression through his work. Ernestine even converts the embittered Dr. Parkman to her plan: "Nothing in which to believe, when there is love such as this in the world?" he wonders after his encounter with the determined wife (211).[10]

[10] The theme of the wife who knowingly gives up her own autonomy and purpose to support her husband is a problematic one that Glaspell explored with less romanticism and greater ambivalence later in the unpublished play *Chains of Dew* and in her 1931

Yet when Karl dies before Ernestine can even begin working as her husband's eyes (something she has trained for in secret because she wanted to present him with the fact, rather than with a vague hope), she loses her faith in life and its meaning, and feels she has been cruelly fooled from the start. The great man of science died before he could fulfil his mission, and all of her love had not been able to save him. Worst of all, a letter that Karl had written to her shortly before his death is proof that he himself had lost his certainty when he lost his sight, even if he had still held on to his knowledge of Ernestine's love:

> A hodge-podge—this letter. Like my life, starting out one thing, and ending up another, or rather not ending up anything at all—a going to pieces in the midst of my philosophy—a not being sure of anything—a constant "perhaps." […]
>
> I want you. I want you—here—now. […] There's one thing that there's no perhaps about. That's you. There's no perhaps when it comes to our love. There's no perhaps— (356).

Following Dr. Parkman's advice to take a rest from her strenuous work at the laboratory, to spend a few days away from Karl and his troubles before presenting him with her plans, Ernestine had left for a brief stay in the Michigan countryside, and the news of his fatal illness had reached her there. The letter she found after his death showed how much Karl had needed her at his side, and Ernestine is convinced that she is responsible for his death. The healing oneness of the world is no longer a reality for the novel's protagonist, and with a single-minded hatred for life she now chooses complete isolation, having nothing more to offer to humanity but a spiteful mockery of her own earlier beliefs.

Both in the moving portrayal of Karl's state of mind before his death and in Ernestine's bitter disillusionment after she has lost her husband, Glaspell acknowledges that the idea of truth resides only within the human self—and thus, that certainties can easily be shattered. Nevertheless, at the end of this early novel she returns to the idea of a deeper knowledge. The change back to a solid faith in the oneness of the world and her own place in it is brought about for Ernestine through two complementary experiences: an encounter with Dr. Parkman, and a mystic moment of revelation in a storm at the Oregon coast. One year after Karl's death, Dr. Parkman visits Ernestine with the clear aim to make her return to life. Disclosing his own desperate need to believe that

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novel *Ambrose Holt and Family*. While seemingly counter to her more well-known rebellious female protagonists, this is apparently an aspect of women's lives she observed, pondered, and tried to realize in her fiction as well. See my discussion of the play in *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression*, and of the novel in "Social Rebels? Male Characters in Susan Glaspell's Writings," in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, eds. Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 201-222.

someone else still holds on to what he himself has lost long ago, he implores her: “the world needs to know more about love. More than knowledge or science or any other thing, the world needs more faith in love” (351). Dr. Parkman’s words alone do not convince the bereft woman, but in a subsequent scene at the seashore, alone with her thoughts and the wild natural elements, Ernestine experiences a revelation that affirms humanity and denies fatalism:

> All at once it rushed upon her, filling her overwhelmingly. It said that there was a sea mightier than what she called the sea of fate; it told of a sea of human souls over which fate only seemed to prevail. A great rush of truth filled her with this—It was the belief in the omnipotence of fate which was the real delusion of the spirit. … She never knew in after years just what it was happened in that hour. She could not have told it, for it was not a thing for words to compass (363).

If words cannot express what she knows to be true in this key scene, the argument is clearly made in *The Glory of the Conquered* that art can fill in where words must leave off. Ernestine decides to go back to her art, determined to “make things right for Karl” (366) by painting the death-bed moment when he had understood her sacrifice and seen the light of love. Interestingly, as with her youthful chalkboard, Ernestine’s painting continues to exemplify the essential unity of art and science, as she tells Dr. Parkman, “You would not believe what that work in the laboratory has done for me. It has given me a new understanding of colour—new sense of it, new power with eye and hand, a better sense of values” (366-67). That Ernestine has succeeded at the end of the novel is made clear by the world’s reaction to the painting, presented first in Paris and then in Chicago several years later. Both in the international world of art and among Karl’s scientist colleagues, it is understood exactly the way it was intended—as a “work of love” that “perpetuates Karl’s greatness,” showing “light and truth sweeping in upon a human soul” (369-370). In this way, the end of the novel re-establishes a sense of certainty for Ernestine: “She was sure that Karl too knew now that it was having the spirit right which counted. The ‘perhaps’ of his letter was surely answered for him now” (375). With the final pages of the book, this conviction has triumphed in the thoughts of Glaspell’s protagonist, even if the author decides to reopen the matter she has just closed when she puts Ernestine’s final words in the form of a question: “‘dear Karl,’ […] ‘did I indeed bring you the light?’” (376).

Consequently, although *The Glory of the Conquered*, by using an internal perspective throughout most of the novel, demonstrates that both faith and scepticism reside in people’s minds, it is nevertheless a sense of idealism and certainty which is insisted upon in this early Glaspell work. Indeed, there is enough of an authorial voice to provide an external argumentative center for the

ideas I have highlighted here—the notion that both science and art participate in the oneness of the world, with science bent on finding the truth about life and art able to communicate it. Importantly, too, *The Glory of the Conquered* favors the belief in the free will of the individual, and in human beings as free agents. True enough, Susan Glaspell incorporates the naturalist notion of determinism in this novel, as she tends to explain her characters' personalities through their racial heritage and their upbringing, and as she demonstrates how their lives are affected by tragedies outside of their control. But the belief that human beings can influence life nevertheless prevails in the end, and art is shown to play a central role in this process.

Since *The Glory of the Conquered* was Susan Glaspell's first novel, one might be tempted to take this work as the product of the author's "youthful idealism" and naïveté—even if this explanation disregards the fact that Glaspell was in her early thirties when she wrote the novel, certainly past her formative years. Whether we take this stance or not, however, it is worth taking a look at how this author negotiates the question of epistemological uncertainty in the same genre thirty years later. In *Norma Ashe* (1942) and *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (1945) Susan Glaspell puts her ideas about knowledge and truth to the ultimate test of experience and history. And while she admits with her last two novels that at this late point in her career—two World Wars and many personal tragedies and disappointments after *The Glory of the Conquered*—she is not able to ascertain whether there are objective truths any more than she was at the beginning, Glaspell still insists that fighting for one's beliefs is necessary if there is to be hope at all for human progress.

Looking back at the years between 1899 and 1929, in *Norma Ashe* Susan Glaspell explicitly asks what happens to the idealism of youth. At the outset of the story, we meet the title character in 1927, as the widowed Mrs. Utterbach who keeps a run-down boarding-house in a poor part of Iroquois City, Illinois, desperately trying to make a life for herself and her grown son and daughter. Embittered in her daily struggle with leaking roofs and unpaid coal, Mrs. Utterbach defies any belief in God and strives only to keep up a façade of respectability that has long ceased to be convincing.[11]

As we follow the protagonist's mind in her grim daily routine, however, the remnants of a different spiritual life can be glimpsed every now and again, if primarily through the traces of its denial. This other life, hinted at in half-sentences throughout the first pages of the novel, comes crashing in with the unexpected visit of an old friend, a woman Mrs. Utterbach had known when she had gone to college twenty-eight years ago. Together with three other students,

[11] Glaspell, *Norma Ashe*, 16-17. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically.

Norma and Rosie had studied philosophy at a small Midwestern college with a teacher who had treated them as the "chosen ones," disciples who were to carry on his teachings about the oneness of the world and the potential of the human mind. As Mrs. Utterbach, Norma has nothing to offer to the shocked woman who had once been her friend, and who had sought her out after so many years in need of spiritual guidance for her own life. Yet the encounter with Rosie has set something in motion for her. Norma begins to trace back her life in order to find out where it was that she had "begun to deny faith" (65).

As immediately becomes obvious, the belief that their teacher had inspired in Norma, Rosie, and her fellow students at "Pioneer College" at the turn of the nineteenth century was the same Haeckelian notion of oneness which drives Glaspell's first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*. Even more so, it is the progressivist belief in the power of the human mind to change life for the better which plays a central role in *Norma Ashe*—the notion that something like the evolutionary leap from water to land might be repeated. "'Sometimes life—makes a leap,' she said. 'In this new country perhaps . . . Think of it! We may be just on the *brink* of this great forward thrust!'" (102, see also 104-105).[12] Back in 1899, Norma is still convinced that this is not just an abstract notion, but the truth: "It's the idea [life] can't be different that is keeping it from being so," she explains to Max Utterbach, the man who has fallen in love with her. "If a wrong idea has that much power—what couldn't the right idea do?" (105-106).

To Mrs. Utterbach in 1927, however, it is clear that her youthful belief had been no more than a dream: "It had the beauty of the uncorrupted; but, alas, of that which has not been put to the test" (60). When that test came—not through a single tragedy, as had been the case in *The Glory of the Conquered*, but through many different events and influences—the dream was unable to survive, let alone be realized. In a strikingly realist, even naturalist, narrative Glaspell demonstrates in the second part of the book how Norma Ashe's life came to "deviate" from the path she had chosen for herself (235)—stressing, in this

[12] In the introduction to *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women*, Veronica Makowsky identifies the writer's idealist philosophy as a "profoundly American" trait: "Glaspell was an idealist, a believer in truth and beauty, that 'Attic grace' rejected by Pound. In contrast to the cosmopolitan modernists, she was a profoundly American writer in the transcendental tradition of Emerson and Whitman. Like them, she sought self-knowledge or truth in the often 'obscure reveries of the inward gaze,'" 4. Glaspell was indeed "profoundly American" in her idea that if life was ever to make another "leap," it would most likely be in this "new country," the United States of America. In her 1921 play *Inheritors*, however, she movingly considers how America has betrayed this national promise. Yet that Glaspell moved in an *international* context of philosophical and scientific thought with her question of how such notions of truth, beauty, and "oneness" might relate to evolutionary theory has already been pointed out in the connections in her work between Emerson and Goethe, Haeckel and Darwin, etc.

novel, the elements of “*milieu*” and “*moment*” rather than “*race*.”[13] And to make clear that Norma’s is not simply an individual failure, Glaspell carefully intersperses the stories of Professor Langley’s other “disciples” into this narrative. Thus, we learn that Rosie had first come under the influence of an evangelical preacher, then married for money and sadly lost touch with the dream. Virgil, who had been in love with Norma but was rejected for the sake of her future as a teacher, after learning that she had given up her place at the University of Chicago to marry someone else had turned to mock the ideals they had once shared in sarcastic short stories about useless dreamers. Helen had become a social worker, building her life on the conclusion that if one wants to change the world one has to start with the small steps and be content with what one can achieve by teaching women how to keep their babies clean. Worse than this, Austin had turned to using the empty frame of their teacher’s vision, his beautiful words, for political purposes in his factory owner’s fight against the unions. And finally there is Emil, now a union leader and Austin’s adversary, who doggedly fights both Austin’s hypocrisy and Norma’s fruitless desire for an unrealized, lost ideal.

By showing a variety of ways in which the idealism of their youth was either betrayed, led astray, rejected, or domesticated in the lives of these six characters, and by making the failure so human, as Martha C. Carpentier has rightly pointed out, it seems Glaspell does indeed “[expose] idealism as a fraud” in this late novel .[14] In the third part of the book, back in the present of the late 1920s, Norma Ashe gets a chance to reaffirm her old faith when she lashes out at its complete betrayal in one of Austin’s political speeches in front of a student audience at the University of Chicago. Only days before this scene, feeling old and defeated, she had rejected the motto she found inscribed over one of the university buildings as an empty phrase belied by her own life (“Ye Shall know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free,” 221-22). Suddenly, however, as she jumps out of her seat in order to oppose Austin’s hypocrisy, she is able to see her teacher’s vision once again as a reality that prevails, even if individuals fail to bring it forth:

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[13] Compare the interpretations of Waterman (108-111) and Carpentier (*The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, 157-177) for a discussion of Glaspell’s argument in its historical and national context: the change from the hopeful Progressive Era to the Depression years and the beginning of World War II.

[14] Carpentier, *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, 158. She goes on to point out, “Both [Norma and Rosie] abdicate responsibility for their choices […]. However, it is important to realize that Glaspell is not portraying a simplistic moral universe here. As becomes clear later in the novel, the ideals Norma and Rosie aspired to are impossible to maintain in life, which is an unpredictable and powerful force,” 161.

> "It was there then and it is there now! Why don't you tell these young people the *truth*? Tell them the truth and the truth will make them free!" […] "Yes!" she said to the students. "We did have a great teacher. Something parted—and we saw the truth. We were not worthy. That doesn't mean the truth was not there! Oh—*find* it. Find it for yourselves and *do* something with it! Make the better world Austin Wurthen and I were too poor to make!" (233).

But this late recovery of her certainty is shattered once more when Emil Jensen, the outsider in the old group of students at Pioneer College, destroys the idealized image she still has of their teacher. Bent on his own version of reality in which capitalists like Austin Wurthen exploit the working class poor and the impractical, wide-eyed idealism of dreamers like Norma only "[stand] in the way" of "a decent world" (303), Emil vengefully tells her what only he knows: that Professor Langley had been dying of a brain tumor when he described to his students the power of the human mind, and that he had killed himself to avoid the painful final stages of his illness. Finding that even her teacher fell so far short of his ideals and betrayed his students, Norma gives up her struggle. No matter how much Emil Jensen will later regret this (see 308, 327), he has managed to convince Norma Ashe that right from the start she had believed not in the truth, but in a lie. And it seems that from this changed image of her teacher (who had been presented as a Christ-like figure throughout the novel) she will not be able to recover.

But again, the narrative does not end here. Glaspell never rests satisfied with easy endings, whether tragic or happy. Instead, in another, final twist Glaspell implies that Norma recaptures—or almost recaptures?—her faith during her final hour. Even after her dream of a higher truth behind the individual's experience of being "chained" (160) by life had been shattered, there was one emotional certainty left her: she did not have the heart to destroy the dream for the next generation, represented in the last part of the novel by a student, Scott Neubolt. Scott had befriended Norma and taken her in after witnessing her outburst at Austin's speech. Yet after "Emil Jensen struck the death blow at Norma Ashe" (328), she could not continue the hopeful exchanges about the future of the world which she had begun with this bright young man. Instead, "she went [back to Iroquois City] in order to get away from Scott. One thing she did still know: she couldn't let Scott know that none of it had ever been true at all. […] [There] was something she knew with certainty. From deep in her, through stunned layers, it struggled up to warn her: she mustn't let Scott know" (330, 331).

Even in this moment of complete disillusionment, Glaspell still endows her protagonist with the instinct of protecting the ideal for the next generation. It is only fitting, therefore, that at the very end of her life Norma Ashe should come through once more to a sense of trust, even if ultimate certainty is delayed right

through the last lines of the novel. In the final scene, Glaspell shows her title character poised in expectation of a final revelation—only to return to an external perspective which brings home once and for all that there are no facts to be had other than the sense we ourselves decide to make of life:

> In a moment now—one moment now—veils would part and . . . Her lips moved. One time more her lips formed works. "This time I will see *all the way*."
> There was a thought which moved after her lips could not. I am waiting, her thought said. One moment now. . . . One moment more. . . .
> Her head went down, in among recorded thoughts, tracings of the hope and vision and courage of youth. . . . And it was not herself, after an hour, raised her head from the place where it had come to rest.

In *Norma Ashe*, then, Susan Glaspell acknowledges the Nietzschean claim that there are "no facts, only interpretations"—but she argues effectively that this is no reason to give up the search for meaning. Choosing a variety of internal perspectives that stress the subjectivity of knowledge, as does any modernist work, she grants that the belief in a transcendental truth beyond surface reality might be an illusion, as might be the notion of the human potential for progress. But then again, it might not be, and what Glaspell argues in the middle of World War II is that there is no alternative to trying. Indeed, as Linda Ben-Zvi states, "[it] may seem as if Norma's surname Ashe points to destruction; however, from the ruins of her life, Norma continually rises, phoenix-like."[15]

As has been pointed out in several readings of *Norma Ashe*, "World War II [is] the unstated backdrop of [this] novel"[16]—the second instance of a global mass killing in Glaspell's lifetime that might well induce one to ask what happens to the idealism of youth. In her next and last novel, Glaspell makes explicit the importance of this historic moment. *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (1945) directly meets the challenge which the Second World War poses to the idealist beliefs discussed in all of Susan Glaspell's writings. Once more in her *oeuvre* she turns to a direct discussion of the relation between art and reality in this context. Once again, too, Glaspell allows ample space for all uncertainties and fears that might characterize modern experience, but in the end insists on her lifelong belief in striving for the ideal, however uncertain, and on the social significance of art. Of course, as has been the case in the reception of both *The Glory of the Conquered* and of *Norma Ashe,* one might see this insistence on the world's need for meaning as a failure on Glaspell's part, a disappointing slippage into conventional popular writing. On the other hand, one might also

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[15] Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 379.
[16] *Ibid*.

look at this incorrigibly hopeful thrust in *Judd Rankin's Daughter* as a courageous philosophical and aesthetic statement towards the end of World War II.

The beginning of the novel finds Frances, the title character, in a hotel room in New York City. The time is 1944, and Frances, who lives with her husband Len, a critic, in Provincetown, is holding vigil at the deathbed of "Cousin Adah," a distant second cousin of her father's. In her youth, Adah Logan had been "the bright smile in the Bible Belt; the gay little tender laugh which somehow extended itself, making lives of farmers seem less drab, and certainly making captains of industry sit up and glow. She was the Middle West's favorite secret."[17] "It's all wrong," Glaspell begins this novel. Having known Cousin Adah in her prime, Frances rejects the place where her life comes to an end: "A luxury hotel […] would have been in the pattern of her life; a dump would be the unpredictable in Cousin Adah, but this middle ground—the commonplace—this run-of-the-mill was out—or should have been" (7).

The atmosphere of the book's opening scene is thus one of decline, death, and profound uncertainty—of a world out of tune with itself. In fact, as Frances reflects about the world that Cousin Adah represented and about the world she leaves behind, we learn that much more is wrong with the present state of affairs than the place this Midwestern woman inexplicably chose in which to die. With her buoyant, luxurious life and her abundant, heartfelt warmth, Adah had added much to the "fertile soil, great industries—and of course God, who certainly made his headquarters in the Midwest" (11). But now this old world of certainties is no more, destroyed by the "horrid sound of a hundred smashing banks" and "a […] populous and rough-shod society [that] had smashed right on top of it" (16, 15.) As Frances wistfully ponders: "Here was a past dying; a past which, in its bright moment of present, had seemed so secure" (15). Today, with another World War raging and her son Judson serving in the Pacific, at least for Frances this feeling of security no longer exists. Perhaps other people were still as certain about their ideas as they had ever been, espousing either a Midwestern isolationism or a liberal, East-coast belief in cosmopolitanism and intervention, or perhaps adopting a fatalism that was itself "out of step with the times because the times were stepping lively, searching like mad for what was wrong and madly shaking each suspected thing" (22). But in Frances's view a "belief should be—nascent, more true this moment than ever before, because of this moment of newly discovered truth" (14)—and none of the opinions voiced around her seem to qualify in this regard:

[17] Susan Glaspell, *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1945), 9. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically.

> And now she lived in a world of so many ideas it was hard to get a moment to consider her belief. The country seemed to be floating in ideas which didn't chrystallize into a belief. People said they believed in America. But which America? […] Which were the right nebulous elements, if this made sense, to breathe upon and sweat for and bring into life? In these recent years the East said one thing and the Middle West another. She had always thought out there was more American than here, but now it seemed wrong and she loved it and didn't want it wrong (15).

Glaspell thus incorporates into *Judd Rankin's Daughter* many of the themes that have occupied her throughout her career. Examining thoroughly the contrast between the "East" and the "Middle West" of the United States, she discusses pressing political issues of national importance—and she does so in the context of the larger question of what "America" should be. At the same time, once more Glaspell's question of whether there is any certainty to be had for the individual transcends this specifically national context. As Mary E. Papke has summed up the main thrust of *Judd Rankin's Daughter*: "Glaspell's final novel recapitulates the central theme in her fiction and drama: the absolute need of the individual to search continually for truth and to honor the life-force."[18]

This question of whether it is possible to find the "truth" about life and pass it on to others—the same question that had guided Glaspell's previous novel, *Norma Ashe*—is explicitly introduced in *Judd Rankin's Daughter,* not only in Frances's expository musings, but in the very story of Adah Logan's passing away in a New York hotel room. Frances answers a knock on the hotel room door to find a young man in uniform who expectantly asks to see Mrs. Logan (25). He is a young soldier—a neighbor's son from back home, about to sail for war—whom Cousin Adah had told to meet her, because there was something she wanted to tell him. Naturally he had not expected to find her dying and, afraid and insecure, he is saddened that he will not be able to learn from her the words he so longed to know. "I'm here now. Gerald. I came—see?" he tries to reach the unconscious old woman, "You said I was to come. *You* came—remember? You were going to tell me something. About—*you* know. You were—going to help me" (29). But it is too late. Adah cannot leave her last "word of wisdom" with Gerald (29), and the living are left to wonder what it was she had travelled all the way to New York to tell him. It seems the task is left to Frances—of all people, as she herself thinks, someone who has "never organized her mind" and who would certainly make a "mistake" if she were to try and leave a bequest to those who came after her (33, 39). Frances is irritated as much at herself and her own helplessness as she is at Gerald, this likeable

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[18] Mary E. Papke, *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 110.

young man who might very well die in the war and who believed with such warm trust that Adah Logan was going to give him something that would help. Still, she does not want to send the boy away empty-handed. The first part of the book, then, ends with this advice from Frances to Gerald, the only advice she is able to give: "Find it out for yourself, my dear. You will have to. We all have to" (43).

Whether these words can really help a young soldier, or whether they must not rather be a source of frustration, even despair, is left unanswered at this point of the novel. With the second part Glaspell moves to the Midwest and to Frances's father, Judd Rankin, and the book thus turns to get at "the truth" via a different, if related route. Like Cousin Adah, the character of Judd Rankin, aged seventy-six, embodies the Middle West, although (again like Adah) he is an unusual person. A "hell-raiser of good will" (46), he is also known as a "gentleman-farmer," implying that Judd Rankin, who does not only farm, but is also a writer and an editor, is not exactly like everyone else "out here" (44). But everybody knows "he'd sit up with somebody else's sick horse," and it had been Judd Rankin who scared away the banker who came to foreclose the mortgage on a neighbor's farm that had been struck by drought and depression years (44). In this way, Glaspell makes clear from the start that Frances's father is of the Midwest through and through, a native son of this country that is so sure that God "made his headquarters" there (11). And in these times of war, even if you only have "a sort of left-handed and humorous acceptance of God," as Judd says of himself (74), the certainty of the Midwest translates readily into his position of political isolationism. After all, "[was] the Mississippi opened up to save Poland?" (83).

Yet from the beginning Judd Rankin is also presented as a more deep and ambivalent character than his identification with such a narrow-minded point of view would imply. He had asked this question about Poland and the Mississippi in his paper *Out Here*, a publication he had proudly set up to celebrate the earthiness and pioneer spirit of his home region and to defy the arrogant stance of the country's intellectual elite that "culture" was to be found only in the East. Yet Judd had discontinued *Out Here* when, entirely in spite of himself, he found that he had to answer "yes " to the question he had meant only as a rhetorical one: "It knocked him for a loop. He had never distrusted his position; he had never written one word he didn't believe. When you get Yes where you're looking for No—if you're an honest man, you pause" (83). Both Cousin Adah and Judd Rankin are thus drawn in a very positive light in this novel, as truth-seekers.

As someone "bent on finding out the truth about things" (58), Judd Rankin is also introduced as the novel's central artist figure. In his paper *Out Here*, he had tried to give his honest view on life—about the Midwest and its place in the

world, and when Frances had been about fifteen years old, he had begun to do so by way of "The Jenkses," a fictitious pioneer family who symbolized all that the Middle West was to Judd Rankin: "Through the Swamp-Neck Jenkses […] he seemed to get a line on all the things that had happened in this part and parcel of the globe" (54).[19] But just as he had stopped his paper two years ago when he found himself answering "Yes" to a question for which he had expected a sure "No," now that he sits down to create a book from his stories about the Jenkses, "this pile of yellow paper before him" (58) does not seem to contain the whole truth. Too much has been left out, as his daughter and her husband, Len, also think when they read the finished book, back East in their home in Provincetown. Indeed, in the third part of her novel Glaspell makes much of the process in which "Judd Rankin's daughter," although she at first resents her husband's criticism of her father's book, comes to share his disappointment that Judd has "put [a fence] around the Middle West" (115). "[He] doesn't see it as part of the whole," Len had regretfully stated, echoing that search for "oneness" that had characterized Ernestine and Karl's lives in Glaspell's first novel so many years ago, and Frances arrives at the same conclusion in her own musings: "It was as if her father resented the rest of the world; he would make the rest of the world less in order to prove out there the best" (161).

Not the least reason for Frances to be disappointed in what she perceives as the book's failure is that she had hoped it might "say something" to her son Judson, who has come home from the war utterly changed and inaccessible, something in its presentation of an honest life that could "reach him," even "bring him back" (113). But Judson is not interested in his parents' books any longer. He especially rejects his father Len, the liberal critic who has made "ideas" his "business" and who now attempts to keep up a façade of life as usual by talking about his work (199, 41). Judson will not be brought back by "ideas" because ideas are at the very core of why he has returned from the war sick to the soul. Thus, in the story of the psychological and spiritual wounds that Judd Rankin's grandson received in the war, Glaspell once more puts to the test, not only the idealist belief that life can be changed for the better, but also the related notion that this change can be brought about if only one keeps looking for a higher "truth" behind the reality of human experience. Surely, it is profoundly threatening to a philosophy that celebrates the quest for knowledge when Glaspell portrays Frances wondering whether it was not this very insistence on the value of questioning that had left Judson unprotected. "Is it us? […] This—looking for things, scrupulousness about the truth, had it been at the cost of security?" (106,108).

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[19] Possibly an allusion to William Faulkner's "Snopeses," which would emphasize Glaspell's characterization of Judd Rankin as an artist.

Only towards the end of the novel does Glaspell reveal what happened to Judson to make him reject so violently his parents' ideals. Of course, the contempt he now has for his father is related to the fundamental question any young person might pose to the parental generation at such a time: why had they been unable to prevent such brutal, world-scale horror as that brought into the world by World War II? In the conflict between Judson and Len, however, Glaspell also examines the more concrete issue of the artist's position in relation to a reality that is ruled by meaningless, man-made destruction. For what has cracked up Judson is not the experience of seeing comrades blown to pieces, as horrific as this had been. As we learn from a letter he eventually writes to his mother, Judson was given the final blow by the particular way a certain young soldier had met his death. This boy, Red, had been more afraid than the others in the daily business of killing. To fight off his fears he had taken to reciting poetry to himself, and Judson, because he wanted to help his friend, had at times joined in with the boy's recitations—until one day Red was "shot through the face" in the middle of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality Ode." After Red's death, thus Judson explains, "there was just me. And the Ode" (239).

Could a writer demonstrate the inconsequential nature of art, and of imagined transcendence, in a world of meaningless violence any more effectively than with such a scene? But it is clear nevertheless that Glaspell's sympathy remains with the seekers. In the very lines of Wordsworth's ode that Red had begun reciting when he was stopped short by death, the speaker admits that the "vision splendid," so clear in one's youth, disappears in the process of growing up: "At length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day."[20] However, Wordsworth's persona goes on to give thanks "for those obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things, / Fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realised . . .," for "truths that wake / To perish never."[21] The Romantic affirmation of this poem no doubt inspired Glaspell's own "words of wisdom" to her contemporary audience in *Judd Rankin's Daughter*: that one should never settle for ready answers, but that one can still find a feeling of security and comfort in the quest itself. True enough, Cousin Adah did not even tell Gerald what she had to say. Yet where Frances continues stubbornly to want to get at Adah's secret, Gerald (now dead in France) had been content in Adah's trying: "[If] you know a thing is there," he had said to Frances, "you don't have to bother much whether you have it or not" (144). And Frances's father, on being told about Adah Logan's final hours, admiringly concludes: "Why, what a

[20] William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 4, eds. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 279-85.
[21] *Ibid*.

lovely way to die. Trying—die of trying" (210). In the end, although Judd Rankin had not written all of himself nor of the world's fundamental connectedness into his book on the Jenkses, for Judson he writes words that "sing" (251). Taking another look at life with this new piece of writing, he brings back his grandson's faith in the value of human endeavour on the basis of their shared experience of grief and struggle: "Grandfather […] is all burned up too, but he *does* something about it. And that was—oh, I don't know exactly—that was doing something for me too. And now maybe I know how by myself" (251-52).

Once more in Glaspell's *oeuvre*, then, she suggests in *Judd Rankin's Daughter* that there is something like "true art," a way of looking at things that human beings cannot do without, as it can help society in the struggle for progress. At the same time, right up to the last lines of the novel she also continues to admit to the dark side of the modern experience, and thus allows for the possibility that words might ultimately be incompetent to answer fundamental epistemological uncertainty. For Glaspell does not end with the happy family reunion on New Year's Eve of 1944, no matter how much Frances would like to stop time: "*Right this moment*, she thought; remember it always as it is this moment—so lovely here in our house tonight: the fire, candles, … Len and her father, Judson *back*, and more than he had ever been before" (252). Into this perfect moment the reality of war once more crashes when the neighbor's son comes running for Frances's help, crying, "Ma—She got one of those telegrams. […] They—got Joe" (253). With this, Glaspell demonstrates to the end that the sense of certainty and truth the individual so urgently needs to grasp (and that art can supposedly render) might be an illusion, even a fraud. And still, in ending *Judd Rankin's Daughter* as Frances quietly closes the door on Judson's and Len's reunion over her father's writing, Glaspell assigns ultimate importance again to that instinct to protect those who go on trying, and to do so through art (254).

At the beginning of her career as much as at the end, Glaspell dealt with her contemporaries' reactions to the modern experience of uncertainty and chaos. While acknowledging the naturalists' and materialists' conviction that life is determined by factors outside the individual's control, she never thoroughly consigned humanity to hopeless fatalism, and while experimenting with the modernist presentation of reality as fragmented and confused, she ultimately rejected a modernist art that was too obscure to connect with "the people." As Glaspell participated in the ongoing search for adequate aesthetic reactions to the modern experience of truth as subjective and relative, she always reaffirmed that the quest for meaning is a fundamental human drive and the prerequisite for any kind of change. It is the responsibility of art, she concluded in the 1940s, as she had done when she first began writing, to insist on this quest for knowledge,

truth and understanding against all odds—particularly at a time of world crisis, when such an effort might seem most cynical or naïve.

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