

Suppressed Voices: Women and Class in the Fiction of Susan Glaspell

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Abstract

This thesis aims to revive Susan Glaspell's name and reputation as an important fiction writer. For some time now Glaspell's name has been somewhat displaced from the American literary canon and her fiction all but forgotten. Indeed, it is for her dramatic output that Glaspell is remembered; if she is remembered at all. I shall examine Glaspell's fiction in relation to her life to show how she uses real life instances and contemporary social events to reflect on the socio-cultural status of women. My thesis will examine Glaspell's fictional oeuvre by looking at some of the thematic issues concerning women's subject matters which dominate Glaspell's short stories and novels. The various chapters of this thesis are organised around the social issues, salient problems pertinent to the beginning to mid-twentieth century period, which Glaspell addresses. The issues I explore concern class, gender and identity. Class distinctions and discrimination are topics which Glaspell addresses due to her own complex relations with class and her own experiences in coming from a 'downwardly mobile' family. I will also examine Glaspell's presentation of the complex relationship between class and women's perception of themselves in society, specifically the early twentieth-century Midwestern society which Glaspell utilises throughout her writing. Finally, I will discuss Glaspell's utilization of silence in the form of absent characters and as a medium of expression. My argument is that Glaspell deploys silence as a sign of power. This idea refutes the notion that women's silence (in different forms) is synonymous with women's cultural absence. Exploring Glaspell's fiction oeuvre, this thesis hopes to reinvigorate Glaspell's scholarly reputation and name as a culturally relevant, early twentieth century American novelist and short story writer.

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Suppressed Voices: Women and Class in the Fiction of Susan Glaspell

Introduction

‘One is not a writer for having to say certain things but for having chosen to say them in a certain way’.
~ Sartre, *Qu’est ce que la littérature?* (1948)

Susan Glaspell’s name as a literary artist in any work of criticism is nearly always linked with assertions of her devaluation, neglect and marginalization. The perplexity which lies beneath such claims drive Glaspellian critics not only to go beyond examining the quality and content of Glaspell’s works to explore her place in the American literary canon, but also to illuminate Glaspell’s socio-cultural and political position within the milieu in which she produced her works. To many general literary scholars, Glaspell’s name conjures the names of just a few works: *Trifles* (1916), a one-act play focusing on gender differences, its short story adaptation ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ (1917) and *Alison’s House* (1930), a Pulitzer winning play based on the life of the poet Emily Dickinson.¹ And to some Glaspellian critics such as Arthur Waterman and C.W.E. Bigsby, Glaspell’s works are considered ‘shallow and ephemeral’.² Not only do they undervalue Glaspell’s works, they also regard Glaspell as a minor dramatist whose name flourished only as a result of her involvement with the experimental Provincetown Players Theatre and her association with Eugene O’Neill.³

¹ According to some Glaspellian critics such as Marcia Noe and Arthur Waterman, Glaspell uses fictional names in *Alison’s House* (1931) since the Dickinson estate refused to grant her permission to use Dickinson’s real life events and poems in the play. See Marcia Noe, ‘Horizons Expand’, in *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland* (Illinois: Western Illinois University, 1983), pp. 47-64 (p. 59); Arthur Waterman, ‘Dramatic Achievements’, in *Susan Glaspell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 66-91 (pp. 86-7). However, Glaspell’s biographers Barbara Ozieblo and Linda Ben-Zvi reject these speculations by claiming that there is no evidence of the Dickinson family rejecting Glaspell’s use of the events of Dickinson’s life in the play. They state that Glaspell intended to use fictional elements as to give complete merit to the play rather than having it labelled as a mere biographical account of the poet’s life. See Barbara Ozieblo, ‘Betrayal of Trust’, in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 227-47 (p. 239); Linda Ben-Zvi, ‘Alison’s House’, in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 331-45 (pp. 334-5).

² Waterman, ‘From Reporter to Local Colorist’, in *Susan Glaspell*, pp. 17-31 (pp. 23-4). Also see C. W. E. Bigsby, ‘Introduction’, in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, ed. by C. W. E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1-31.

³ Glaspell’s reputation as a dramatist has always been second to Eugene O’Neill who is commonly considered the ‘father’ of American Drama. It was Glaspell who discovered O’Neill in Provincetown and encouraged him to be a member of the Provincetown Players Theatre. However, Glaspell’s name was side-lined. According to

However, for other Glaspellian critics such as Martha C. Carpentier, Marcia Noe, Barbara Ozieblo and Linda Ben-Zvi, *Trifles* and ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ are only partially representative of who Susan Glaspell was and still is especially when considering her extensive oeuvre: fourteen plays, nine novels and over fifty short stories. Given such literary accomplishments, it is unfortunate that seven of Glaspell’s novels and more than half of her short stories are *not* in print and do *not* seem to be considered valuable pieces of literature worth teaching in academic classrooms. Indeed, almost her entire fictional corpus has been completely ignored.

Such has not always been the case. As Carpentier notes, ‘[Glaspell] was critically accepted as an American novelist of integrity and importance until the mid 1930s. Many of her novels were reviewed, increasingly favourably, in the *New York Times*’.⁴ Her short stories, too, were widely acknowledged during her life situating her name amongst the highest ranks of the most distinguished writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane, Willa Cather, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce. Kristina Hinz-Bode affirms that, ‘It is true that Susan Glaspell is still known first and foremost for her connection to the Provincetown Players [...] but Glaspell (1876-1948) was a successful author of fiction before she began writing for the theatre’.⁵ Glaspell embarked on her writing journey from composing articles in magazines and newspapers as a journalist to producing short stories and novels. It was not until 1915, submitting to the incessant demands and influence of her husband George Cram Cook, that Glaspell moved away from narrative story writing and began composing plays for

Ozieblo, ‘The history of American drama has tended to relegate Susan Glaspell, when it deigned to acknowledge her at all, to the status of wife of George Cram Cook, founder of Provincetown Players, the amateur theatrical group that discovered Eugene O’Neil’. Ozieblo, ‘Introduction’, in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 1-5 (p. 1).

⁴ Carpentier provides an account of the reviews done on Glaspell’s fiction in Martha C. Carpentier, ‘The Deracinated Self: Immigrants, Orphans, and the Migratory Consciousness of Willa Cather and Susan Glaspell’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 35 (2007), 131-58 (p. 135); Martha C. Carpentier, ‘Susan Glaspell’s Fiction: Fidelity as American Romance’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 40 (1994), 92-113 (p. 93).

⁵ Kristina Hinz-Bode, ‘Introduction’, in *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression: Language and Isolation in the Plays* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2006), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

the Provincetown Players Theater.⁶ In her interaction with the players, Glaspell became greatly influenced by the philosophies of the Provincetown Players dramatists and intellectuals and this is clearly shown in her fictional depiction of the everyday realities of women's lives.⁷ In addition, the methods she deploys in her drama are similar to those she uses in fiction with the only difference being the mode of deliverance. Four years after Cook's death in 1924, Glaspell returned to writing fiction, producing six novels before her death in 1948.⁸

In an interview with Alice Rohe in 1921, Glaspell affirms that her stories are based on real-life incidents which she collected throughout her writing career as a reporter and journalist in the *The Weekly Outlook* and *Des Moines Daily News*. Also, in a sketch she wrote about herself for *Twentieth Century Authors* (1942), Glaspell recalled her years as a journalist covering the Iowa State Legislature, 'There I was always running into things I saw as short stories, and after less than two years of newspaper reporting I boldly gave up my job and went home to Davenport to give all my time to my own writing'.⁹ With a focus on bettering the socio-cultural and economic position of women through her writing, specifically Midwestern women not unlike herself, Glaspell developed a narrative style of her own by shaping most of her stories out of women's needs and by using events drawn from reality.

For example, between December 1900 and April 1901 Glaspell reported on the Hossack case

⁶ Because of her dramatic successes, Glaspell was given the position of the director of the Midwest Play Bureau of the Federal Theater Project in 1936 in Chicago.

⁷ An integral idea that dominates the Provincetown Players was their 'expression of life' and how they translated that into their works. Gerhard Bach summarizes the philosophies of the Provincetown Players into five main contributing aspects: '(1) The new drama is an expression of life, or, more precisely, an expression of the dualistic nature of man striving for unity. This aspect is strongly conditioned by Nietzsche's concept of the dichotomy of the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" element in artistic expression; (2) The new drama can be only created by and expressed within a group of individuals with a unique cause; (3) It is a shared effort of creative expression by all contributing arts – a unified artistic expression; (4) It has a strongly developed sense of its historical ties and conditions as well as its traditional values; (5) It has a definite sense of social responsibility'. Gerhard Bach, 'Susan Glaspell - Provincetown Players', *The Great Lakes Review: A Journal of Midwestern Culture*, 4.2 (1978), 31-43 (p. 33).

⁸ Even though Glaspell stopped writing novels between the years between 1915 and 1928, devoting herself entirely writing and producing plays, she continued to write and publish her short stories in magazines and newspapers.

⁹ Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 541.

in the *Des Moines Daily News* and in 1916, Glaspell used the case as the story-line for her play *Trifles* and then for the short story 'A Jury of Her Peers'. Also in the same year, Glaspell co-wrote *Suppressed Desires* (1915) with her husband George Cram Cook to critique the new Freudian phenomenon which greatly affected America and which was much publicised and discussed in the American presses.¹⁰ In *The Road to the Temple* (1927), Glaspell comments on people's madness with the new psychoanalytical craze, 'Those were the early years of psychoanalysis in the Village. You could not go out to buy a bun without hearing of someone's complex. We thought it would be amusing in a play, so we had a good time writing "Suppressed Desires"'.¹¹ Glaspell's personal experiences and those of women living around her provided trustworthy and invaluable resources in her fictional depictions of realistic problems and her formulation of plausible solutions.

In the same interview with Rohe, Glaspell talks about her interest and active role in progressive movements, 'Of course I am interested in all progressive movements, whether feminist, social, or economic, but I can take no very active part other than through my writing'.¹² Writing in an era of intense political and social activity, Glaspell, a progressive writer, targeted her writings at all women even the poor and uneducated who might have been left behind by early progressive feminist groups or not a part of the feminist movement. Examining her works one cannot but notice Glaspell's consistent portrayal of women's issues, which leads me to think about her refusal to be labelled a feminist. Glaspell's stepdaughter, Nilla Cook, has described the writer as 'anything but a feminist', which is

¹⁰ In 1909, Freud and Jung visited the United States. Many artists were influenced by their ideas and somehow the topic of psychoanalysis was popularised in lengthy newspaper and magazine articles. Amongst the avant-garde writers who were interested in Freud and Jung are Glaspell and Cook's close acquaintances Floyd Dell, Mabel Dodge and Max Eastman. The topic of psychoanalysis became exhausted and in 1915, Glaspell co-wrote *Suppressed Desires* (1915) with her husband Cook to parody the overused topic. See Catherine Morley, 'Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell and The Provincetown Players', in *Modern American Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.270-84 (p. 277).

¹¹ Susan Glaspell, 'The Old Wharf', in *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), pp. 247-59 (p. 250).

¹² Alice Rohe, 'The Story of Susan Glaspell', *New York Morning Telegraph*, 18 December 1921, p. 4.

curious given Glaspell's acknowledged interest in feminist movements.¹³ It is worth considering Glaspell's refutation of the label. Clearly, Glaspell was interested in dealing with quite abstract themes, encompassing metaphysical questions, psychological issues, as well as social problems which deal directly with women and society. Her stories self-evidently contain feminist messages which show the author's support of women's rights. I believe that Glaspell was distrustful of the feminist label for precisely the reason that critics have undervalued her work. It aligned her with 'women's writing', writing which might be perceived as having no relevance beyond topical issues of the day. It is therefore ironic that the likes of Waterman have dismissed her fiction on these grounds. It is also worth noting that Glaspell worked in a predominantly male environment, alongside Cook, Dell and O'Neill. Although this is conjecture on my part, it is likely that conversation was directed more towards socialism, Darwinism and Nietzschean philosophy than feminist issues. All of them touch upon these topics in their letters and writings (although Dell did write directly about women's issues).¹⁴ This intensely competitive and macho environment perhaps inhibited Glaspell in fully embracing the feminist label.

According to Noe, Glaspell's remark on progressive movements 'suggests detachment, or even a polite lack of interest in the specific concerns of the women's movement: suffrage, equal employment opportunities, and discriminatory state laws'.¹⁵ Noe and Holly Hill also claim that 'while often sympathetic with and involved in Progressive and Socialist causes, [Glaspell] never became the activist some scholars argue she was.'¹⁶ Certainly, her writing is 'involved in causes as censorship, women's rights and free speech; while sincerely supportive of liberal movements, she never evidenced the sustained,

¹³ See Letter from Nilla Cook, Mönich Kirchen, Austria, 10 February 1976.

¹⁴ For example, see Floyd Dell, *Women as World Builders* (Chicago: Forbes and Company, 1913).

¹⁵ See Noe, 'Provincetown Years', in *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland*, pp. 29-46 (p. 44).

¹⁶ Marcia Noe and Holly Hill, 'Susan Glaspell's "Plea" for Juvenile Justice', in *Text, Kontext Und Fremdsprach Un Terricht: Festschrift Für Gerhard Bach*, ed. by Dagmar Abendroth and others (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 63-75 (p. 74).

committed, and focused dedication to a cause that is characteristic of true activism. Her political interests were wide-ranging and she did remain a ‘passionate leftist up to her final years’, however she was primarily a ‘writer sympathetic to liberal causes rather than an activist who employed her writing as a means of political ends.’¹⁷ Contrary to Noe and Hill, I argue that Glaspell’s writings are a powerful and direct form of activism, specifically feminist activism, believing that the fleshing out of feminist issues in the development of her characters would bring an immediacy and empathy to the matters concerned. Glaspell wrote at a time of rapid change in American society. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed progressive movements which challenged and replaced the Victorian, traditionalist ideas which dominated the world Glaspell was born into. Her works explore the intersections and implications of social, political, cultural and personal realities and provide suggestions regarding the liberation of women from injustices and gender inequalities. Thus, and I do note the irony in this, even though she did write for betterment of women, she avoided the feminist label to ensure that her voice would be heard and to be regarded as an equal amongst all literary artists.

Glaspell’s fiction is steeped in the rigid conventions of the Midwestern society in which she grew up. In an article for *The Weekly Outlook* in 1897, Glaspell expresses her views on the restrictions placed on women, ‘Goodness knows we [women] are cumbered and made uncomfortable enough by conventionality’.¹⁸ Glaspell, a Davenport native, understood women’s position in the small town environments of the Midwest and knew from her personal experience that the cost of venturing on a professional career casts aside women as outsiders and inferiors. The feelings of displacement Glaspell felt, the inferior position she was trapped in resulted from her insistence on being different. She pursued a path that was not considered suitable for women, a path far away from the designated role expected of her.

¹⁷ Noe, ‘Introduction’, in *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland*, pp. 9-11 (p. 9).

¹⁸ Susan Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 13 March 1897. p. 7.

As Ozieblo underpins, ‘Glaspell believed in the right of the individual to full self-development, but she recognized the conflict inherent in this right; ... she had learned the cost of opposing convention’.¹⁹ Determined not to submit to convention, Glaspell set out to prove herself in the literary field through the use of her intellect.

Glaspell’s rejection of conventionality enabled her to subtly criticize the Midwestern society she inhabited. In her newspaper columns, she used irony to express her disapproval of the superficiality of the Midwestern American society. As Linda Ben-Zvi states, ‘One of the unique and consistent qualities of Susan Glaspell’s writing is her uncanny ability to present serious critiques of society in such a way that audiences and readers are often unaware that they are being exposed to new ideas and positions’.²⁰ Writing, her method of protest, became her form of resistance to the conventions which stifled women and imprisoned them in confined social and gendered roles.

By blending the political issues with the personal stories of women’s lives, Glaspell ensured that her radical ideas were adaptable to any woman of any background (class, education and profession) and would transcend her immediate temporal environment. These radical ideas act out as moral lessons enabling the ideas of social reform.²¹ As Colette Lindroth, a critic of Glaspell’s fiction explains, ‘Using the techniques of indirection – irony, understatement, metaphor, the juxtaposition of opposites, and especially the weapon of humor – Glaspell makes her points subtly but unmistakably’.²² For example, Glaspell voices her own convictions on social themes such as the fate of women in marriage and divorce in *Fidelity* (1915) and *Fugitive’s Return* (1929); cultural issues such as women’s right to

¹⁹ Ozieblo, ‘Her Husband’s Keeper’, in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 123-47 (p. 138).

²⁰ Linda Ben-Zvi, ‘The Political as Personal on the Writing of Susan Glaspell’, in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, ed. by Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 275-94 (p. 275).

²¹ Ben-Zvi confirms that in most of her works, Glaspell attempts at blending the political with the personal. In addition, because of the subtlety of her method ‘even today some contemporary critics fail to acknowledge Glaspell’s political bent or her attempts to infuse her writing with social, cultural, and political critiques’. Ibid.

²² Colette Lindroth, ‘America Unmasked: Cultural Commentary in Susan Glaspell’s Short Fiction’, in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 257-73 (p. 259).

education and freedom in *The Visioning* (1911) and ‘Unveiling Brenda’ (1916); and political themes such as the juvenile system justice and socialist convictions in ‘The Plea’ (1903) and ‘The Man of Flesh and Blood’ (1904).

Depending deeply on realism and regionalism, Glaspell’s method of portraying her feminist messages varies from one work of fiction to another. In *The Glory of the Conquered; A Story of Great Love* (1909), Glaspell uses the guise of the sentimental novel to tackle themes of love and sacrifice through her female protagonist Ernestine; in *The Visioning* she challenges more complex issues such as class and power control in female characters using the ‘inversion technique’; in *Fidelity*, by blending fact and fiction, she boldly reflects her own life through that of her Midwestern protagonist Ruth Holland, revealing her defiance.²³ In *Brook Evans* (1928) she analyses the causes for the emergence of the ‘New Woman’ by examining mother/daughter relationships across three generations; and in *Fugitive’s Return*, she uses Greek mythology to reveal the power of women’s silence and voice in shaping their own lives.²⁴

The question of why Susan Glaspell’s reputation as a writer of prose fiction is sidelined within the American literary canon is baffling. Mary K. Papke observes the absence of Glaspell’s fiction from the canon:

Even more overlooked is [Glaspell’s] fiction, for which she was renowned during her lifetime both in the U.S. and abroad. Dismissed by literary criticism until very recently as sentimental, as merely local color fiction and therefore extremely passé, as

²³ In ‘Some Notes on Defining a “Feminist Literary Criticism”’ (1975), Annette Kolodny explains the ‘inversion technique’ as a method used by women writers in which they juxtapose traditional literary images with opposing images. For example, ‘love is revealed as violence and romance as fraud; suicide and death are imaged as comforting and attractive, while loneliness and isolation become, for their heroines, means to self-knowledge and contentment’. Annette Kolodny, ‘Some Notes on Defining a “Feminist Literary Criticism”’, *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1975), 75-92 (p. 81).

²⁴ Though some scholars debate on when the term ‘New Woman’ emerged, it is generally safe to say it was generated in 1894 in an exchange between British writers Sarah Grand and Ouida. In Glaspell’s works, the ‘New Woman’ is a representation of the new independent, social reformist female.

no more than a way to keep food on the table and therefore undeserving of serious critical engagement, her novels have been rarely studied or discussed. Not one is available in print the United States. None is cited in the usual overviews of American literature as an exceptional work of psychological realism nor even as representation of any type of movement whatsoever, including regionalism. Glaspell the fiction writer simply does not register in our list of notables.²⁵

In addition to these reasons, there are other several explanations behind Glaspell's erasure from the fiction canon. Glaspell's fiction was overshadowed by the success of her plays, which were productions of the Provincetown Players Theater, even though the stories received a considerable amount of praise and positive criticism at the time of their publication.²⁶ According to Noe, Glaspell's short stories were 'published in mass circulation magazines like the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *Youth's Companion* and her novels were middlebrow book club-type/best sellers aimed at female readers, not highbrow novels aimed at elite readers'.²⁷ This, at least partly, explains Glaspell's fiction's short-lived success. Out of the fifty-five short stories only thirteen were published during her lifetime in a compiled collection *Lifted Masks* (1912).²⁸

In 1940, Glaspell's former publishing agency, Frederick A. Stokes Company went out of business after the death of its owner. As a result, the heirs of the publishing house were

²⁵ Mary E. Papke, 'Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 19-34 (p. 19).

²⁶ The Provincetown Players Theater is an all-American theatre group founded by Glaspell and her husband George Cram Cook in the summer of 1915 in Provincetown. Glaspell's dramatic plays were written, produced and performed to the members of the Provincetown Players, an audience of notable artists such as Floyd Dell, Eugene O'Neill, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Neith Boyce, literary bohemian intellectuals and critics who assessed and publicized her plays. Many of Glaspell's plays are experimental in nature, a unique attribute which according to Arthur Waterman, Marcia Noe and C.W.E Bigsby is a quality absent in her fiction.

²⁷ Marcia Noe (marcia-noe@utc.edu) email to Rasha Gazzaz (rashagazzaz@hotmail.com), Subject: Susan Glaspell, 21 May 2012, 14:40:01 PM.

²⁸ In 2001, Patricia L. Bryan in collaboration with Martha C. Carpentier reprinted an additional of eleven short stories which Glaspell had already published in magazines and newspapers but never collected in a collection. Even with the publication of *Her America: "A Jury of Her Peers" and Other Stories* (2010), around half of short stories are still lost today. See Susan Glaspell, in *Her America: 'A Jury of Her Peers' and Other Stories*, ed. by Patricia L. Bryan and Martha C. Carpentier (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 2001).

forced to merge their company with J.B. Lippincott who, then, owned the rights to all Glaspell's novels. America's involvement with the Second World War forced many publishing agencies to give up all metal plates for the production of ammunition. Not as successful as other publishing agencies, Lippincott did little to preserve Glaspell's works and sold her metal plates to the war effort, thereby erasing all traces of her novels. Glaspell was not as fortunate as other regionalist writers, for example Willa Cather whose works according to Carpentier 'enjoyed over eight decades of continual reprinting by a publisher who believed in, and was clearly invested in, their value'.²⁹ Glaspell, sadly, did not enjoy the same relationship with her publisher. And this has had a significant impact upon her literary legacy, for had it not been for the difficulty of obtaining her novels and short stories, Glaspell's name would have received at least *some* of the recognition it deserves.

Undoubtedly, Glaspell's relegation also occurred due to the exclusion of women writers' works from early American literature anthologies. According to Paul Lauter, there are three factors that contributed to the absence of women in anthologies during the 1920s: 'the professionalization of the teaching of literature, the development of an aesthetic theory that privileged certain texts', and the historiographic organization of the body of literature into conventional "periods" and "themes".³⁰ These factors had a negative impact on women specifically. Women were not only excluded from the emerging scholarly power structures in a rapidly developing profession; their reading choices, which dominated reading and literary clubs before the 1930s, shifted to the white male academics who, then, had the power to exclude women writers from the canon. In the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist

²⁹ Carpentier, 'The Deracinated Self: Immigrants, Orphans, and the Migratory Consciousness of Willa Cather and Susan Glaspell', p. 151.

³⁰ Lauter also mentions a study done in 1952 showing that 'women represent no more than 13.7 percent and as little as 3.2 percent of the writers in ... anthologies, on average 8 percent'. American literature in anthologies was recognized as an official academic study after the First World War. By the 1930s, the influence of the reading choices, what is to be remembered and read, shifted from non-academic women who constituted most of the reading percentage before the 1930s to male white academics, thus moving the reading choice away from a wide range of female writers. Paul Lauter, 'Race and Gender in the Shaping of the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties', *Feminist Studies*, 9 (1983), 435-63 (pp. 440).

scholars such as Nina Baym, Judith Fetterley and Annette Kolodny began unearthing forgotten women's writing and sought to integrate such writing into the literary critical discourse. They opposed the silencing of women's literature and they attempted to find and interpret forgotten women's texts to be included in anthologies of American literature of different genres.³¹ It was not until the 1960s that Glaspell was revived in relation to her most successful story - 'A Jury of Her Peers'.

In 1966, Arthur E. Waterman published the first critical study on Glaspell and her fiction which did more harm to her status as a novelist. In his book, Waterman completely dismissed Glaspell's fiction by pointing to what he considered to be its defects, 'conservatism, unabashed sentiment, an overwhelming middle class point of view, and reverence of tradition for its own sake'.³² He also claimed it was invaluable due to the superficiality of its themes. Waterman overlooks (or is perhaps uninterested in) Glaspell's portrayal of the complex nature of gender differences, class and gender discrimination, the intricate relationship between mothers and daughters, and women's suffrage and free speech. Waterman also ignores Glaspell's use of diverse writing techniques, the deployment of the absent character and the use of modernist-influenced approaches such as conveying complex interior development of her characters' psyche, and the utilization of Greek mythology to reflect the environment of her settings and the nature of her characters. Waterman does not discuss the audacity of Glaspell's women characters in defying the social norms of their Midwestern towns. He does not acknowledge that the experimentalism of her theatrical

³¹ Kolodny refers to the field of literary criticism as a 'minefield' where women's literature and feminist criticism are either misread, excluded, or fought against. Baym attacks the 'theories controlling [the] reading of American literature [which] have led to the exclusion of women authors from the canon'. Fetterley states that 'American literature is male. To read the canon of what is currently considered classic American literature is perforce to identify as male'. Annette Kolodny, 'Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Theory', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Panethon Books, 1985), 144-67 (p. 149); Nina Baym, 'Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors', *American Quarterly*, 33 (1981), pp. 129-39 (p. 129); Judith Fetterley, 'Introduction: On the Politics of Literature', in *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xii).

³² Waterman, 'Summary and Evaluation', in *Susan Glaspell*, pp. 17-31 (p. 118).

works might also be evident in her prose fiction. In fact, at the time of Waterman's publication of his book, there was no research done to explore the experimental quality in Glaspell's fiction. Later critics, such as Cheryl Black, Julia Galbus and Noelia Hernando-Real have commented upon and explored the experimental aspects of Glaspell's work.³³

Waterman categorizes Glaspell amongst the 'minor writers' of the twentieth century. As quoted from the concluding chapter of his book:

Like [Glaspell's] plays, the novels received widespread reviews on their first appearance; but, outside of brief mention in several surveys of American fiction, there has been no comprehensive examination of her fiction. The situation is not unexpected; for, when everything else has been said, we must agree that Susan Glaspell is a minor writer.³⁴

Waterman's statement seems to beg the question: it begins with the conclusion that Glaspell is a 'minor writer' before presenting convincing premises that this is the case. Indeed, he confirms that 'there has been no comprehensive examination of her fiction'. One needs a major study before the claim for her minority or otherwise can be assessed for its validity.

It was not until the late end of the twentieth century that scholars took an interest in Glaspell's fiction and began reviving and interpreting a number of Glaspell's short stories and novels. Critics such as Carpentier, Ben-Zvi and Ozieblo published works in an attempt to reclaim Glaspell's reputation as a fiction writer. However, other than Carpentier's *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (2001), Ben-Zvi's *Susan Glaspell: Essays on her Theater and*

³³ See Noelia Hernando-Real, *Self and Space in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011); Cheryl Black, "Making Queer New Things": Queer Identities in the Life and Dramaturgy of Susan Glaspell', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 20 (2005), 49-64; Julia Galbus, 'Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*: A Socratic Quest to Reinvent Form and Escape Plato's Cave', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 15 (2000), 81-95.

³⁴ Waterman, 'Summary and Evaluation', p. 120.

Fiction (1995) and some articles mostly on the much studied short story ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ and a minimal number of other stories, all other studies focus on Glaspell’s theatrical oeuvre. Many Glaspell critics agree that there is a necessity for more studies on Glaspell’s fiction. For example, Lindroth explains that ‘While critics have recognized the feminist conviction in Susan Glaspell’s dramas, that aspect in her fiction, especially in the short stories, has gone largely unregarded’.³⁵ Also, Ben-Zvi explains that most studies are:

devoted to Susan Glaspell as playwright because this is the area first studied by contemporary critics and now available in print and because this is the genre in which her most radical experiments took place. Yet she is also a writer of fiction and, in fact, in her own period was as well known for these works as she was for her plays. Certainly, an entire study could be done on her extensive fictional output.³⁶

The shortage of scholarly criticism on Glaspell’s fiction has impelled me to explore her prose work. It was difficult for me to obtain her complete fictional oeuvre since they are not available in bookstores or university libraries. Regarding her novels, the only prints accessible were worn-out used copies available on obscure online platforms. Glaspell’s short fiction was even harder to get a hold of as there were only two published collections comprising of twenty-five stories in total, while at least another thirty stories were not republished after their initial publication in magazines and newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, after corresponding with some of Glaspell’s dedicated critics, I was able to obtain an additional sixteen of Glaspell’s short stories. I also corresponded with Valentina A. Cook, executor of both the Glaspell and Cook estates, to give me permission to

³⁵ Colette Lindroth, ‘Lifting the Masks of Male-Female Discourse: The Rhetorical Strategies of Susan Glaspell’, in *Susan Glaspell Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 303-15 (p. 303).

³⁶ Ben-Zvi, ‘Introduction’, in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, pp. 1-14 (p. 11).

access what is left of Glaspell's personal correspondences and some of Cook's correspondences as well. The New York's Public librarians sent me some of Glaspell's unpublished letters to and from family members, work associates and other artists.

Glaspell valued her privacy greatly and so before her death, with the help of her maid Francelina, she managed to dispose most of her personal papers, letters and diaries.³⁷ Ozieblo notes, the 'lacunae that the dearth of material of a personal nature relating to her life has left' and argues for the necessity of an 'intertextual interpretation in the case of Glaspell'.³⁸ Agreeing with Ozieblo, I discovered that because we have so little information on Glaspell's life and on her personal views on topics and general issues, as critics we are compelled to focus on the work as a textual edifice. We must read her work for all its figurative aspects and, of course, for its overlap with other texts (i.e. its intertextuality). In short, it seems to me that Ozieblo's approach, which is a close textual analysis approach, is something that I will be utilizing - for instance, in my lengthy section on 'the gardener' figure in *The Visioning* in Chapter One and my description of the sand dunes and trees in 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927) in Chapter Three. In a way, I will be somehow following in the critical footsteps and methodology of Ozieblo, however, I will be using more of Glaspell's life to interpret some of the overlooked stories and novels, thus differing from Ozieblo in that regard.

Having read all of Glaspell's drama and what I have obtained of her fiction and her articles in *The Weekly Outlook*, I concur with the critics that there is more room for research on Glaspell as a prose writer due to the lack of extensive studies done on her fiction. My research will provide the first in-depth study of a number of Glaspell's novels and short stories. These works have never been studied alongside each other, and never been given detailed scholarly attention. Indeed, some of the works I analyse are no longer available in print form. My research will illuminate the female-centred issues in Glaspell's prose which

³⁷ See Ozieblo, 'Writing Is a Lonely Business', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 249-79 (pp. 276-7).

³⁸ Barbara Ozieblo, 'Silenced Mothers and Questing Daughters in Susan Glaspell's Mature Novels', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 137-57 (p. 138).

reflect women's experiences and problems, as well as solutions to these problems, during the early twentieth century. The originality of Glaspell's works lies in the subject matters she addresses and challenges, topics that affected women at her time (and continue to do so even today). Due to their historical and cultural significance these issues, when analysed critically in parallel with the history of Glaspell's life, add a deeper understanding to the often untold difficulties women faced at the time and the paths they selected to identify and redefine their identities in a changing world. Since Glaspell was interested in offering a woman-centred perspective, she emphasizes the critical use of women's experience in literary texts. Primarily she was interested in exposing the continued oppression of American women. In essence, what I hope to do is highlight how and where Glaspell thematically integrates contemporary concerns regarding women's socio-cultural, political and economic positions in her fiction. In turn, I hope to show how Glaspell's fiction offers subtle yet important glimpses into cultural history and change. Indeed, it is my contention that Glaspell's writing is a kind of quiet activism. Reluctant to assume the label of 'feminist', her writing nonetheless displays strong women battling with convention, poverty and gender bias. While Glaspell may not want to call herself a feminist, her protagonists undoubtedly fit the description.

Driven by an idealistic vision of social and gender equality, Glaspell's fictional writings, which are so entrenched with the reality of women's lives, are deeply connected with social change. Her dissatisfaction with women's social roles provides her with her greatest literary challenge, to translate women's demands for social justice and equality into concrete and relatable stories. Focusing on the Midwestern woman's plight, Glaspell stories speak about the inner conflicts of her female protagonists, and their struggles in rebelling against the rigid conventions of Midwestern middle class societies. Though many scholars may regard Glaspell's concentration on the Midwest evidence of her regionalism (or even parochialism), they undermine the importance of small communities in shaping and

influencing the lives of women. Writing about what she knew, Glaspell seized her immediate environment to make wider cultural observations about the sometimes invisible ways in which all women, regardless of region and/or social class, are constrained.

As well as illuminating the inhibiting wider, social constraints that curtail the economic and intellectual lives of women, Glaspell also addresses the problems between women. In stories such *The Visioning*, 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914) and 'Unveiling Brenda', the issue at stake clearly relates to social class. Upper class women torment (intentionally or otherwise) their social inferiors due to their own unsatisfactory lives. Uninspired, often poorly educated and bored women such as Caroline Osborne in *The Visioning*, for example, cause long-term emotional damage through foolish short-sightedness and ignorance regarding the lives of lower class women. Glaspell's critique is not aimed at upper class women *per se*, but at the systems whereby all women are kept from the kind of intellectual enlightenment that might enable them to experience social mobility and/or activate social change.

While this dissertation will not attempt to study Glaspell's drama as well as her fiction, I will draw connections between her plays and short stories and novels to show that Glaspell's purpose in writing, regardless of genre, is always geared towards promoting social change to better the conditions and status of women. The core of my study concentrates primarily on eight works (novels and short stories) which are the focus of my chapters, alongside other prose works and plays in each chapter, to show their relation to the thematic concern discussed and their relation to the understanding of Glaspell's works as a whole. I will examine Glaspell's works in the chronological sequence of their publication date to convey the development of her thematic concerns over time and to allow readers to gain insights into Glaspell's aim in writing and the meanings behind her texts.

The first two chapters of my thesis focus on the depiction of women's hardships and the last two chapters concentrate on women's strategies in fighting against such oppression. In Chapter One, I focus specifically on representing the problematic issues caused by class differences in Glaspell's socialist novel *The Visioning*. This novel acts as a good model for reflecting the antagonism between different social classes and its negative effects on women belonging to both upper middle and lower working social sectors, in addition to the discrimination women experience due to their gender. Specifically, I will discuss how Glaspell presents women of the lower working classes as being discriminated against not only by their male counterparts but also by women of the upper middle classes. It is the system that produces such antagonists that Glaspell criticizes as it inhibits their self-realization and the necessary social knowledge that might bring about social change.

In this chapter, I focus on analysing three main areas in women's lives as presented by Glaspell: social status, educational rights and professional identity. These areas inform my discussion of Glaspell's attack on the monotonous banal lifestyles which curtail and damage women's intellect and personality. They also contribute to the understanding of Glaspell's writings which are often associated with socialism and the promotion of Marxist views. Since Glaspell was a supporter of socialism, I will integrate some Marxist ideas regarding gender inequality to augment my discussion of class and its relation to women's oppression. According to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, the origin of women's oppression lies in the rise of class society; they note that a reflection upon class and its conflicts as reasons for women's oppression is integral to the possibility of delivering women's liberation. In *The Visioning*, Glaspell provides realistic examples of women's struggles against the oppression of capitalist-driven communities and voices her support for changing women's conditions.

She is aware of the kinds of realities described by Marx and Engels and fictionally conveys them in her characters and stories.³⁹

In Chapter Two, I further expand my discussion regarding the conflicts of class, gender and identity in Glaspell's short stories 'The Rules of Institution' and 'Unveiling Brenda' to further explore her socialist inclinations.⁴⁰ As they were published a few years after *The Visioning*, the stories display an evident development of Glaspell's representation of these concerns. They reflect a continuous change in women's socio-cultural position and women's ways of fighting against their repressed status. My discussion involves drawing a strong connection between the content of Glaspell's criticism of the stifling customs of Midwestern societies and the characteristics of the 'society girl' which she addressed in *The Weekly Outlook* social columns and her stories.⁴¹ In addition, I analyse the personae of Glaspell's women characters who are the opposites of 'society girls' to show Glaspell's way of setting examples of defiance for readers.

Building upon her critique of the 'society girl', 'The Rules of the Institution' is Glaspell's portrayal of the ills of women's social and educational groups, specifically the Heterodoxy Club which Glaspell was a member of at the time of the publication of the stories. Its significance resides in the controversial questions it poses regarding women's clubs and their ideology of sisterhood: are women's clubs just as stifling as patriarchal

³⁹ Simone De Beauvoir notes, 'In my definition, feminists are women - or even men, too - fighting to change women's condition, in association with the class struggle, but independently of it as well, without making the changes they strive for totally dependent on changing society as a whole'. Alice Schwartz, *Simone De Beauvoir Today: Conversations 1972-1982* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983), p. 32. De Beauvoir's description of a feminist perfectly fits Glaspell whose depiction of women's struggle with class structures in *The Visioning* (1911) clearly calls for the need of bettering women's status. The story introduces women of different social class striving to improve women's socio-cultural position. For instance Helen, the absent character in the story, engages in the women's suffrage movement and Ann, a woman of a lower social group, defies conventionality by moving to the city to better her professional opportunities.

⁴⁰ 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914) is one of Glaspell's forgotten stories as it has never been reprinted after its first publication in *Harper's*. See Appendix 1 for full story.

⁴¹ Based on Glaspell's articles, the 'society girl' is a superficial individual who is compelled to follow the new trends of fashion, be respectable and aim at landing the best suitable bachelor she is able to lure into marriage. She resembles, in some way at least, the women often found in Jane Austen's novels. Glaspell despises and refuses to be framed within an image that presented her as an object targeted at pleasing her male counterpart.

Midwestern societies or are they channels for the possibility of women's development?⁴² In 'Unveiling Brenda', Glaspell focuses on the educational sphere, presenting a fictional university based on the University of Iowa, to enlighten readers regarding a different kind of oppression. The story aids my discussion in that it depicts the haughtiness of upper class societies and their constant prejudicing against lower class individuals who are less fortunate. To support my reading, I refer to Dennis Gilbert's useful description of the variables of class, characteristics which define class as determined by education, occupation, wealth, and prestige.

In Chapters Three and Four, my discussion centres upon showing that Glaspell's methodology in defying society's oppressive regulations involves her use of absence and silence as powerful mediums of expression and communication in her prose works.⁴³ In Chapter Three, I discuss various theoretical meanings of silence by contemporary theorists such as Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag and Elaine Showalter. Using formulations which project silence as a form of empowerment, I show Glaspell's prose works' use of absence and silence as power and authority. I also explore Glaspell's utilization of the absent character by drawing attention to Maeterlinck's static theatre which Glaspell was influenced by in 'A Jury of Her Peers', 'One of Those Impossible Americans' (1911) and *The Visioning*. I show that Glaspell's use of the absent character draws more attention to the interpretation of the nonappearance of the protagonists in the text and the reasons behind it. My central argument

⁴² According to Ozieblo, 'The patriarchal coat of mail imprisoning women is subtly riveted that they no longer know how they are trapped, and moreover, with blind complacency, they consider it their duty to ensure that the fine links enmesh their daughters as tightly, and as quickly, as possible.' The 'patriarchal coat of mail imprisoning women' Ozieblo refers to is the women's club in the story since they follow inherently patriarchal rules. The club, run by women of the higher social classes, teach and oblige young working girls under their supervision to demonstrate Victorian standards of ethics and conduct. Ozieblo, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁴³ Kristina Hinz-Bode's 'Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression' focuses on Glaspell's use of language as a theme and medium of expression as presented in Glaspell's plays. Hinz-Bode is alert to the field of gender studies which shows the fundamental difference between men and women's use of language yet she argues that Glaspell's 'overarching concern with the nature of communication often transcends such aspects of difference. This is precisely why Glaspell's art can speak to many audiences and readers, regardless of gender, age, nationality, class, or historical context'. Hinz-Bode, p. 5. Though Hinz-Bode offers invaluable observations on Glaspell's use of language both as a theme and a medium of expression, she only examines Glaspell's plays.

in this chapter revolves around the short story 'A Rose in the Sand'. This proves that Glaspell's stories did in fact offer a significant contribution to the understanding of the inadequacy of language and the inability to communicate through words. Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin state that silences 'reveal reticences culturally imposed upon women, the workings of a repressed ideology, or, alternatively, women's deployment of silence as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse'.⁴⁴ I intend to show that Glaspell wrote such stories to depict the female experience by creating a new language, silence, understood and used by women. I analyse Mrs. Paxton, the story's protagonist, in terms of her personality and state of mind in specific relation to the environment in which she secludes herself to depict her refusal to communicate through words. Glaspell specifically uses 'the Outside', an isolated, silent and dreary landscape between sea and sand, to reflect the nature of women's psyche and restrained speech.

In Chapter Four I continue debating Glaspell's use of silence in *Fugitive's Return* as a method of meditation and power. However, I distinguish this chapter from the previous one with my focus on silence in relation to the protagonist's self-perception of herself. As Irma Lee, the main character in the story, experiences traumatic experiences, she decides to use silence as her expressive mode of communication. My discussion focuses on exploring Irma's interior dialogue along with psychoanalyzing the different identities she adopts throughout the novel. To help explain Irma's identity crisis and how it is linked to her perception of her 'self', I will apply Jacques Lacan's mirror theory. Lacan's psychoanalytical theory explains how individuals view themselves from the outside by turning themselves into 'objects' in order to dissociate themselves from their inner self. I will also use John Cage and Ihab Hassan's notion of the soundless room, in this instance the setting of Greece, to show how Irma's perception of her 'self' is associated with her distorted feelings and thoughts

⁴⁴ Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Introduction', in *Listening to Silences New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 3-14 (p. 5).

which are visible to the reader through Glaspell's narration. My chapter focuses on comparing the soundless room to the physical space of Greece which steeped in the rich mythology of the tempestuous gods, goddesses, monsters and beasts. I will show that in Greece, Irma, the silent female main character, is in a space wherein she is able to connect with her consciousness and face her past in order to find inner peace. Irma's mute state and eventual use of words, which is deferred by a prolonged silence, is important in explaining the defectiveness and confinements of the language she is forced to use to express herself. Glaspell presents Irma as choosing to remain silent as a point of defiance against a language dominated by patriarchal discourse.

Ben-Zvi notes that 'Glaspell saw that if the world portrayed is the world of women – if the locus of perception is female – then her plays would have to strive for a shape which reinforces this new vantage point and a language which articulates it'.⁴⁵ The same idea should be applied to Glaspell's fiction. Glaspell's determination to write the stories of oppressed women dedicated to change their lives for the better, is borne out of her vision of a reformed society. Her idea of a reformed society is characterized with equality which she presents through a new silent expressive mode that could deliver what the female voice had failed to express. The objective of my dissertation is to enlighten the modern reader of the importance of reading Susan Glaspell's fiction in the first place, but also to view that fiction as offering a lens upon the historical and cultural context in which the works were produced and the radical, feminist and political ideas which motivated Glaspell. Examining Glaspell's overlooked prose fiction, I show that there is more to extract from Susan Glaspell's works than local colour vistas. Deceptively simple in narration, her works are rich with realistic examples of the American society which faced changes and challenges in the earlier half of the twentieth century.

⁴⁵ Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Susan Glaspell's Contribution to Contemporary Women Playwrights', in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 147-66 (p. 149).

Chapter One

The Intricate Web of Class in *The Visioning* (1911)

‘... until she could fairly feel herself fitting into the pattern formed for her’.
~ Susan Glaspell, ‘The Rules of the Institution’ (1914)

Glaspell’s novels and short stories of the early twentieth century document the socio-political changes of the era especially with regard to the lives of women in both the private and public spheres. As evidenced in her short story ‘The Rules of the Institution’ (1914), Glaspell frequently emphasized gender conflict as she felt that women were confined to preformed domestic roles which forced them to fight to find their place in a male-dominated social hierarchy. Glaspell critiqued the patterns formed for women especially in Midwestern settings as it stifled their advancement at a time when changes in women’s position was on the rise. The twentieth century witnessed changes in women’s status. For instance, in 1895 almost all states allowed women the right to trade without their husbands’ consent. Women were able to own property and control their own earning. Also in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment facilitated women’s suffrage and this included betterment in education, workplace and health care. Such labour movements which advocated and related to class, are deeply embedded in Glaspell’s fiction and, indeed, are staple features of her entire literary oeuvre, from the earliest of her fictional works through to the final completed work of her career.

At least eight of Glaspell’s short stories and more than half of her novels deal with issues of class and social inequality, ‘The Girl from Down-Town’ (1903), ‘For Love of the Hills’ (1905), ‘Agnes at Cape’s End’ (1915) and ‘Miss Jessie’s Trip Abroad (1916), *Fugitive’s Return* (1929), *The Morning is Near Us* (1939), *Norma Ashe* (1942) and *Judd Rankin’s Daughter* (1945). In these works, Glaspell exhibits some causes and patterns of social and gender inequality by creating instances and scenarios where clashes between social

groups instigate class antagonism and discrimination. She also gives explicit examples of unequal opportunities granted to women in both the domestic sphere and the workplace.¹ In the home, Glaspell shows that domestic life which revolves around either childcare or marriage enables the exploitation of women by a patriarchal system that devalues them and the substantial work they do. In the latter sphere, she shows how the professional world, mainly led by men, curtails women from holding jobs requiring higher levels of cerebral capability (politics, medicine and architecture for instance) and thereby stifles their intellectual capabilities. Glaspell's persistence in showing these realities in novels and plays illuminates her sense of public and private gender injustices.

Glaspell's presentation of class conflict, specifically between the upper middle class and lower working classes of society, offers realistic depictions of the ways in which social inequality is structured and how it impinges fundamentally on all facets of an individual's life in a Midwestern community such as the one in which Glaspell grew up. The understanding of these existing conflicts as presented in Glaspell's novels serves two purposes. Firstly, it reflects the author's argument for socialism.² Glaspell's personal antagonistic feelings against the upper echelons of society and its superficiality were instigated by her hatred of a system which forced individuals to possess certain beliefs at the expense of giving up their own. For example, the theme of personal versus public good is a topic which reverberates in stories such as *Fidelity* (1915), 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927) and *Brook Evans* (1928). Secondly, it shows that Glaspell used her works as a mouthpiece for expressing her dissatisfaction with women's roles which she regarded as limiting and confined. The restrictions on the position

¹ This was a period of feminist activism in which women called for changes in the workplace, education, sexual liberation, increased independence and social roles. See Valerie Sanders, 'First Wave Feminism', in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge Taylor and Frances Group, 2001), pp. 15-24.

² In Chapter Two, I discuss Glaspell's involvement with radical groups such as the Monist Society, *The Masses* and the Heterodoxy Club and her interaction with many socialist artists such as her husband George Cram Cook and Floyd Dell to depict her socialist leanings and influences.

and status of women resulted from the traditional lifestyles and conventions of Davenport's society which Glaspell herself faced.

In this chapter, I will explore Glaspell's strong sense of social inequality in terms of class discrimination and how it results from the social and gender inequalities which occur between different social groups, specifically between the upper middle classes and the lower working classes. I will begin by documenting certain incidents from Glaspell's biographical accounts, centring on the family's downfall and the treatment of the Glaspell family by the upper social tiers of the local Davenport community. Tracing the decline in Glaspell family's social standing will open new understanding of the origins of the author's social disquiet, her growing sense of social injustice through her personal experiences and her insistence upon exposing the injustices women faced. I will then link my findings to similar happenings in Glaspell's stories to show the author's distillation of her own realities into her fiction. This will demonstrate how Glaspell used real histories, stories and events in her fiction as representations of the existence of gender inequality resulting from non-reciprocal social statuses and her insistence upon the need for social change.

Reflecting some of the incidents associated with class conflicts in Glaspell's life, I will offer an overview of Glaspell's fiction, specifically those stories and novels projecting detailed accounts of injustices occurring against women because of their class. This will strongly support my contention that Glaspell's fiction constitutes a rallying cry for socialist change. Glaspell's inclinations toward socialist causes are evident in her writing.³ Glaspell's socialist proclivities are evident in her themes and in her characterisation – for instance, in the creation of her socialist gardener figure, Alan Mann, in *The Visioning* (1911) and the fictional creation of *The Masses* (a radical newspaper founded by Max Eastman) in her play *The*

³ In February 1909, Millie Cook wrote a letter to Floyd Dell asserting 'that Susan is ... near socialist'. Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Travel at Home and Abroad', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.92-103 (p. 97).

People (1917).⁴ My main discussion in this chapter centres upon Glaspell's second novel *The Visioning* as it is a prime example in showing the author's presentation of the prejudice faced by women and the problems arising between the different hierarchies of social stratification in the United States at the beginning of the century. Through the novel, Glaspell draws attention to contemporary social issues through the development of her protagonist, society-girl Katie, who questions conventional ideas about gender and class. Linking certain events in the story to Glaspell's life and women's socio-cultural position, I will focus on examples of social inequality in three specific areas of women's lives: women's social status, the limited education they were allowed, and their professional identities. I will show that Glaspell uses *The Visioning* to depict an example of a twentieth century Midwestern society and how it categorizes its members into the different hierarchies of class, enforcing limitations on those who are less privileged in social status.

In addition, since *The Visioning* incorporates Marxist ideas regarding class relations, power relations and property, I will briefly discuss this aspect of her work. Though well-worn and outré, Marx's theories are of relevance here largely because, in his explication of the tenets and ideals of socialism, he depicts capitalistic systems as turning people, specifically the lower working sectors, into cogs in an industrial, capitalist machine which strips them of their individuality. They end up conceiving themselves only as parts of a composite structure. Glaspell's strong opposition to such oppression borne out of a capitalist system which tyrannizes the working class sector is depicted in *The Visioning*. Marx's theory of alienation also helps explain women's inferior positions which result from an economic system that alienates individuals from one another (and themselves), a dominant theme in *The Visioning*.

My discussion will also situate the novel and its concerns in a period of Glaspell's life in which she physically and intellectually interacted with important socialists, such as her

⁴ See Ben-Zvi, "“Though Stone Be Broken”", in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 103-12 (p. 105).

husband George Cram Cook and friend Floyd Dell, and their works.⁵ Glaspell's involvement with these free thinking individuals and the progressive socio-political activities occurring in Davenport at the beginning of the twentieth century influence some of the important events relating to class in the story.⁶ Cook and Dell's association with *The Masses*, a monthly publication which championed socialism, pacifism and feminism, and its editor Max Eastman, another strong supporter of socialism, gave Glaspell a solid source of information for *The Visioning*.⁷ Furthermore Glaspell's association with unorthodox groups such as The Monist Society, which focused their meetings on issues including socialism and feminism, clearly feed into the fictional manifestation of her socialist ideas in *The Visioning*.⁸

Part I: The Glaspell's Family Social and Economic Downfall

Susan Glaspell's critique of the wealthier social classes in her fiction results from the economic downfall of her ancestors, a loss of status and wealth. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Glaspells were amongst the first pioneers to settle in Davenport, Iowa.

⁵ Similar to Glaspell, Dell came from a poor family where his father and brothers worked in factories. Trying to escape poverty and break free from falling into the trap of a capitalistic job, Dell educated himself by going to Davenport's public library and reading books recommended by the local librarian Marilla Freeman. Floyd's experience with poverty made him promote Marx's views and socialism. Many of his articles published in *Tri-City Magazine*, some of which will be used in this chapter, and his novels such as *Homecoming* (1933) depict his support for socialism. However, in 1954, Dell explained in a letter to Max Eastman his disappointment at the fall of socialism and its association with tyranny. See Susan Glaspell, 'The Monist Society', in *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), pp.188-99; Floyd Dell, 'A Letter to Max Eastman (1954)', *Grand Street*, 7 (1987), 195-207; Ben-Zvi, 'The Monist Society', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 77-84.

⁶ Glaspell's socialist ideas are also portrayed in several of her works, for example, the themes of sexual freedom and birth control in *Suppressed Desires* (1915) and *Chains of Dew* (1922); socialism in *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (1945); and censorship in 'Finality in Freeport' (1916).

⁷ Glaspell lived in Greenwich Village and Provincetown amongst a society of writers such as Cook and Dell who were interested in reforming society amongst socialist lines. According to historian Robert Humphrey, Greenwich artists including Glaspell were socialist and progressive writers, artists, journalists, feminists, and labour organizers characterized as people who 'harbored utopian ideas; they dreamed of reorganizing society, expanding artistic achievement, liberating the individual and establishing a community of equals'. Robert E. Humphrey, 'Introduction', in *Children of Fantasy: The First Rebels of Greenwich Village* (New York: Wiley, 1978), pp. 1-13 (p. 11).

⁸ Glaspell was also a member of The Liberal Club, which was very similar to The Monist Society in its unorthodox teachings. Founded in 1913, The Liberal Club on MacDougal Street was led by bohemian radicals of Greenwich Village. Reform-minded intellectuals gathered in the club to discuss topics related to sexual freedom, socialism, and modern art. See William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff, 'Bohemian Essay: Modern Art and Culture', in *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 73-100 (pp. 73-5).

They were regarded with high esteem due to their respectable positions in society.⁹ However, the family's first main collapse happened in the mid-1800s. Susan's great grandfather, James Glaspell, created his wealth through his success in the farming business. After James's death in 1847, his eldest son Silas inherited forty acres of farmland. Silas, a more audacious character than his father, had an experimental spirit and focused his efforts on testing plants and trees for an improved fruit farm.¹⁰ Though some of his experiments were successful and profitable, they were costly and gradually failed due to the harsh conditions of weather. By the time of his death, Silas's sons, Charles and Elmer (Susan's father), were left with nothing of their grandfather's forty acres of land but an old farmhouse, an orchard and a vineyard.

The Glaspells' social status continued to flounder. Elmer decided to remain in Davenport but he was less successful in the business world than his ancestors. He struggled with working at different trades, including farming, truck driving, contracting and hay and straw wholesaling, but failed at elevating his family's lost social standing. Elmer's decision to marry Alice Keating, Susan's mother, brought further financial obligations as he was then responsible for a family. And so, by the time Susan was born, Elmer was forced to give up his father's farmhouse and resided with his family in a poor residential area in a rented house by the river.

Aside from Silas's failed experiments, a second unexpected incident further propelled the decline of the Glaspells' fortune and position. In the 1850s, a new railroad was built which split Davenport in half. This division situated the Glaspells' home on the border near

⁹ The Glaspells were well known for their strong willpower, their idealistic approach to life, their good natured personalities and their extensive evangelical activities. As Glaspell's biographer Barbara Ozieblo notes, the Glaspells were a 'large and active' family who 'did not limit itself to church, school and farm', they contributed to the social good of their communities and in various trades revolving around farming. See Barbara Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 7-34 (p. 9).

¹⁰ Glaspell honours her grandfather's experimental spirit by presenting some of his personality traits in protagonists such as Claire Archer, an experimental botanist, and Blossom, an upper middle class woman who experiments with plants in *The Inheritors* (1921) and *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931) respectively, and in the supporting character of Ira Morton who promotes Darwin's theories of evolution by experimenting on corn fields in *The Verge* (1921).

the Mississippi River, the part of town which attracted poor German immigrants who mainly laboured in industries and factories, in low wage professions.¹¹ Living in this community and alert to the dwindling family fortunes, Susan became aware and critical of social injustice and problems regarding the unequal distribution of wealth. Linda Ben-Zvi, one of Susan Glaspell's biographers, observes that

these changes [Susan's family's misfortunes and the creation of the railroad] in her family's finances and prestige in the community created in Susan contradictory feelings about wealth and status, and the schisms appear when she discusses her youth or that of her protagonists'.¹²

Glaspell discusses these contradictory feelings in *Fugitive's Return* where she reflects her feelings towards poverty through the protagonist Irma Lee Shraeder. Just like Glaspell, Irma wishes to fit into a group of wealthy girls, yet she finds herself forced to associate with the German girls who live in her poor neighbourhood and attend the same school she goes to. Instead of adapting and accepting to her socio-economic condition, Irma caves in to the negative feelings of imperfection which affect her life greatly.¹³ Glaspell's bitter and

¹¹ The upper middle class did not associate with the German immigrants due to their lower status. However, the Germans brought a distinct culture to Davenport which included a new interest in socialism and radical thought. Sharon E. Wood gives a detailed account of German immigrants' history and development in Davenport. See her 'Introduction: The Belva Lockwood Club', in *The Freedom of the Streets: Work Citizen, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1-13.

¹² Ben-Zvi, 'A Town Springs Up', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 11-8 (p. 17).

¹³ Considered one of her most autobiographical novels, *Fugitive's Return* (1929) contains the most vivid descriptions of Glaspell's family's hardship. Glaspell describes Irma Lee, the protagonist, and her embarrassment at living on a small farm-house outside of town to reflect her own feelings of resentment which she mentions. Irma's feelings of inferiority result from her realization that she is completely different to the wealthy girls she aspires to befriend – just as Glaspell was different from her wealthy peers in Davenport. In an excerpt from the story, Irma's feelings reflect Glaspell: 'She had times of hating her family for putting her in this position [poverty]; other times of mutely and passionately loving them to make up for her own disloyalty'. Susan Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1929), p. 125; Ben-Zvi, 'A Town Springs Up', p. 17; Ozieblo, 'Death in Delphi', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 191-225 (p. 203).

resentful tone towards her family's downfall and diminished social status are also clear in other fictional works like 'Unveiling Brenda' (1916) and *Brook Evans*.¹⁴

Glaspell expressed her views on Davenport's 'high society' in the 'Social Life Columns' published in *The Weekly Outlook*. According to Ben-Zvi:

In these brief sketches about local society, the tone is usually sarcastic, the writer taking obvious joy in disclosing the silly customs she observes around her, positioning herself outside the circle of Davenport "high society," and lobbing some powerful volleys at the foibles and banalities of the members.¹⁵

Later on in *The Road to the Temple* (1926), Glaspell's biography of her husband, she expresses her views on the transformation of Iowa from a 'settlement to statehood' and 'from primitive democracy to a class-conscious society with land speculator, banker, legislator at the top and the American farmer at the bottom'.¹⁶ Glaspell must have had in mind the downfall of her family's prestigious pioneer status to that of farmers at the bottom of the hierarchal structure of society. Her cynical tone rises when she describes her husband's family's social background. In the biography she writes, 'George Cram Cook grew up in town that had a Cook Memorial Library, the Cook Home, and a Cook Memorial Church. I am constrained to say again – there having been no Glaspell Home for the Friendless – these

¹⁴ Regardless of her adoption of an obviously harsh tone in her works, Glaspell never ceased to be proud of her ancestors and showed signs of guilt for having railed against her family. Some of her works, *Inheritors*, *The Verge* and *Brook Evans* (1928) show her proud feelings regarding her ancestors' accomplishments.

¹⁵ See Linda Ben-Zvi, 'The Political as Personal on the Writing of Susan Glaspell', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, ed. by Martha C. Carpentier and Bárbara Ozieblo (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 275-94 (p. 276). Ozieblo, in her biography of Glaspell, also comments on Glaspell's articles in *The Weekly Outlook*, which like her fictional works criticized the frivolity of society. She notes that Glaspell 'provides a picture of the cultural and social life of a Midwestern town in the last years of the nineteenth century, with pithy criticism of the most ridiculous habits. Glaspell spares no one, and no aspect of the life of well-to-do women goes unnoticed. Perhaps because she did not have a natural place in Davenport society, she delighted in subtle revenge'. Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', pp. 20-1.

¹⁶ Glaspell, 'The Unintended Beauty', in *The Road to the Temple*, pp. 1-9 (p. 4).

things are relevant'.¹⁷ Her discussion of Cook's wealth clearly shows her sense of social injustice which is at least in part attributable to her family's diminished status in the community.¹⁸

Glaspell's life, as shown above, demonstrates her criticism of the superficiality and social power of the privileged classes. According to Ozieblo, this position of alienation allowed Susan Glaspell to develop a 'sharp mind and penetrating criticism' from the perspective of an outsider.¹⁹ Thus, growing up with feelings of being socially inferior paved the way for Glaspell to produce works that would portray such experiences, as the one faced and shared by other less privileged women (mainly working women of the lower social order) like herself shown in this chapter.

Part II: Class Discrimination in Glaspell's Short Stories

Glaspell's interest in class as a main issue in her works is shown in her portrayal of several hierarchies of social classes along with the manners and traditions acquired by each class. She projects the high rank members of society as privileged with better income and wealth, yet in some cases with minimal rights for education and profession and portrays the lower class women as experiencing forms of injustice due to the domestic obligations forced upon them. Glaspell also emphasizes how it is quite difficult for individuals to escape, culturally, from the class into which they have been born as they are traditionally within his/her original class. She depicts and stresses the fact of women's socioeconomic imprisonment in her fiction by showing her women characters as ensnared by the patterns formed for them. As a result, they suffer from the inequalities of having to follow inherently patriarchal conventions which impede their independence.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸ Sharon E. Wood gives a detailed account of the origination of the Cook Home which began in 1884. See Wood, 'A Place in the City: The Working Woman's Lend a Hand Club', in *The Freedom of the Streets: Works, Citizen, and Sexuality in a Gilded City*, pp. 48-78 (pp. 48-9).

¹⁹ Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', p. 17.

To understand Glaspell's views on society, one must examine the study of social stratification and how individuals are placed within the hierarchies of a specific society as it aids in understanding the problems that arise between different social groups. The relationship between women's position and social class is a complicated matter because it involves understanding the integration of class, gender and identity and how they work in combination. Glaspell focuses on the class collision which occurs where the upper middle class meets the lower working class groups and thwarts their attempted incursions upward. According to Glaspell, the Midwestern society where she sets her works gives advantage to those born to relatively rich parents. In *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell explains the importance of the success of families and her bitter tone is evident in her comparison between Cook's family who owned the Cook Memorial Library, the Cook Home, and the Cook Memorial Church and her own. Glaspell states that 'these were things to think about, a way of feeling life, not only from one place, but from its opposite'.²⁰ However, women belonging to these groups still suffer gender inequality and women belonging to the lower social classes suffer even more because of the double bind of gender and class discrimination.

As Glaspell's fiction charts and mirrors the historical changes of the twentieth century, the images of extreme class antagonism and discrimination in her works are evident. The stories I have selected range over three decades and reflect the development of Glaspell's portrayal of the problems existent between different social groups. In an early short story 'The Boycott on Caroline' (1906), Glaspell portrays the protagonist Caroline Stuart, a newcomer, as disparaged by a group of wealthy young women who consider her 'one of the vulgar rich and thus, not of their class' simply because she is nouveau riche.²¹ Glaspell's scathing attitude to discrimination of any kind is obvious in this story. She shows that women can still be victims of patriarchal laws that empower certain females to enforce oppression on

²⁰ Glaspell, 'Who is an Honest Man?', in *The Road to the Temple*, pp.9-14 (p. 12).

²¹ Susan Glaspell, 'The Boycott on Caroline', *The Youth's Companion*, 22 March 1906, pp. 137.

other women. The oppressive factor in this story is the group of young girls who believe that wealth and prestige, two variables defining upper middle class membership, puts them in a position of power and control. Throughout the story Caroline does not try to escape being bullied; rather, like most of Glaspell's protagonists, she resorts to isolation to escape such oppressive situations. She voices Glaspell's convictions against social oppression since she is 'free from any ideas of distinctions created by money'.²² It is when the girls discover her good-natured personality that they accept her into their social circle. The rebellious tone in 'The Boycott on Caroline' may not be as powerful as the stories published in later years. Yet, Glaspell's clear stance against judging people based on their class or race is obvious.

In *Fidelity*, a novel published in the second decade of the century, Glaspell's tone against class discrimination gains more stridency as she penalizes social ideologies which she perceives as steeped in inequality. Through the tone of her narrative as well as her characters' unconventional held beliefs, Glaspell scorns a society which ostracises and alienates individuals on the basis of their unorthodox ideas or lower social ranks. What makes this novel interesting is the striking resemblance between the story and the events of Glaspell's life. Reflecting on her own life as an example of reality, Glaspell presents freedom of life choices as an important human right which should be allowed to both sexes. The character of Ruth Holland, an early twentieth century, upper middle class woman who is privileged by wealth, becomes Glaspell's voice piece as she defies her own family who deny her the right to an education or to a professional identity. As an act of rebellion Ruth, in choosing her personal desires, breaks the rigid strictures of social conventions and runs away with a married man. Though Ruth's action may seem at odds with the novel's title, it clearly alludes to Glaspell's message of being true to oneself by following one's dreams and desires regardless of the consequences.

²² Ibid.

Glaspell continues to focus on class discrimination in later novels written and published in the third decade of her career. In *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931), Glaspell voices her own convictions through Harriette Holt (referred to as Blossom in the novel) who believes that women of her class are the victims of society as they are forced to live under the control of men, first their fathers and later on their husbands. Glaspell criticizes class and wealth by focusing on the social structures which restrict women's individuality. Martha C. Carpentier notes that, in the novel, Glaspell 'explores ... women in patriarchal bourgeois family structures ... incapacitated by being protected from relegated work and from hardship; they are then belittled and made to feel "fools" because they are inexperienced'.²³ Having felt denied the right to prove herself in a society inherently dominated by men, Blossom revolts against society's rules by breaking all the rules of planting her own garden by using unconventional techniques of planting different flowers together instead of grouping one kind separately from the other. This recalls *The Verge's* (1921) Claire Archer, a botanist, whose professional goals are aimed towards creating plants which defy their natural growth.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Glaspell published *Fugitive's Return* and *Norma Ashe* in which she also explored the issue of class. Irma and Norma, the protagonists of *Fugitive's Return* and *Norma Ashe* respectively, face difficulties adapting to the genteel class to which their husbands belong. They are considered outsiders by upper class women and, as a result, are treated as inferior citizens. Discrimination within and between social classes is evident in the novels, yet the metaphor of slavery which we see in earlier works such as *The Visioning* and *Fidelity* is less blatant. This is not due to the insignificance of class as an important issue but due to the significance of other dominant issues arising at the time. Glaspell focused upon progressive changes in women's occupations, the complex

²³ Martha C. Carpentier, 'The Daughter with Two Fathers in *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931)', in *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 108-30 (p. 109).

relationship between mothers and daughters (*Brook Evans*), the rise of the New Woman (*Fidelity*) and the search for one's identity (*Norma Ashe* and *Judd Rankin's Daughter*).

The stories mentioned above are only a few examples of Glaspell's protest against the social constructs designed to legalize any sort of discrimination. It is evident that Glaspell focuses on projecting the subordination of her female characters to raise awareness of the oppressive systems they are subjected to. By doing so, she aims at promoting social change, a way of bettering women's socio-cultural position. Glaspell's examination of the limits placed on women by traditional gender roles highlights women's suffering in an unjust society and vocalizes her support for social change. Departing from these examples, I continue my chapter with a thorough examination of three important areas in women's lives as presented in *The Visioning* to emphasize gender inequality and its prevailing relation to class. My focus on this novel in particular is due to the fact that it thoroughly represents Glaspell's views on class and gender inequality. It is also rich in its portrayal of various incidents related to women's suppressed position which is reflective of the female socio-cultural status in early twentieth-century.

Part III: The Intricate Web of Class in *The Visioning*

The Visioning narrates the story of Katherine (Katie) Wayneworth Jones, daughter of a privileged army officer in Government Island, a fictional name for Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, who lives amongst the upper middle classes. The novel begins with Katie witnessing Verna Woods on the verge of committing suicide. She interferes and helps the unfortunate woman by taking Verna into her world and changing Verna's name into Ann Forrest.

When Ann appears in Katie's society and associates with its members, she sees a difference between her past life and theirs. She finds the upper middle class characters scornful of the less fortunate and oblivious to the implications of a life full of hardships. Even

though Katie's associates enquire about Ann's background, Katie manages to hide her ward's past. Katie sees how Ann is upset by the mores and values of her new environment, so much that she increasingly expresses her disquiet. This, in turn, drives Katie to question her own life. She becomes intrigued by forbidden literature for instance, including that of Walt Whitman, and befriends an ex-army officer who enlightens her about important issues such as socialism and Darwinism.

Upper middle class characters in the story include Katie's brother, Captain Wayneworth Jones, who falls in love with Ann; Caroline Osborne and Zelda Fraser, single wealthy women whose social roles include running charity events for poor working girls and finding eligible rich bachelors who suit their prestigious status; Major Darrett who abuses Ann; Bishop Jones, Katie's uncle, and his son Fred, who marries a feminist activist called Helen (we learn that Fred's father does not approve of the marriage). The story ends with Ann leaving for New York and beginning a new life. Katie realizes that there is more to life than being confined to her tight superficial social circle in an island in the middle of the Mississippi and travels to New York to undergo new life-enriching experiences.

Glaspellian critics such as Linda Ben-Zvi, Marcia Noe and Cynthia Stretch place *The Visioning* within the context of working class fiction since it depicts the lives of working women in contrast to those of wealthier women enslaved within the customary sphere of domesticity. The novel centres on the dominant power of a male-dominated social hierarchy that facilitates the inequalities in different areas of women's lives from their social duty in the private sphere to their role in the public world. Stretch classifies *The Visioning* as a socialist novel which discusses 'issues of class privilege and the instability of gender identity that remain below the surface of contemporaneous treatments of women who pass across class

lines'.²⁴ I certainly concur with Stretch in describing *The Visioning* as a socialist novel. However, moving beyond her observations, I also feel that the novel offers ways forward for the betterment of women's socio-cultural position, for instance through interaction between members of different social classes, exposure to 'radical' literature, and education. I will extend my discussion of Glaspell's support for socialism in light of the exploitation of power which leads to class and gender inequality by offering a socio-cultural examination on three areas of women's lives (social status, education and professional identity) as presented in *The Visioning*.

III.1 Women's Social Status

Although applied retrospectively, Kathleen Gerson's description of 'domestically oriented' and 'work committed' women are useful to Glaspell's works because she wrote at a time when women's work was not theorized.²⁵ 'Domestically oriented' women, as Gerson explains it, accurately describes the social status of upper middle class women characters in *The Visioning*. For instance, 'domestically oriented' Katie is a woman of a wealthy and prestigious family devoted to the life of luxurious social gatherings. The expectation of her social circle is that she will marry a man of similar rank to ensure the social status-quo. She is not expected to have a profession, unlike Verna and the working girls of the lower class, who are 'work committed' and obliged to support themselves and their families financially.

Aside from her privileged social rank, Katie is placed in the superior position of a savior to whom Verna feels indebted. Katie's heroic act of saving Verna from committing

²⁴ Stretch bases her explanation of socialist novel on Walter B. Rideout's definition of radical novel. Rideout defines a radical novel as 'one which demonstrates ... that its author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and *advocates that the system be fundamentally changed*'. Walter B. Rideout, 'The Two Nations', in *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 1-18 (p. 12); Cynthia Stretch, 'Socialist Housekeeping: *The Visioning*, Sisterhood, and Class-Cross Alliance', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 223-38 (p. 224).

²⁵ See Kathleen Gerson, 'Combining Work and Motherhood', in *Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 158-90.

suicide by faking an illness, sparks a desire to create a new person: Ann. The creation of a new person (i.e. Ann Woods) calls to mind the power relations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Victor's desire for power ultimately backfires. Horrified by his creation, he rejects and flees and is pursued by the monster. Similarly, Katie in *The Visioning* yearns for creative power and so changes Verna's identity to Ann. Both Katie and Victor, initially enjoy their creative power. But in both instances, they create something that they ultimately cannot control and which teaches them a lesson regarding the limitations of their own psychological and social strength.

In Katie's thoughts, hunger for some kind of authority is revealed, 'Never in her life had she been so fascinated with anything as with this creation of an Ann'.²⁶ Katie's fascination with the idea of 'creating' is a kind of all-consuming avarice, arguably a feature of capitalistic societies, similar to that of a despotic tyrant. Relying on her influential social ranking, Katie assumes power without contemplating whether it is right for her to do so or not. She is unreceptive to the fact that she has control over the destiny of others, which is a crucial aspect of the various power relations regarding class and gender I have described so far. Katie, though uncertain of the facts that drive Ann to resort to suicide, grabs the opportunity to abolish Ann's reality without acknowledging them first. She erases Ann's original identity, as will be discussed in the exploration of Glaspell's metaphorical images below, which she considers insignificant. And by doing so, Ann becomes one of Katie's possessions and is turned into a commodity. This idea is further intensified with the use of the indefinite article, 'the creation of *an* Ann', which objectifies Ann as it dehumanises her, making her a 'thing'. Giving her a completely new history and background, Katie cancels and erases Verna Woods's old identity and grants her a new one: Ann Forrest.²⁷

²⁶ Susan Glaspell, *The Visioning* (Lexington: Filiquarian Publishing LLC., 1911; 2010), p. 21.

²⁷ The importance of both Verna and Ann's surnames (Woods and Forrest) lies in their symbolic meaning. In Jean C. Cooper's encyclopaedia on traditional symbols, the woods and forest represent unknown mysteries and dangers. They also refer to the 'realm of the psyche and a place of testing and initiation, of the unknown perils

Sociologist Dennis Gilbert's study of white American social structures, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* (2011), explains how the American social structures operate and defines women's social position as determined by the framework of class and its factors: income, wealth, education, and occupation. Adopting a lifestyle similar to that which Gilbert describes in his book, Katie, a member of the upper middle class, maintains a certain lifestyle by which she minimizes 'interaction with outsiders who seem too different (... too poor, too uneducated ...)'.²⁸ Katie's decision to change Verna's identity to Ann is due to her uncertainty of Verna's origin. Yet Katie is certain that whatever background Verna hides, it is one that would not meet the criteria to be accepted in Katie's social circle. This gives Katie another incentive to change Verna's identity before bringing her into her world. Verna is prejudged on the basis of her physical attire, the 'poorly made gown' and 'satin slippers', clothes which belong to a city performer as revealed later in the novel.²⁹ Gilbert also explains that money (income) is one of the variables which distinguish an individual's social rank within a society. Verna's garments act as the material element solidifying Katie's assumptions of the performer's origin; thus Katie's condensation of Ann is clear, '[Verna] had just seemed whirled out of the nowhere into the there'.³⁰ With the making of Ann, Katie places her new creation in the inferior position of being suppressed and controlled. Hence, Katie's control dismantles any form of unity that might unite women from different social classes.

Dissatisfied with such oppressive means of ruling others' lives, Glaspell presents Katie as the oppressive agent to enforce her criticism of power misuse which subjugates

and darkness'. He also notes that the forest is a 'threshold symbol; the soul entering the perils of the unknown to find meaning'. Glaspell's use of Woods and Forrest combines both of Cooper's interpretations since she depicts Ann as foreign and inferior to Katie's world and prestigious social circle. Entering a foreign land, an unexplored realm of dangers and testing, subjects Ann to dangers of upper middle class prejudices. J.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbol* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 71.

²⁸ Dennis Gilbert, 'Social Class in America', in *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 9).

²⁹ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

misfortunate powerless individuals such as Ann. Through the use of poetic analogy, Glaspell portrays oppression in Katie's observation of Ann. She deploys the metaphorical image of a gardener tending his plants to portray Katie's perception of Ann and to emphasize the power relations between Katie and the appositely named Ann Forrest:

The girl was like a flower; a flower, it seemed to Kate, which had not been planted in the right place. The gardener had been unwise in his selection of a place for this flower; perhaps he had not used the right kind of soil, perhaps he had put it in the full heat of the sun when it was a flower to have more shade; perhaps too much wind or too much rain—Katie wondered just what the mistake had been. For the flower would have been so lovely had the gardener not made those mistakes.³¹

The excerpt above portrays Ann as a delicate flower displaced by a male gardener and buffeted by external factors which the gardener subjects the flower to. Believing he knows what is best for the flower, the gardener experiments with soil, sun, wind and rain, nourishing elements of a plant, to control the progression of its growth. Ironically, instead of acting as nurturing elements, the nutrients, misused by the gardener, deny the flower the opportunity to bloom. Not unlike the flower, Ann has no free will of her own as she is subjected to gender discrimination by the imaginary male gardener, and then to class discrimination by Katie.

Katie adopts the role of the gardener because she finds flaws in the original gardener's planting. Her displeasure with the gardener's method echoes Blossom's discontentment with the male gardener in Glaspell's later novel *Ambrose Holt and Family*. Like Katie, Blossom rejects the planter's method of cultivating and arranging the flowers in her garden. As a way of revolting against his technique, Blossom experiments at planting her garden in an

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

‘improper’ manner regardless of the gardener’s disapproval.³² Blossom voices Glaspell’s rebellion against restricting patriarchal social constructs, embodied in the gardener’s flawed planting methods, which in advertently or otherwise encourage the misuse of power.

However, Katie is not very different to the original gardener in both *The Visioning* and *Ambrose Holt and Family*. Her thoughts further reveal her desire to control:

A strange desire entered the heart of Katherine ... She was like the new gardener eager to see whether he can redeem the mistakes of the old. And the new gardener’s zeal is not all for the flower; some of it is to show what he can do, and much of it the true gardener’s passion for experiment.³³

As Katie is an archetypal example of the upper middle class she is eager to use the power of her social rank. She takes on the gardener’s role to override his position and duty and to exert her own control, to supposedly ‘redeem’ his mistakes and his misuse of power.³⁴ The nourishing elements of the plant which the gardener misuses and which Katie later manipulates become symbols of the oppressive system which empowers certain individuals of any gender or class to possess control in displacing women in Ann’s socio-cultural and economic position from active roles in society by hindering their advancement. Katie becomes the cultivator forcing Ann, the flower, to depend on her for survival. As she is blinded by her new role, Katie’s perplexed emotions, a blend of sympathy and authority, emerge as her personal desire to take over the role of the gardener and care for the flower

³² Glaspell also uses another form of nature analogy in ‘A Rose in the Sand’ (1927) to depict the displacement of women in society. Witnessing the growth of a rose in an infertile environment, sand, the story’s protagonist Mrs. Paxton realizes that in order to survive in a constraining society; she must fight for her rights against prevailing social conventions.

³³ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 9.

³⁴ Glaspell’s play *The Verge* is also a good example where she portrays the role of a vexed heartless creator. Claire Archer, the protagonist of the play, experiments with plant breeding to form new species. However, Claire does not create for the sake of creation. Her goal is rather to create plants which break the normal pattern of their species. Unlike Katie, Claire’s power is shown in her ability to destroy plants which conform to the norm. In this instance, Claire’s uses her power of creation to control any defiance of convention.

increases. She thrives at managing the flower's future into blooming for the short while when she takes control of Ann's life.

Katie's stance may seem in itself reflective of her rebellion against abiding strictures of class and gender. However, Glaspell's intention in this scene is quite different. Glaspell uses both the male gardener and Katie to demonstrate the view of an oppressive agent, through gender and class to depict Ann's situation. Ann is suppressed because of the social chains which decrease her chances for personal development. In this instance, Glaspell argues against the stifling of women's growth by male domination and continuous restraining systems, which is caused by society's conservatism and the restrictions it places on women. Her dismay is targeted towards abolishing the perceived inferiority of women and the social bonds which tether them to particular classes.

Another character with Katie's similar socio-economic position is Caroline Osborne, the 'richest and most prominent girl of the vicinity'. Of Gilbert's variables, wealth and power define Caroline's social rank.³⁵ In *The Weekly Outlook* columns, Glaspell targeted and satirized 'society girls', similar to Caroline, whose successes are measured only by the socio-cultural status of their families rather than their own:

A true aristocrat looks little to the past and much to the future ... what our fathers did yesterday reflects small credit on us. It is what we ourselves accomplish today that we are going to be marked by.³⁶

Caroline does not fall into Glaspell's categorization of a 'true aristocrat' because, unlike Glaspell who was an independent woman of her own making, she does not strive for her own

³⁵ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 86.

³⁶ Susan Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897. Also refer to Ben-Zvi's article 'The Political as Personal in the Writing of Susan Glaspell' where she discusses Glaspell's columns in *The Weekly Outlook*. Ben-Zvi, 'The Political as Personal on the Writing of Susan Glaspell', pp. 275-94.

success but rather bases her status on her father's wealth. Caroline's class identification, influenced by her father's social ranking, is the key factor of her attitude towards gender roles. She does not strive to better herself as an individual, an option preferred by Glaspell, because her ultimate goal revolves around pursuing eligible bachelors from her social circle to share the demands of her banal life. Instead of being marked for her accomplishments, she chooses to yield to the social conventions which restrict her role to domesticity in order to maintain the social status afforded her by her father. She did not just revolt against the conventions which impeded women's progress but also revolted against women of Caroline's type who were created by the conditions which led to their suppression and the impediment of their progression.

Glaspell also uses Caroline to show an extreme contrast between the social classes in a scene where the young socialite appears in her automobile:

A few girls were still coming from the candy factory. Miss Osborne's car had crossed the bridge and was speeding toward her beautiful home up the river--just the home for a garden party. The last group of girls, going along very slowly, had to step back for the machine to rush by.

Katie forgot her own grievance in wondering about those girls who had waited for the Osborne car to pass.

She knew where Miss Osborne was going, where and how she lived; she was wondering where the girls not enjoying the breeze always to be found in motoring were going, what they would do when they got there, and what they thought of the efforts to help them "manage better" on their dollar or less a day.³⁷

³⁷ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 89.

In the above excerpt, Glaspell contrasts the image of the rich woman in the automobile with the factory girls walking to their home to assert her socialistic ideas of social inequality and her support for the working class, a clear reaction to the oppressive systems empowering the owning class as portrayed in the text. The image may be read as reflecting Marxist views regarding the differences between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Projected as dehumanized souls trapped in unskilled laborious jobs which exhaust their energy, the proletariat working girls are sharply contrasted to Caroline a ‘popular young society lady’ about to enjoy a garden party.³⁸ A strong critique of capitalist societies is implicit here as Caroline’s wealth is built on the expense of the sufferings of working girls whose lives are spent in factories. The existence of class conflicts results from and is embodied in the underlying disconnection between Caroline and the factory girls. Glaspell illuminates the disparaging inequities of a system which engenders greed, corruption and the injustices meted out to women not unlike herself.

Ironically, in contrast to her image in the above section, Caroline is described by Mrs. Leonard as someone ‘trying to do something for humanity’ while the factory girls, the silent oppressed masses of the working division, are described as ‘trivial ... without souls’.³⁹ Caroline, who thinks it is humane to help the less fortunate, contradicts her worthy impulses by considering the less fortunate as ‘trivial’. The point Glaspell raises here is not based on the usual gender differences, but on women’s class-based assumptions against individuals of their own sex but of a different class. Caroline is an example of women who unwittingly use their social rank and wealth to oppress women of lower ranks. Uplifted by the prestige, power and wealth of her social class, Caroline’s position as the oppressor is obvious. Her subordination of the factory girls hinders their basic needs for social and personal improvement. As a result, the girls’ submission to a higher control immures their social

³⁸ Susan Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 2 January 1897.

³⁹ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 116.

conditions, negatively affects their intellectual development and places them in a position of victimhood.⁴⁰ However, Caroline is also a victim of her own class since, as Ozieblo notes, ‘society stifles [women] of the middle and upper classes, leaving [them] no means of valid self-expression’.⁴¹ Caroline’s only vent of ‘self-expression’ can occur by controlling the lives of working class women, as shown in Section V.3 (Women’s Professional Identity) of this chapter, and in this way she is not only the victim of society but becomes an oppressor of those beneath her in social rank.

Glaspell uses Katie and Caroline’s attempts to control lower class women’s lives as the reason behind the breeding of ‘antagonism, and ... prejudice’ between women of different classes.⁴² Katie and Caroline’s snobbery is a characteristic which Glaspell attacked in her articles:

I wish you would reach out of your own sphere occasionally and become aware that your kind of people are not only the people in the world and that you have rightfully no monopoly upon the good things in life.⁴³

According to Glaspell, the wealthy and the poor would be no different if class and gender inequalities were abolished and if individuals with wealth comprehended that their superiority in terms of wealth and familial background does not give them the right to create and force the conventions of a hierarchical system on those they consider ‘commonplace’.⁴⁴

Glaspell’s promotion of the equality between individuals of all social groups is a critical

⁴⁰ In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill discusses the social injustices women face in their everyday lives due to the patriarchal systems and rules imposed upon them by their male counterparts. Mill argues that both sexes must have equal rights regardless of class and gender. He attacks the subordination of one sex to the other and regards it as a hindrance to human improvement. In her works, Glaspell tackles similar problems to those Mill speaks about in his work. See John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997).

⁴¹ See Ozieblo, ‘Escaping Main Street’, in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 35-61 (pp. 47-8).

⁴² Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 192.

⁴³ Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 2 January 1897.

⁴⁴ Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p. 6.

aspect of her support for socialism. It is also a sign of her discontent with the regulations that force Ann and the working girls' kind to submit to the rules of class division, presenting an important argument against the social and class inequality presented in the area of women's social status.

III.2 Women's Education

Glaspell's life is a case point in the inequalities faced by women in terms of accessing an education, a background she drew upon in the composition of her stories and characters.⁴⁵ We can witness a resemblance between the author and her protagonists in terms of their quest for a decent education. At the turn of the century, most Midwestern girls who wanted post-secondary education were allowed to go to institutions which offered programs focused on preparing women to take up the roles of wives and mothers in society.⁴⁶ Glaspell would have been destined to a similar fate were it not been for her mother Alice who strongly advocated her daughter's education. In her biography of Glaspell, Ben-Zvi notes, 'Susan was the middle child, the only girl sandwiched between two boys, and her education might have been considered less important than that of her brothers had her mother been less determined to foster her daughter's talent'.⁴⁷ Alice encouraged Glaspell to leave Davenport to attend Drake

⁴⁵ Women struggled and fought to receive the same education as men. Anglo-American feminists such as Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft and bell hooks state that the exclusion of women from learning ensured the subordination of women to the private, domestic sphere while men were enabled access to public lives. Other American proponents of education such as Catherine Beecher Stowe, Sarah Josepha Hale and Emma Willard fought for the right of co-education. They believed that women's minds without the intake of knowledge leaves them untrained and undeveloped. Advocating similar views in her stories and articles in *The Weekly Outlook*, Glaspell supported that women must learn, think for themselves and develop their own skills rather than depend on male support because not doing so is an act of empowering inequalities. See Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 March 1897; Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 10 April 1897.

⁴⁶ For more information, see Ben-Zvi, 'Delphic Days', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 35-40 (p. 35).

⁴⁷ Ben-Zvi, 'Families in Fact and Fiction', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 19-28 (p. 24). Alice, too, had wanted a career of her own and was encouraged by her mother who saw marriage as a 'dead end' for Alice's career as a teacher. However, her marriage to Elmer Glaspell destroyed Alice's professional opportunities and trapped her in a world of wifely duty and motherhood. Making sure Susan did not fall into the same trap, Alice encouraged her daughter to finish her studies to become a writer. Glaspell presents Irma Lee's mother in *Fugitive's Return* as a version of Alice. For a more detailed description, see Ben-Zvi, 'Families in Fact and Fiction', pp. 26-7.

University in Des Moines to pursue her education which, certainly by 1890's Iowan standards, was an audacious act.

In addition, Glaspell faced another hardship for a woman pursuing higher degrees of education. Ben-Zvi relates Glaspell's persistence in breaking conventions to pursue her own education

At a time when less than 2 percent of American women attended college, [Glaspell] put herself through Drake University in Des Moines, excelled in male-dominated debate tournaments, wrote for a literary magazine, and did freelance work for newspapers in the Iowa state capital.⁴⁸

Glaspell, with much difficulty, broke free from the socio-cultural restraints of a Midwestern society, fought for her education and pursued a career as a writer. She was constantly attentive to the social and cultural constraints faced by women in their everyday lives, and so used her stories as a way to explore and find possible solutions to the educational predicaments with which she and women like herself were confronted.

Aware of the importance of education as a way of fighting social and class injustices and the difficulties faced in order to receive it, Glaspell never ceased to point out to its significance and this is obvious from her continuing presentation of the matter in her novels.⁴⁹ Addressing upper middle class women in her weekly columns, Glaspell compared the correlation between an impoverished mind and a limited education:

⁴⁸ Ben-Zvi, 'Preface: A Pioneering Life', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. vii-xiv (p. viii).

⁴⁹ Through the characters of Ruth Holland and Annie Morris in *Fidelity* (1915), Brenda Munroe and Ina Gilson in 'Unveiling Brenda' (1916), and Irma Schraeder in *Fugitive's Return*, Glaspell demonstrates the importance of education.

My dear girl you are making an awful mistake in not reading anything. Even though you are very pretty, beauty is short-lived and when your eyes lose their lustre and your cheeks their bloom your nonsensical small talk will seem incongruous and will seize to please.⁵⁰

The character of Katie Wayneworth Jones is an example of the ‘dear girl’ Glaspell addressed back in 1897 and still addresses in 1911, the year *The Visioning* was published. Katie’s hometown is one which nurtures women with an education that fosters religious belief. This regime is strictly censored by authoritative male figures such as Katie’s uncle, the Bishop, who regards the very notion of women’s education as conflicting with the conventional ideals set out for women. The Bishop, for instance, promotes the religious teachings which encourage women to possess good conduct related to Christian beliefs. He regards ‘too much education’ as being one of ‘the dangers of age’.⁵¹ Reverend Saunders, Ann’s father, is another character with similar beliefs to those of the Bishop. He denounces his daughter for having left his ‘God-fearing home’ to work as a performer and satirically criticizes her ‘need to serve God by laughing and dancing’.⁵² To these two male figures, the advancement of women, whether through education or profession, is unfeminine. Glaspell does not attack religion per se, rather individuals with authority who use religion as a method of endorsing social and class inequalities.

Having been in a similar position to her protagonists, it is not surprising that Glaspell included religion and its supporters as stifling factors affecting female lives in *The Visioning*. In Davenport where Glaspell resided, religion ruled the lives of its inhabitants including her family. According to Ozieblo, Glaspell’s ‘parents missed no opportunity to remind their

⁵⁰ Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p. 6.

⁵¹ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 183.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 178-9.

wayward daughter of God and His sacred Word'.⁵³ Similar to the Bishop in *The Visioning* is Glaspell's father Elmer who insisted that his daughter's duty was to serve God in the confinements of her home. He was against her attending Drake University, but due to Glaspell's habit of not conforming to established social patterns and roles and Alice's persistence, Elmer finally yielded to his daughter's choice.⁵⁴

Glaspell's ideas on education are reflected through Katie's persistence on demanding truth, which she sees as accessible through education rather than by merely going to church. When Katie becomes aware of the faulty education she receives in a conversation she has with her brother about her tutor Miss Sisson, she demands to be taught what she has missed. She realizes that the educational system is one that denies the individual the most basic needs. Katie realizes that she is entitled to be properly educated instead of wasting her time in acquiring domestic social skills. And so she resorts to Alan Mann, a lower class labourer with unorthodox views on life, not only to enrich her knowledge but to fill in the gaps of her faulty education.

Alan's character and ideas reflect George Cram Cook and the views of the Monist Society which Glaspell attended in 1907.⁵⁵ Cook was very much influenced by socialist views, as well as the works of Nietzsche and Darwin.⁵⁶ In *The Road of the Temple*, Glaspell quotes Cook's words: 'Into what new and at first terrible environment do inspired men like Nietzsche, insane with truth, plunge and return grasping? ... The Nietzsches know the danger,

⁵³ Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', pp. 13-4.

⁵⁴ Even though Alice was more religious in her beliefs than Elmer, it was she who insisted that Glaspell continue her education. Alice wanted to ensure that Glaspell did not fall in the traps of marital institution as she did.

⁵⁵ Glaspell joined the Monist Society, 'a new free-thought society', devoted to the expression of liberal and progressive ideas. In *The Road of the Temple*, Glaspell explains that the society was a group that helped 'a strangely assorted group' of people with different backgrounds, thoughts and religions: 'fearless clubwomen', 'free-thinking Germans', 'disappointed politicians', 'young people' and 'lonely souls' 'find their own, for they had not found their own in Davenport'. These people rejected conventional beliefs as they contradicted their intellectual convictions. Glaspell, 'The Monist Society', pp. 192-3.

⁵⁶ Glaspell first met Cook in the Monist Society. He helped her discover a new way of presenting contemporary issues in a more realistic sense. He was against what he perceived as Glaspell's medieval-romantic views specifically those projected in her first novel *The Glory of the Conquered; A Story of Great Love* (1909) which he regarded as superficial.

yet go, and perish'.⁵⁷ Cook believed that ancient thinkers before him sacrificed their time and efforts to search for the truth and his life's conquest was to follow their footsteps in reaching truths that would bring more justice and equality to the world he lived in. Similar to the way Cook influenced Glaspell, Alan influences Katie. Like Cook, Alan pursues political truth and encourages Katie to do the same. He sends her three books: one on working women in factories, one on Darwin's theory of evolution, and another on socialism. The books instigate Katie's doubts regarding the system by which her class controls the lives of the less privileged. She becomes aware of the limitations of her thought and experience and begins to yearn to switch positions with educated individuals. In some ways, Katie reflects Glaspell's experience since both are exposed to an environment which raises their awareness of the political issues of their environment via the intellectuals and thinkers around them.

As a result of reading the books Alan provides, Katie becomes 'conscious of [her] chains'.⁵⁸ These chains allegedly protect Katie from what society regards as the 'wicked world.' However, for Katie, safety 'ha[s] always shielded [her] from life. And now she was beginning to feel that that same shielding had kept her from knowledge of life, understanding of it'.⁵⁹ She believes her interest in 'dangerous' education will allow her to appreciate the grimness of women's realities across all classes and perhaps enable her to move toward a role of social activist or instigator of change. Her initial home education inhibits her from doing '... anything real ... [or] anything that counted'.⁶⁰

Katie's safety from the outer world equates with ignorance and a deprivation of knowledge, and her 'so-called dangerous education' is the pathway to experience and self-achievement. However Katie's mother's friend, Mrs. Prescott, does not agree with the idea of knowledge as a redemptive salve to ignorance. She believes that an unmarried woman should

⁵⁷ Glaspell, 'The Monist Society', pp. 197-8.

⁵⁸ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 154.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

not read ‘strange books’ such as Walt Whitman’s volumes as this would direct her toward an ‘unsuitable’ path. Glaspell invocation of Whitman as an example of ‘dangerous literature’ is interesting as the poet was a lifetime supporter of suffrage.⁶¹ Whitman is best known for his most prominent work *Leaves of Grass* (1855) which was famous for his celebration of the self, a self which was able to access certain kinds of metaphysical and transcendental truths; Indeed, his conflation of the self with America and his democratic poetry was sympathetic to women.⁶² He celebrates the different roles of women and women who defied the societal conventions of the nineteenth century such as Margaret Fuller, Frances Wright, George Sand, and Delia Bacon.⁶³ In his prose work ‘A Memorandum at Venture’ (1892), he argued that the ‘current prurient, conventional treatment of sex is the main formidable obstacle’ to women’s progression in politics, business, and social life.⁶⁴ Whitman’s concept of a ‘true woman’ is similar to Glaspell’s; they both see the ‘true woman’ as different from the stereotypically submissive, dutiful Victorian woman.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See Helena Born, ‘Whitman’s Ideal Democracy’, in *Whitman’s Ideal Democracy and Other Writings*, ed. by Helen Tufts (Boston: Everett Press, 1902), pp. 3-19 (pp. 9-10).

⁶² In a letter to Horace Traubel, Whitman declares that *Leaves of Grass* is a woman’s book even though women are not aware of it; ‘it speaks out the necessities, its cry is the cry of the right and wrong of the woman sex – of the woman first of all of the feminine: speaks out loud, warns, encourages, persuades, points the way’. See Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, ed. by Sculley Bradley, IV (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), p. 188.

⁶³ In 1830, at the age of eleven, Whitman completed his formal education and relied mostly on self-education. His interest in women’s rights originated from hearing lectures by Frances Wright, the Scottish radical emancipationist and women’s rights advocate. Later on in 1855, he became acquainted with a number of women’s rights activists and writers, Abby Price, Paulina Wright Davis Sarah Tyndale and Sara Payson Willis (Fanny Fern), who were supporters of *Leaves of Grass*. These women’s radical ideas about sexual inequality influenced Whitman’s poetry. In addition, early twentieth century feminist writers such as Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edith Wharton admired Whitman’s work for promoting equality between men and women and for his views on women and his vision of comradeship which is based on mutuality and equality. Glaspell was similarly influenced by Whitman. Oscar Lovell Triggs, a widely known scholar, introduced Glaspell with the founding information on Whitman’s ideas in one of the postgraduate courses he taught and which Glaspell attended in the University of Chicago in 1902. In addition, Whitman was regarded as an important figure to bohemian intellectuals of the time and accordingly Glaspell was affected by his ideas. See Ben-Zvi, ‘Chicago’, in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 53-60 (p. 54).

⁶⁴ Walt Whitman, ‘A Memorandum at a Venture’, in *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: D. McKay, 1892), pp. 409-15.

⁶⁵ For more information regarding Whitman’s perception on ‘true women’, refer to Sherry Ceniza, ‘Introduction’, in *Walt Whitman and 19th Century Women Reformers* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), pp. 1-9 (p. 1).

Mrs. Prescott, a conventional Victorian woman, categorizes Whitman as ‘dangerous’ because, according to her beliefs, he imposes danger on young women. Her thoughts express such a view:

She wished Katie would not read such strange books; she was sure Walt Whitman, for one, could not be a good influence. What would happen to the world if the women of Katie’s class were to—let down the bars . . . And she was too fond of Katie to want her to venture out of shelter’.⁶⁶

It is evident that Mrs. Prescott wants Katie to remain within the ‘protective’ shelter, the imprisoning censorious bars. The books on socialism, Darwinism and working women which Mrs. Prescott refers to as strange ‘endanger’ Katie’s mentality as they expose her to new channels and ideas. Mrs. Prescott represents late nineteenth century anti-feminists who fought against equalizing women’s education with that of men. Such individuals claimed that women did not have the same mental abilities as the opposite sex, and advocated the Victorian conviction of women belonging in the home and educated for domestic work.⁶⁷ Glaspell implicitly criticizes Mrs. Prescott’s beliefs for their rigidity. Mrs. Prescott rejects the advancement of women because she fears the changes promised by the emancipation of

⁶⁶ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 231.

⁶⁷ Edward H. Clarke in *Sex in Education* (1873) argued that women’s education was dangerous and only hazardous to women’s health and reproductive capacity. His book greatly influenced social views at the time it was published by stimulating disputes about women’s education. See Edward H. Clarke, *Sex in Education; or, a Fair Chance for the Girls* (Boston: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1873). Also, in the late nineteenth century, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell initiated the ‘Rest Cure’ treatment, claiming that women should not use their mental capacity except in household matters to ensure the safety of their psychological health. The ‘rest cure’ promoted bed rest for women who took part in expressing unconventional thoughts or unsuitable ideas in order not to exhaust the mental abilities of women. Mitchell used his treatment on famous women authors such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf who later criticized and ridiculed the doctor’s methodology. See Sally Haslanger, ‘Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?’, *Noûs*, 34 (2000), 31-55; Suzanne Poirier, ‘The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctors and Patients’, *Women’s Studies*, 10 (1983), 15-40.

women as they may disrupt socio-cultural norms. To her and the society in which she lives, a woman who is educated will not be fit for the designated role of woman.⁶⁸

As events proceed, Katie conveys her resentment at the home education she receives. In a conversation with her brother Wayne, she asks:

When doctors or lawyers don't do things right can't you sue them and get your money back? Why can't you do the same thing with educators? I'm going to enter suit against Miss Sisson. This unchristian editor says modern education is dangerous.⁶⁹

Two significant points must be noted in Katie's remarks regarding her education: the first is how she equates the importance of educators to that of doctors and lawyers; the second is her attack on Miss Sisson by calling her an 'unchristian editor'. In the first point, Glaspell embeds the comparison between the three professions in Katie's interrogations regarding Miss Sisson's teachings. Doctors and lawyers' occupations are critical as both professions control the lives and futures of individuals. Professionally ethical doctors are responsible for the possibility of elongating life with the help of medicine and surgery. If ethics are excluded from their intentions, doctors treat patients inhumanely. Lawyers' jobs are also ethical in nature in terms of the pursuit of justice and truth. Without the moral code of the lawyers' oath, lawyers could become advocates of injustice, discrimination and inequality. Katie's words imply that educators are similar to doctors and lawyers since they attempt to eliminate ignorance and pass on truths which are vital to humanity. It is because of educators that an individual's intellect is nourished and the personal development of individuals and social progress can occur. The censorship of knowledge is a form of injustice as individuals are not

⁶⁸ Ben-Zvi mentions that Glaspell suggests 'that freedom from social pressures is possible and young women can have some options if they educate themselves. ... Glaspell's advice on education is more practical than parodic; if young women read they will be better companions and more popular'. Ben-Zvi, 'The Political as Personal on the Writing of Susan Glaspell', pp. 277-8.

⁶⁹ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 79.

given their full right to the pathway of learning. According to Katie, Miss Sisson fails as an educator because she does not teach Katie about ‘modern education [which] is dangerous.’ She says, ‘there was no danger in the course at Miss Sisson’s’.⁷⁰ Instead of healing and nurturing like a doctor, and reaching the truth like a lawyer, Miss Sisson the educator does the opposite. She impairs and paralyzes Katie’s mind by preventing it from experiencing independence of thought or to question convention.

In the second point, Glaspell’s views of home educators are resounded articulated through Katie’s protests against Miss Sisson’s method of teaching. Glaspell does not object to home educators per se, she objects to teachers who do not do their job properly. Katie’s description of Miss Sisson as an ‘unchristian editor’ is striking.⁷¹ The word ‘unchristian’ is synonymous with what opposes Christian values of benevolence, kindness and generosity. Thus, Katie’s labelling of Miss Sisson as an ‘unchristian editor’ denotes an unkind and uncharitable editor who modifies, eliminates and assembles information according to her preference or according to rules and conventions. Miss Sisson denies Katie the sophistication exhibited in what Katie calls ‘modern education’ and excises any possibility for Katie’s intellectual progression. And since Miss Sisson opposes ‘modern education’, she is considered ignorant and her mind is confined by societal conventions.⁷² Holding the power of censorship an editor does, Miss Sisson hinders Katie’s intellectual development. Instead of enriching Katie’s knowledge with facts and truth, Miss Sisson chooses to censor the amount and kind of information she passes on to Katie, undoubtedly providing an education which

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ In *Fidelity*, Glaspell presents another home tutor, Miss Collins. She is described as a symbol of ‘polite learning’ who avoids ‘the remotest danger of an education which might bring about the ‘unfeminizing [of] a girl.’ The censored education she provides Ruth, the protagonist of the story, narrows Ruth’s chances at developing intellectually. See Susan Glaspell, *Fidelity; a Novel* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1915), pp. 40-41.

⁷² Catherine Beecher Stowe, Emma Willard and Sarah Josepha Hale were nineteenth century activists who advocated the necessity of equalizing female education to that of men as a way to advance women’s practical and intellectual abilities. Even though Glaspell does not deal directly with male education in depth in *The Visioning* (1911), she greatly emphasizes that the mediocrity of women’s education is due to the dominating patriarchal system.

coincides with social conventions, such as singing and painting.⁷³ As a result, Katie feels cheated of her right to a ‘real’ education and her discontentment with ‘safe education’ resembles Glaspell’s dissatisfaction with Davenport’s schooling.

‘Modern education’, for Katie, pertains to her contemporary intellectual culture, in which progressive thoughts would have been espoused. For Katie, a truly ‘modern education’ is uncensored and bold. Miss Sisson practices the opposite of what ‘modern education’ represents. Trained and modelled by educators before her, she blindly serves old-fashioned ideals and follows the ideas which reject modernity. Miss Sisson is but a mere follower of an outdated education, an enforcer set on maintaining archaic Victorian standards. For such educators, women’s education should serve the purpose of domesticity. It should not enlighten women to the possibility of holding better jobs or social positions that might bring them into a more equal social and professional standing with men or expose them to the inequality and oppression forced upon them due to the nature of their the gender.⁷⁴

In contrast to the limited education Katie receives, Glaspell shows readers the benefits a good education can provide through the success of Helen, Katie’s cousin Fred’s fiancée. Katie’s foil character, Helen never appears in the novel and her absence, which is strongly felt by other characters, somehow fuels the events of the narrative.⁷⁵ Helen’s profession as a women’s suffrage advocator strongly vocalizes Glaspell’s conviction in pursuing women’s rights by grounding equality on the individual’s capabilities rather than his/her sex. Helen’s absence emphasizes the scarcity of strong independent women fighting for social equality.

⁷³ Margaret Nash notes that middle class women’s perceived weakness was simply the product of ‘mis-education’ as they were limited to the simple essentials of basic literacy, domestic skills, and accomplishments of music and painting. Glaspell portrays this reality through Katie’s education which was very limited to conventional standards. See Margaret Nash, *Women’s Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005).

⁷⁴ Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) advances the same argument, albeit to a later context, when she asserts: ‘So the sex-directed educator promotes a girl’s adjustment by dissuading her from any but the “normal” commitment to marriage and family’. See Betty Friedan, ‘The Sex-Directed Educators’, in *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 132-59 (p. 149).

⁷⁵ Glaspell’s use of the absent character is discussed in depth Chapters Three and Four as a technique of strength and power.

Glaspell portrays the dearth of such female activists through Helen's absence in *The Visioning*.

Unlike Katie, Helen is assertive in her beliefs and original in her thinking. She does not pay considerable amounts of money to tutors who curb her intellectual ability. Fred describes her as one who rather believes 'that in ... education the more you pay the less you get', and this belief emphasizes Katie's defected education.⁷⁶ Having no innate intellectual curiosity, Katie is accustomed to receiving education without questioning its truth and is unaware of progressive modern education. In contrast, Helen is the exemplar of 'modern education'. She is interested in and 'mad' about Walt Whitman, the 'dangerous' knowledge of which Katie is deprived. As described by Ann, Helen is someone with 'strange ideas about things', who is not 'afraid of anything and wants do such a lot of things to the world'.⁷⁷

Similar to Glaspell, Helen is an ardent supporter of gender equality with regards to the educational and professional areas of women's lives. She is a dynamic and evolving image of the progressive new woman, an example of whom Gail Finney describes as 'a literary type which flourished ... in Victorian fiction of the 1890s' who 'typically values self-fulfillment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice' often choosing to work for a living.⁷⁸ 'Although not necessarily a woman suffragist, she is likely to be more interested in politics than the conventional woman'.⁷⁹ She is considered an outsider by the standards of Government Island, but she is the only female in *The Visioning* who 'silently' voices private fulfillment through both her work and education.⁸⁰ Her education and new ideas release her from the old patterns of her culture and, as Carpentier notes, Helen

⁷⁶ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 74.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁷⁸ Gail Finney, 'Ibsen and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. by James McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 89-105 (p. 95).

⁷⁹ Gail Finney, 'The New Woman as Madonna: Shaw *Candida*', in *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 187-206 (pp. 195-6).

⁸⁰ The technique of the absent character is discussed in Chapters Three and Four in relation to the thematic concerns of voice and silence.

fights ‘to preserve in herself that quality long thought to be inherently male – an active, intellectual mind’.⁸¹ Similarly, for Glaspell, an intellectual mind is not synonymous with masculinity.

III.3 Women’s Professional Identity

In *The Visioning* Glaspell focuses on a final area, women’s professional identity, in which she attacks class and gender inequality. As mentioned, Gilbert’s study of American social tiers shows that occupations are associated with social class since an individual’s occupation indicates three variables of class levels: social status, education and income.⁸² Based on the previous section, it has been established that given the poverty of their education, representatives of early twentieth century American women in *The Visioning* were relegated to domesticity and factory jobs. Glaspell presents these women as experiencing different professional limitations and work impediments which women were subjected to at the time to add to the understanding of women’s employment discrimination.⁸³

Glaspell projects upper middle class Midwestern women as confined to supervising domestic chores to maintain their social prestige, a variable of class. Katie and Caroline never experience autonomy. These wealthy women are shown as analogous to some Victorian women whose designated roles are to manage the household, get married and engage only in charitable work. Enjoying a life of luxury dependent upon their parents’ wealth, Katie and Caroline’s roles are limited to party-going and social mingling and they are blind to any opportunity outside the contours of their community’s social circle. Katie’s duties of

⁸¹ Martha C. Carpentier, ‘Susan Glaspell’s Fiction: *Fidelity* as American Romance’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 40 (1994), 92-113 (p. 110).

⁸² See Gilbert, ‘Position and Prestige’, in *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*, pp. 21-39 (p. 35).

⁸³ In other stories such as ‘The Girl From Down-Town’ (1903), ‘From A to Z’ (1909), *Fidelity* and *Brook Evans*, Glaspell represents women holding different professional positions such as department clerks, a writer in a publishing house, farmers and housewives. The diverse nature of these women’s jobs depends on their class ranking and geographical locations.

managing her domestic chores are further lessened as her housemaid Nora does the actual work. Carpentier describes upper middle class life at the turn of the century as ‘superficial and limited for women, who are protected from working by servants and whose lives are expected to revolve around socializing’.⁸⁴ Katie’s life resembles such a life as her servant Nora runs the household, cleans the house, tends to Katie’s nephew and administers social events, all under the supervision of Katie. While Nora does the actual labour work, Katie’s role is unproductive and minimal.

Caroline, too, is portrayed as a non-working woman, yet her role differs from Katie as she is described as spending her time on charity parties held for the ‘the lower class of working girls, who are in factories’.⁸⁵ We find Caroline adopting the role of the philanthropist, seemingly preoccupied by the best interests of the working girls employed in her father’s candy factory. Caroline’s application of philanthropic work is a case in question. Charity work should be exerted to provide help to sufferers, who in this instance are the working girls in the factory, yet Caroline’s generous events do not aid the working girls as such (proven by the fact that one of the working girls commits suicide, a point discussed later in this section). Denouncing spoiled rich women who oppress the lower classes, Glaspell wrote in *The Weekly Outlook*:

Do not be too pleased with yourselves. You are not superior in your individuality. It is only that fortune has favored you with worldly things. Your position gives you so many opportunities and you utilize almost none of them.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Carpentier, ‘Susan Glaspell’s Fiction: *Fidelity* as American Romance’, p. 106.

⁸⁵ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, pp. 88-89.

⁸⁶ Susan Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p. 6.

Glaspell attacks the snobbish traits of society girls such as Caroline. Her empathy is directed at women who are excluded from society just because they do not belong to the social elites such as the factory girls presented in *The Visioning*.

Ben-Zvi asserts that ‘Glaspell was aware that class differences may prove formidable obstacles to reaching out to other people, something she was [*sic*] knew personally because of her family’s position in Davenport, outside the elite circles’.⁸⁷ This observation reflects Caroline’s attitude towards the working girls as she takes the position of the authoritative manager. Similar to that of the managerial women characters in ‘The Rules of The Institution’ discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Caroline’s role is marked by her managing the woman’s club devoted to the workers in her father’s candy factory. Caroline unjustly denies the working girls any chance of bettering their socio-cultural and economic status in society as she is not shown to eradicate their problems or improve their harsh condition. Caroline’s implementation of the charity work is more of an excuse for delaying true remedies to their troubles. Her imperfect attempt to lessen their misery is obscured by her superficial working girls’ club.

Glaspell’s use of the candy factory as an example of a capitalistic setting is influenced by Floyd Dell’s articles which describe the inside view of industrial settings he worked for and suffered from as a labourer.⁸⁸ Glaspell’s deployment of the rhetoric of socialism in her fiction resembles and is influenced by Dell’s motive to expose the injustices occurring in factories.⁸⁹ Glaspell’s utilizes the candy factory as a realistic example portraying the tyranny of a capitalistic location. It is important to note that Glaspell does not present her wealthier characters as villains. Indeed, they too are victims insofar as they are blind to the reality of their situation, ignorant of forces that keep them at the top while others labour. Caroline herself does not support a capitalistic system; she simply lives her life within it. She has been

⁸⁷ Ben-Zvi, ‘The Political as Personal on the Writing of Susan Glaspell’, p. 279.

⁸⁸ Floyd Dell, ‘A Candy Factory from the Inside’, *Tri-City Workers Magazine 1*, January 1906, pp. 17-20.

⁸⁹ See footnote 5, page 26 for more information on Dell’s sense of injustices of factory work.

fortunate enough to be born into wealth. Locked within the system, Caroline does not control it. However, it works to her benefit at the expense of the less fortunate. She is given power as she owns the factories which not only exploit the working young women's labour but the women themselves. She compels the female factory labourers to engage in activities contrary to their interests or needs by 'organizing [a] girls' club'.⁹⁰ She explains to her peers that the club aids her female employees to manage their salaries more efficiently, 'the experienced and the skilful [make] a dollar' a day while 'the least experienced and skilful' make fifty cents'.⁹¹ She does not understand that because their jobs are poorly paid and devoid of benefits, the working girls' lives are marked by instability. As Gilbert explains, working women are dependent on their jobs to survive and so yield to employment at very 'low-skill, low-wage [and] often insecure jobs'.⁹²

Glaspell's depictions of the proletariat are based on her knowledge of the happenings of the union of Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) founded in 1905.⁹³ Certainly, she seems to be influenced by Marxist ideas about unifying and uplifting the conditions of the working classes. In *The Visioning*, the working girls sell their labour power at minimal wages for factory owners such as Caroline's father.⁹⁴ Here, Glaspell mirrors the reality of women

⁹⁰ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 88.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gilbert, 'Social Class, Occupation, and Social Change', in *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*, pp. 1-19 (p. 47). Gilbert's study also shows that 'the working conditions and wages offered America's expanding working class were often dismal'. In addition, an article presented by the *Women's International Center* describes examples of the poor environments early twentieth century women worked in. It states that women 'work[ed] outside their homes in large numbers, notably in textile mills and garment shops. In poorly ventilated, crowded rooms women ... worked for as long as 12 hours a day [and] were limited to factory labor or domestic work.' Glaspell clearly uses similar depictions in *The Visioning* to show that's women were not allowed to work in professions which require individual 'intellectual development'. See 'Women's History in America', *Women's International Center*, (Compton's NewMedia, Inc., 1994). <<http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm>> [accessed 3 April 2013].

⁹³ Glaspell was exposed to the happenings of the IWW through the Liberal Club which held meetings on the occurrences of the Wobblies. She also was in acquaintance with IWW activists such as Big Bill Haywood, Joe O'Carroll, Fred Boyd and Baynard Boyesen some of whom were members of the Provincetown Players which she and George Cram Cook founded in the summer of 1913. See Ben-Zvi, 'War and Peace', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 145-52, p. 148.

⁹⁴ Glaspell stresses the idea of the exploitation of women as cheap labour, echoing Marx's theories which explain the moral degradation, physical deterioration and intellectual desolation of women workers in *Capital* (1867-1894). See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital Vol. I* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965).

labouring in what Gilbert calls ‘pink-collar fields that are almost entirely female’ which offer ‘lower wages, less prestige, and slimmer opportunities for advancement’ to stress on the oppressive conditions which women worked under.⁹⁵ Though influenced by Marxist thinking, Glaspell does not overtly promote Marx’s dogma of a classless society or a society where the proletariat triumphs by overpowering the ruling class. Rather, she believes in and advocates the simple belief of human rights, the establishment of freedom for workers, and the attainment of equality for all members of society. Focusing on women’s professional identity, Glaspell draws attention to the necessity of freedom. Her support for socialism as a reforming movement is a natural reaction she adopts in *The Visioning* to portray the possibility of a better life with more freedom, justice and opportunities against the brutality of the owning classes.

Echoing Glaspell’s sentiments, Ann attacks Caroline for presuming that giving a ‘garden party’ and organizing a ‘working girls’ club’ can better the lives of the underprivileged girls.⁹⁶ Her bitter retort, ‘that [it] is surely a splendid thing helping a girl to “manage better” on fifty cents a day!’ expresses her anger at Caroline’s ignorance.⁹⁷ She exposes Caroline’s true intention behind helping the working girls, ‘they help [her] – pass the time’.⁹⁸ Caroline’s ‘so-called profession’ reflects Glaspell’s low opinion regarding the barren lives and wasted times of the upper middle classes. Glaspell wrote in a weekly column that improving one’s education is important and that young women should ‘take an hour or two every day to read’.⁹⁹ Instead of immersing themselves in jobs that might add to their intellectual development, Caroline and her ilk, who reflect Glaspell’s society’s upper middle

⁹⁵ See Gilbert, ‘Social Class in America’, pp. 14-15; Gilbert, ‘Social Class, Occupation, and Social Change’, pp. 47, 56-7.

⁹⁶ In Chapter Two, I discuss the origination of women’s clubs at the beginning of the twentieth in the United States and how Glaspell portrays this reality in ‘The Rules of Institution’. My discussion includes Glaspell’s criticism of women’s groups, some of which she has been a member of, and how some of these groups stifle women’s advancement.

⁹⁷ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 89.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Susan Glaspell, ‘Social Life’, *The Weekly Outlook*, 10 April 1897.

class girls, take part in subtly tyrannizing the lower sect. Ann does not attack Caroline directly, but the social conventions that allow Caroline to think that helping women live on a dollar or fifty cents is philanthropic and not just another form of class and gender oppression.

Suicide is mentioned a second time in the novel when one of Caroline's factory girls kills herself. In a letter to her colleague, the girl explains that 'she was tired of things ... tired of not having any fun ... Tired of walking down the same street'.¹⁰⁰ Like Ann, the factory girl is unable to tolerate the injustices and prejudices of the rich and so chooses to end her life. The girl finds that her monotonous life is destined for only one direction, 'walking down the same street'. Her professional opportunities and career successes and most probably her personal happiness are determined by her class position.

According to Caroline Hymowitz and Michelle Weissman, in the beginning of the twentieth century, many women worked in factories and suffered from working long hours (around ten-to-twelve-hours a day) 'in dimly lit rooms that were stuffy hot in summer, cold and drafty in winter'.¹⁰¹ Glaspell reflects this realistic scene in her description of the nature of the factory girl's job. The nameless factory girl is exhausted by a system that abuses her human power and, because of her poor financial condition, the girl is left with no choice but to continue on a path which enforces injustice upon her. Her job at the factory does not enrich her intellectually or challenge her and so her chance of a different life is far-fetched. The girl's suicide may be seen as a sign of rebellion against the unsatisfying, mindless, repetitive factory labour she performs, or perhaps an escape from a life of empty monotony. The job is another controlling agent that structures and limits her ideas, making it impossible for her to

¹⁰⁰ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 116.

¹⁰¹ In addition to the long hours spent in factories and mills 'that were dusty, noisy, dark, smelly, and dangerous', women and children, in large numbers jammed together, were subject to accidents as the environment of the industrial field was dangerous... [Also,] women's unskilled work never provided them with a living wage. The piece-rate system, combined with the sex division of jobs, made women the cheapest pool of workers in the labor force. Studies of working women in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries show that women received one-half to one-third the wages of working men'. See Caroline Hymowitz and Michelle Weissman, 'Industralization and Urbanization: Bread and Roses', in *A History of Women in America* (New York: Bantam, 1978), pp. 234-65 (p. 239).

imagine any goal other than surviving on the low wages she earns. The mental and physical exhaustion she undergoes because of the strenuous job at the factory wears her spirits. As a result, she yields to suicide as a last resort to voice her despair and to end her misery.¹⁰²

The factory owners and their circle do not sympathize with the girl's situation. Instead, Mrs. Leonard, the colonel's wife, empathizes with Caroline noting, 'Such a shocking thing has occurred. One of the girls at the candy factory - - you know [Caroline's] trying so hard to help them - - has committed suicide'.¹⁰³ She is oblivious to what might have caused the girl's doom. In this episode, Glaspell echoes Dell's argument, which he expressed in his article 'Why People Go to Brick Munro's' (1906), in Wayne's remark that 'not having fun' was 'one of the best reasons [he] can think of' for ending one's life'.¹⁰⁴ In the essay, Dell explains that the reason men and women of the working class need to 'have fun' is to escape the weariness of a life as exploited labourers.¹⁰⁵ Similar to Dell and emphasizing Glaspell's socialistic views, Wayne defends the girl who commits suicide, articulating the right for any individual to live a life where their personal nourishment is practiced and allowed. Wayne is scorned by his social circle for his socialistic defence which they find repulsive. Mrs. Leonard exclaims her dismay at Wayne for 'putting up any defense for a girl who kills herself' and further demeans the lower class, describing it as 'that class', 'people like that', 'so trivial - - so without souls' because she is antipathetic to the idea and necessity of basic human rights.¹⁰⁶ They do not believe that an individual such as the factory girl has the right to

¹⁰² Sharon E. Wood comments that Dell's article 'Why People Go to Brick Munro's' explains working girls' desperation in wanting to find meaning in their lives. Their only resort is dancing halls a place where they seek marriage opportunities (this idea will be further explored in Chapter Two) while some resort to suicide as depicted in *The Visioning*. See Sharon E. Wood, 'Susan Glaspell and the Politics of Sexuality', in *Red Badges of Courage: Wars and Conflicts in American Culture*, ed. by Ugo Rubeo and Anna Scacchi Biancamarie Pisapia (Rome: Bulzoni, 1998), pp. 315-20 (p. 319).

¹⁰³ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁵ See Floyd Dell, 'Why People Go to Brick Munro's: The Worst Place in Davenport Described and Analyzed', *Tri-City Workers Magazine I*, September 1906, pp. 1-4.

¹⁰⁶ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 116.

adjust her social position to accord with her own convictions, in this case bettering her opportunities in life.

Away from the Midwest, Glaspell uses another location, Chicago, to portray the objectification of women in the workplace when Katie visits a telephone office in Chicago. She presents young women working in call centres transferring telephone calls. These places, where women are denied the opportunity to think and develop, are referred to as ‘disciplined occupations’ in the novel because they restrict, control and curtail women’s thinking.¹⁰⁷ The women are shown as slaves to an impersonal and inhuman machine built by man.¹⁰⁸ As she follows the male office supervisor, Katie’s thoughts are revealed through her observation of the nature of routine jobs:

... several hundred girls were sitting before the boards They walked behind a long row, their guide proudly calling attention to the fact that not one of those girls turned her head to look at them. He called it discipline - - concentration. Katie, looking at the tense faces, was thinking of the price paid for that discipline. Many of the girls were very young, some not more than sixteen. They preferred taking them young, said the guide; they were easier to break in if they had never done anything else.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Women activists from both sides of the Atlantic, Marion Reid, Harriet Mill and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were some of those who fought against the regulations that forced women to work in ‘the worst jobs’ which prevented them from having ‘a real opportunity to earn an independent living’. Laws banned women from holding jobs, particularly supervisory positions. It was not until the 1960s when several federal laws, such as The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and The Civil Rights Act of 1964, improved the economic status of women and prohibited discrimination against women on the basis of their sex. Glaspell portrays an example of the ‘worst jobs’ as ‘disciplined occupations’ in the young women working for call centres. See Susan Ferguson, ‘Foreword’, in *A Plea for Women by Marion Reid* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1988), pp. v-viii (p. vii). Also see Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1898).

¹⁰⁸ See Allen W. Wood, ‘Alienation and Capitalism’, in *Karl Marx: Arguments of the Philosophies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 44-60 (p. 49).

¹⁰⁹ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 164.

The mechanistic nature of the women's work seems to erase their intellectual potential, cancelling out any use of their minds.¹¹⁰ These girls are required to give an accurate performance, be obedient to a rigid, hierarchical structure and ensure constant and effective productivity as if they were operating a conveyor belt. Working in silence, they perform the same monotonous task without verbal interactions and presumably without thought.¹¹¹ In addition, women were taken young - as the male 'official' indirectly explains to Katie that the working girls are trained to be submissive. Women are symbolized as trained animals, 'broken in' and spiritually crushed to become accustomed to inferior treatment and become automatised cogs in a great capitalist machine. In the capitalist system, human labour is commodified – turned into property. The female telephone operators in Chicago echo Glaspell's previous portrayal of the factory girls on the island. Their strength and capacity diminish, and so their struggle for their rights ceases to exist because of the hegemonic system in which they are enslaved.

Stretch remarks that '... working women in the capitalist system force [Katie] to examine and eventually reject many of the standards of gender ideology and class allegiance upon which her own sense of self rests'.¹¹² Katie's realization of the girls' constraining working conditions wakes her up to the reality that her world is different to the working girls and Ann's world. After personally seeing the young women in the workplace, Katie realizes that they experience the damage of class discrimination with minimal chance of progression. In this instance, the downwardly mobile mass of the working sector provides Katie with

¹¹⁰ According to Donald M. Fisk, 19 percent of working age women in the 1900s participated in the labour force; 1 percent as lawyers and 6 percent as physicians. Hence, around 12 percent worked in 'disciplined' jobs, such as factory and domestic jobs. Women found difficulties working in certain types of employment that were mainly open to men, so they settled for less intellectual occupations. See Donald M. Fisk, 'American Labor in the 20th Century', *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, (2003) <<http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/cwc/american-labor-in-the-20th-century.pdf>> [accessed 30 March 2015].

¹¹¹ Marx comments on the labour of women as 'the first thing sought for by capitalists'. He sees the capitalist system as considering women workers as an easy source of cheap labour especially in industrial jobs that do not require much intellectual capability. Though the employment of women may be considered a progressive development as it liberated them from the narrow confinements of the home, still women workers remain the most exploited and oppressed section of the proletariat. See Marx and Engels, p. 268.

¹¹² Stretch, p. 232.

insights into the reality of, her own life, the life of a young woman of the leisure class whom Glaspell pities in many of her articles. Katie's idealistic misconception of 'one world' is erased in Chicago and her 'democratic view of things' is destroyed as she is exposed to the double standards of her society, one which cultivates actions of social and class inequality.¹¹³

Katie's exposure to the undemocratic principles of life which divide her class from the working sector expands when she discovers Ann's origin. Upon Ann's disappearance at the end of the story, Katie visits Ann's father, Reverend Saunders, in search of her friend. Reverend Saunders reveals that Ann's real name is in fact Maria and that Verna Woods is her professional name. Maria's name, of course, connotes the Virgin Mary and under her father's sheltered God-fearing home, Maria is the obedient young woman abiding by the Christian codes of conduct of chastity, obedience and moral purity. However, when Maria runs away and she changes her name to Verna Woods she changes from the submissive Christian daughter to a city theatre performer.

Sharon Wood raises an interesting point about the possibility of Verna Woods being based on a local Davenport brothel keeper called 'Woods'. Wood observes that if this is not coincidental then this is the first time that Glaspell draws upon and reimagines an actual personage in her fiction. Wood's claim here is contentious because Glaspell uses actual personages elsewhere (*Alison's House* (1930) and *The Verge*).¹¹⁴ However, what is possibly more interesting, from my perspective at least, is the connotation of the contrast between the names 'Maria' and 'Woods' – the former suggesting a mythical moral purity and the latter an actual 'fallen woman'. Here, Maria/Verna/Ann embodies both. There is no 'either/or' and this is interesting as it complicates visions of women's sexuality (neither the virgin nor the

¹¹³ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 90.

¹¹⁴ Inspired by the life of Emily Dickinson, Glaspell's based *Alison's House* (1930) on some of the truths behind the tragic life of the famous poet. Also, *The Verge* celebrates her grandfather's, Silas Glaspell, in the character of Ira Morton who promotes Darwin's theories of evolution by experimenting on corn fields.

whore). It is interesting to note that this fictional portrait also coincides with Glaspell's affair with an older man in Chicago.¹¹⁵

According to Wood, in her high-school years in 1891 Glaspell was exposed to 'four primary sets of knowledge' about women and the politics of sexuality which assisted her in reflecting the 'fallen women' represented in the personae of working women in *The Visioning*.¹¹⁶ Firstly, in Davenport, prostitutes were 'an everyday feature of life' and newspapers acknowledged their presence in society. Besides that they were 'feisty and fun-loving', they were also 'broken women inclined to suicide'. Second and thirdly, the community regarded sexually active women as either 'predators who endangered men and boys' or 'innocent victims'. In the fourth instance, while women went to dance halls in the hope of finding husbands, men, knowing women's desperation for marriage, cunningly exploited women as easy sexual prey.¹¹⁷ Blending the characteristics of the 'broken women inclined to suicide', 'predators', 'innocent victims' and the 'sexual prey' found in dance halls, Glaspell, aware of the existence of these kinds of women in her own hometown, portrays their reality in *The Visioning*. Drawing from the personal history of the area, Glaspell created a more textured and layered individual in Verna by accumulating all the strata of knowledge mentioned by Wood. Glaspell complicates the way women were perceived as she proves that gender reduces individuals by limiting their opportunities to the classes they belong to. It is evident that Glaspell does not use the prostitute persona in her novels, but she outlines the circumstances that would lead a woman to become one. Glaspell's intention in doing so is clear: she believed that in delimiting women to menial, physically laborious professions they could be led into prostitution as a means of providing a liveable wage.

¹¹⁵ In 1909, Glaspell published a short story 'From A to Z' revolving around a young graduate who falls in love with her older co-worker while working on compiling a dictionary. Ben-Zvi states that this story is autobiographical as at the time of the story's publication, Glaspell was recovering from an affair with a much older man whom she had met in Chicago. Ben-Zvi, 'Chicago', p. 60.

¹¹⁶ Wood's article provides an insightful cultural and historical analysis of 'fallen women' in Glaspell's *The Visioning*. See Wood, 'Susan Glaspell and the Politics of Sexuality'.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 319.

Glaspell uses Verna as an example of embodying some of the characteristics of a ‘fallen woman’ to enlighten readers to the injustices of class and gender oppression. Verna does not disclose her occupation to Katie, either because she is ashamed of it or because she knows it is the kind of profession that is not acceptable in a society like Government Island. Appearing in ‘satin organdie and satin slippers’ at the beginning of the story, Verna’s costume resembles that of the members of the ‘Daisey-Maisey Opera Company playing at the city across the river’.¹¹⁸ To this conventionally rigid society, a performer is merely an instrument used for men’s sexual pleasures and in this instance Glaspell portrays Verna as a victim of her occupation. Her unconventional fancy apparel is oppressive as she is perceived merely as a sexual object.

At the climax of the story, events reveal that Major Darrett, one of the members of Katie’s social circle, lures Verna into having an illicit affair with him. She is ignorant to the fact that he manipulates her and uses her for his own sexual gratification. Verna’s job as an entertainer naturally attracts the ‘male gaze’ and ignites sexual pleasures, enabling men to look at her as an ‘erotic object’.¹¹⁹ Her image as a sexual entity is shaped and defined by her occupation, giving men the opportunity to sexually objectify her. Verna’s profession and suggestive theatrical ensemble invites Darrett’s attentions. Verna hopes for marital commitment, yet Darrett does not consider her ‘one of [them]’, referring to the members of his own social class.¹²⁰ Verna’s role as a performer imprisons her in the inevitable purpose of pleasing and entertaining social elites. In this case, Verna can be regarded as what Martha C. Nussbaum classifies as an ‘object of instrumentality’ and what Rae Langton features as

¹¹⁸ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ I am drawing my understanding of the ‘male gaze’ from the work of Laura Mulvey, a British feminist film theorist greatly influenced by Freud. Mulvey argues that women characters are ‘displayed as sexual object[s]’ holding ‘appearances coded for strong visual and erotic impact’. Glaspell features the same concept in *Fugitive’s Return*. Irma Shraeder fails at saving her marriage as she does not satisfy her husband’s ‘male gaze’. She neglects her role as a wife and focuses instead on being a mother. Dan, Irma’s husband, falls prey to illicit relationships with other married women who seduce him as his sexual desires are not quenched by his wife. Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen* 16 (1975), 6-18 (p. 10).

¹²⁰ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 146.

‘reduction to body’ and ‘reduction to appearance’.¹²¹ The former notion shows the objectifier treating ‘the object as a tool of his or her purpose’ while Langton’s ideas convey the treatment of a person as identified with their body and in terms of their appearance. When Verna becomes aware of her existence as a mere ‘excursion’ she, defeated and hopeless, attempts suicide.¹²² Verna’s sense of alienation and rejection is rooted in the fact that others, and consequently she herself, consider her life to be meaningless and worthless. After her sexual encounter with Major Darrett and his abandoning her, Verna is unable to sustain a feeling of self-worth. She realizes that her several failures in finding fulfilment in her father’s house, in her profession and finally in her illicit relationship with Darrett are reasons good enough to end her life. Glaspell uses Verna to show a woman’s oppression on different levels.

A final yet different prototype of a working woman is Glaspell’s ‘New Woman’ character Helen.¹²³ In Glaspell’s works, the ‘New Woman’ is a representation of the new independent, social reformist female. According to Marcia Noe, ‘many of Susan’s Glaspell’s New Woman characters function in this way; they challenge and subvert the conventions of prevailing patriarchal order that governs female behavior’.¹²⁴ Helen reflects the progressive feminist of the 1920s who fought for suffrage.¹²⁵ She aims to engender social change and to

¹²¹ See Martha C. Nussbaum, ‘Sex: Constructing Love, Desire, and Care’, in *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 253-75 (p. 257). Also see R. Langton, ‘Autonomy-Denial in Objectification’, in *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 223-40 (pp. 228-9).

¹²² Glaspell, *The Visioning*, p. 146.

¹²³ Though some scholars debate on when the term ‘New Woman’ first came to be used, it is claimed that in an exchange between British writers Sarah Grand and Marie Louise de la Ramée in 1894, ‘New Woman’ was generated. The term instigated debates on what the term means and what it represents. The rise of the New Woman marked one of the most significant cultural shifts of the nineteenth and twentieth century. See Martha H. Patterson, ‘Introduction’, in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*, ed. by Martha H. Patterson (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. 1-28 (p. 1).

¹²⁴ Marcia Noe, ‘The New Woman in the Plays of Susan Glaspell’, in *Staging a Cultural Paradigm: The Political and the Personal in American Drama*, ed. by Barbara Ozieblo and Miriam López-Rodríguez (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 149-62 (p. 150).

¹²⁵ Sylvie Gambaudo notes, ‘In the first [wave, 1920], the claim to equality was founded upon a logic of sameness whereby since women are as rational as men, society carries a duty to give its female citizens equal opportunity to take part in social organization: education, suffrage’. Glaspell’s interest in socio-political issues is reflected in this novel since she focuses on education and suffrage as important women’s rights. Sylvie

serve the purpose of emancipation and radical social change, which are very similar to Glaspell's aspirations. Similar to Glaspell, Helen calls for the removal of social, political and economic discrimination based on sex. She attacks the bourgeois idealization of woman that inhibits her individual progression.

Glaspell, a working woman who kicked against her expected role in society, pursued her career in journalism and later as a fiction and drama writer, was eager to offer representations of the 'New Woman' as professionals seeking to succeed in a male-dominated society.¹²⁶ Helen is portrayed in this way, a model of the liberated woman. Raised on a ranch in the Midwest, Helen grows up to become a clerk in the forest service. Despite Fred's disapproval, Helen insists on working after marriage. Fred explains, "I try to assert my manly authority, but manly authority doesn't faze Helen much. She has some kind of theory about the economic independence of woman".¹²⁷ Helen resists the injustices of patriarchy forced upon women by breaking the conventional standards that she is supposed to abide by and by setting out an example for other women to take similar paths as hers. She seeks new opportunities by challenging and reaching beyond the limited possibilities offered by her society.

Unlike Katie who believes that Helen is 'just what [her] family needs', Fred's father and Katie's uncle, Bishop Wayneworth do not 'see that a young woman who votes is the crying need of the family'.¹²⁸ He considers Helen a threat to his family and denounces his son's choice of a future wife. To Katie he explains, 'one hates to see you swallowed up in the

Gambaudo, 'French Feminism VS Anglo-American Feminism: A Reconstruction', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14.2 (2007), 93–108 (p. 94).

¹²⁶ Another helpful description of the New Woman is offered by Maureen Honey. Honey states that the New Woman is a 'woman of action'. She has 'financial success' and is 'eager to take on challenges in the non-domestic world'. Glaspell portrays this description in the character of Helen. See Maureen Honey, 'Introduction', in *Breaking the Ties That Bind: Popular Stories of the New Woman, 1915-1930*, ed. by Maureen Honey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 3-36 (pp. 10-1).

¹²⁷ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, pp. 73-74.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

troop of serious-minded young women'.¹²⁹ The bishop's profession plays a role in his stance against Helen, for he represents orthodox conventions which are antithetical to Glaspell's beliefs, while Helen stands for unorthodox beliefs which acknowledge women's need for independence.¹³⁰ Unaccustomed to such new notions which he regards as irrational, the Bishop's conservatism is further clarified in his opposition of socialism. Considering it a destructive force as it contradicts his beliefs and the beliefs of the Church, the Bishop lectures against socialism under sermons titled 'fallacies of socialism'.¹³¹ Glaspell uses the Bishop as an example of oppressive authoritative figures who have the power to influence the mind-set of society. His high rank and support for capitalistic sectors such as Caroline's father's candy factory to fund his project for new cathedrals nurses Glaspell's argument against class and gender oppression.

As a book which might be described as an example of socialist writing, *The Visioning* holds significant meaning as it presents the problems of contemporary women's socio-cultural positions by focusing on different classes. In this chapter, I have focused on aspects in Glaspell's writing which associate her fiction, specifically *The Visioning*, with the problematic issues of class which lead to social and gender inequalities. My explorations of Glaspell's concerns, which include women's social position, education and professional identity, reveal the truths about women's oppression at the beginning of the twentieth century and highlight the injustices caused by the cultural tiers that mould women's lives. In addition, the shared experiences of the powerless upper middle and working class women, their

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

¹³⁰ Though Glaspell came from quite a religious family who went regularly to Church, she used to skip Sunday ceremonies to attend the Monist Society. This is not to say that Glaspell revolted against religion. Like Katie, she 'felt it's a disgrace the way [upper middle class people] live - - taking everything and doing nothing' for the 'broken down men and women and diseased children that [the] church is built right on top of'. Ibid., pp. 185-6.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 183.

relationships and the class roles that their Midwestern society impose on them support the same argument.

Through *The Visioning*, Glaspell specifically argues that women's personal fulfilment is not possible without equal opportunities in the workplace and easier access to education. In the following chapter, my focus will be on Glaspell's representation of working class women as she expands her Marxist ideas regarding the alienation of the self to illuminate the oppressive socio-cultural position of women at the beginning of the twentieth century. The chapter will focus more on Glaspell's involvement with radical groups who influenced many of her unconventional thinking which are presented in her short stories.

Chapter Two

Power Struggles in Glaspell's 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914) and 'Unveiling Brenda' (1916)

'We need not be held in forms molded for us.' ~ Susan Glaspell, *The Verge* (1921)

Susan Glaspell's sense of the necessity for women to escape pre-set social roles, as articulated by the rebellious Claire Archer, offers a glimpse of the author's gender politics and her distaste for social structures which hinder and contain women. Instead of adhering to social strictures ordained by gender and class hierarchies, Archer proposes new forms which kick against the subservient positions in which women have been imprisoned and offers means by which women can form an identity of their own. As the previous chapter has established, Glaspell's support for socialism is related to her views regarding the inequity of a society which exploits and alienates women due to their sex and/or social standing. Some of her views were a result of what she witnessed in the rapid changes in the socio-cultural landscape of Davenport which were partly due to the incoming waves of settlers which began at the end of the nineteenth century and continued throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century.¹ This change gave rise to a class-based society and Glaspell was at odds with such a community since it exemplified a culture which transformed, as she saw it, 'a society unconscious of class distinctions' into one defined by a class system which relied on superficial elements such as money and wealth. This new system adopted by the second generation of Davenport settlers replaced their ancestors' pioneering nature.²

For Glaspell, class-based societies engendered antagonism and prejudice, forms of discrimination, which were especially pernicious for the less privileged. Davenport's social

¹ See Sharon E. Wood, 'Introduction: The Belva Lockwood Club', in *The Freedom of the Streets: Work Citizen, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1-13.

² Susan Glaspell, 'The Unintended Beauty', in *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), pp. 1-8 (p. 4). Also see Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Introduction: Blackhawk's Land', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3-10 (p. 3-7).

hierarchies presented harsh realities which Glaspell herself was unable to avoid as she struggled with feelings of rejection for belonging to a working class family while growing up. She chose to combat this form of inequality through her writings by promoting socialistic ideas. Glaspell was always aware of class and gender discrimination as factors whose social and ideological impact promoted insecurity and instability for groups lower down the social hierarchy. According to Barbara Ozieblo, as the daughter of a poor farmer, Glaspell 'had striven for acceptance and been sorely hurt by unfeeling rejection'.³ Like Irma, the protagonist of *Fugitive's Return* (1929), Glaspell was acutely aware of her family's lower social standing which she felt was an obstacle that denied her acceptance in the more elite social circles.⁴ Eventually, the recognition and successes of her short stories by *The Black Cat* (a short story periodical) helped Glaspell get accepted into some of Davenport's local literary clubs, the one thing she dreamed of as she was growing up in her hometown.⁵ Though their acceptance was something she sought, it increased her feelings of alienation because she felt an outsider who had been granted access to the club.⁶

The Tuesday Club is one example. The club, a local ladies' literary group founded in 1892 which Glaspell became a member of after becoming famous concentrated on educating women by reading books which adhered to Davenport's social, intellectual and moral codes. Members of this club belonged to the upper middle classes and one such member was Davenport's well-known local colour writer Alice French (also known as Octave Thanet).

³ See Bárbara Ozieblo, 'The Luck of Children and Fools', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), pp. 91-122 (p. 112).

⁴ Since many of Glaspell's acquaintances enjoyed a privileged life, she felt displaced and more of an outsider. However, persistent to escape poverty and rid herself of the feelings of displacement, she enrolled in Drake University and established herself as a successful writer. By the year 1905, Glaspell became a local celebrity and was then welcomed by Davenport's highly selective social and literary groups such as the Margaret Fuller Club, Davenport's Tuesday Club and Davenport's Amateur Musical Club. See Caroline Violet Fletcher, "'Rules of the Institution' and Sisterhood", in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, ed. by Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 239-56 (p. 243); Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', p. 17; Marcia Noe, "'A Romantic and Miraculous City' Shapes Three Midwestern Writers", *Western Illinois Regional Studies*, 1.2 (1978), 176-98 (pp. 190-1).

⁵ In 1905, the short story periodical *The Black Cat* awarded Glaspell with the recognition she desired by giving her the first prize for the short story 'For Love of the Hills' (1905).

⁶ See Ben-Zvi, 'Society Girls', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 29-34 (p. 29).

French's family were held in high esteem in Davenport; her father held many prestigious positions as the mayor of the town, the treasurer of the school board and the owner of a number of lumber mills. As Ozieblo observes, French believed in 'the Victorian order of privilege for those with money and education and in the superior spiritual qualities of women, as long as they confined themselves to the sphere assigned them by God and patriarchy'.⁷ In her stories, French depicted the Victorian order and supported the advantaged position of the wealthy. She was also a strong promoter for conservative causes, for instance, in 1909, French travelled widely in the United States expressing her opposition to women's suffrage.⁸ Glaspell admired French, who was at least twenty years her senior for being one of Davenport's pioneer women in her pursuit of a writing career. However, the women differed in their ideas about class and gender.

Averse to French's beliefs, Glaspell's ideas were considered strange and unacceptable to the Tuesday Club women's strict conventional values as she endorsed the idea of the advancement of women in the public sphere, specifically the professional arena. Ozieblo notes in her biography of the writer that Glaspell 'was unwilling to mingle with the coterie of small-town highbrows, with their pretensions and pseudo culture' which she saw as the apotheosis of the superficiality she attacked in her weekly columns and stories.⁹ However, Ellen Dodge Cook (George Cram Cook's mother and also known as Ma-Mie) pleaded with Glaspell to socialize with Davenport's social circle, and by 1913, Glaspell was accepted in most of her hometown's more private social circuits and the upper class drawing rooms. She knew that her acceptance was at least in part due to her marriage to George Cram Cook. Glaspell was very aware that Cook came from a wealthier family whose position in society was more prestigious and further up the hierarchal scale than her own. Thus, rather than

⁷ Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 7-33 (p. 18).

⁸ See Ethel C. Simpson, 'Alice French', in *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives*, ed. by Nancy A. Williams and Jeannie M. Whyne (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), pp. 111-3 (p. 113).

⁹ Ozieblo, 'The Luck of Children and Fools', p. 112.

becoming a member in society's elite groups based on her own intellectual and professional advancement, Glaspell felt she was welcomed largely on the basis of being Cook's wife. Her irritation with being acknowledged as someone's wife or someone's daughter is again evident in her columns where she stated that women should not rely on their father's or husband's accomplishments and genealogy, 'It is what we ourselves accomplish today that we are going to be marked by'.¹⁰ Glaspell certainly distinguished herself by choosing to retain her family name (Glaspell) throughout her life, a public (and personal) act of independence. Her involvement with Davenport's local social groups made her aware of the injustices which benefitted richer individuals, such as Alice French, who used their higher social rankings to enforce restrictions on women of the subordinate classes.

Davenport's local clubs and social organizations exposed Glaspell to a deeper sense of injustices which she expressed in stories such as 'The Boycott on Caroline' (1906), *Trifles* (1916), 'The Girl from Down-Town' (1903) and *Fidelity* (1915). In these stories, Glaspell reflects her own situation by presenting a young protagonist faced with the difficulty of becoming accepted in the upper middle social circle. However, in contrast to the displacement and restlessness she experienced with the antiquated restrictions of Davenport's social clubs, Glaspell's inspiration was ignited by the avant-garde socio-cultural and political movements in the United States and Europe. These movements introduced her to different type of clubs, better suited to her taste since they catered to her unconventional thinking. Some of these groups were the Liberal Club in New York City founded by Henrietta Rodman in 1913, The Monist Society originated by George Cram Cook and Floyd Dell in Davenport in 1907, and the Heterodoxy Club (1912), a Greenwich group of feminists which Glaspell was a charter member of. The Liberal Club, for instance, was a group based in Greenwich Village which insisted on implementing equality on all bases and admitted black members.

¹⁰ Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p. 6.

The Monist Society, also an unorthodox group, included many socialist and radical thinkers such as George Cram Cook and Floyd Dell and accepted members regardless of their backgrounds and politics. The Heterodoxy Club, as described by one of its members Mabel Dodge Lohan, was a group of 'unorthodox women ... who did things and did them openly'.¹¹ Members of the group, known as Heterodites, were loyal group members and faithful to the cause of bettering women's lives. Glaspell's involvement with such radical groups and her association with bohemians with nonconformist beliefs influenced her continuing support for socialism in her writings to promote the abolition of class and gender inequality. However, though unconventional in thought, the Heterodoxy Club was not so different in its operation. Its chief members distinguished between those with higher statuses and those with lesser privileges as will be examined in this chapter.

As discussed in Chapter One, Glaspell's personal experiences with class discrimination were reflected in her longer fiction. My discussion in the chapter was based on Glaspell's fictional recreation of some of the snobbish traits of small town life in politically-driven stories of injustice. I explored Glaspell's dissatisfaction with the stratified social system in the United States, specifically that which affects women. The chapter also attempted to explain Glaspell's strong belief in the necessity of implementing a socially equal system to suit individuals of all backgrounds. Glaspell criticized the social order of Midwestern societies in which the wealth of the privileged depended on the discrimination of others. She consistently emphasized that women had the right to refuse to comply with conventional rules which brought about their oppression.

Building on the discussion in Chapter One, my focus in this chapter is firmly on Glaspell's short fiction and the means whereby her short stories portray class-related problems. I hope to offer an extended picture of Glaspell's frustration with social injustices

¹¹ Mabel Dodge Lohan, *Movers and Shakers*, 4 vols (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1936; repr. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 3, p. 143.

and how it evolves in her later works through her portrayal of wealthy women's groups. Glaspell remains scathing toward the arrogance engendered by wealth and the resultant social problems. This chapter will focus on two short stories, 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914) and 'Unveiling Brenda' (1916), which I believe demonstrate Glaspell's maturing ideas. In these stories, it becomes evident that Glaspell goes beyond the social injustices faced by women in the private sphere as shown in Chapter One to provide a clearer angle of social and gender inequality amongst women in women's social clubs. She reflects on the gender inequality present in the professional sphere and radical social clubs which she was a member of, thus enlightening her readers of a different perspective.

Glaspell published 'The Rules of the Institution' and 'Unveiling Brenda' before the commencement of the first wave of the feminist movement in 1920. At that time, many women's groups were founded for diverse causes and Glaspell's involvement with several radical groups as well as women's groups was at its peak. Many of the groups supported suffrage and the ideals of the feminist movement. Feminist agitation exposed the stranglehold of patriarchal convention over the lives and futures of women.¹² The new generation of feminist activists and organizations, many of whom were members in women's clubs such as the Heterodoxy and Liberal Clubs, demanded suffrage, equal opportunities in the educational and work sphere, equal pay and political equality. Glaspell participated and contributed by creating a rebellious activism of her own in producing works which spoke politically for the cause of women, such as those discussed in this chapter. What I am specifically interested in exploring in this chapter is the position of lower class women reflected in radical social

¹² The status of women at the beginning of the era stirred up much confusion due to the early feminist movement. Considered as the beginning of the Progressive Era for women in the United States, the first wave of the feminist movement in 1920 brought into attention subject matters, such as poor working conditions, lower pay than male counterparts and sexism, concerning middle class women. Feminist activists focused on advocating women's rights by abolishing male control and equalizing women's stature to that of men. Women were granted some of their rights and a revolutionary change in the social and domestic roles of women was witnessed. Women were employed in large numbers in male positions, however, occupations were mostly limited to teaching, nursing, secretarial work, and telephone operations. See Rory Cooke Dicker, 'First Wave Feminism: Fighting for the Vote', in *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), pp. 21-56.

groups, such as the one portrayed in 'The Rules of the Institution' and their position in an educational environment as 'Unveiling Brenda' portrays. Glaspell's involvement with social groups provided her with a rich source of information which she chose to absorb, fictionalise and critique.

The chronological order of the stories will be taken into account as it will aid in understanding the development of the problems discussed and allow us to examine the maturation of Glaspell's political vision. Therefore, the first section will begin with 'The Rules of the Institution'. Again I will draw on Dennis Gilbert's previously identified determinants of class, occupation and income, wealth and prestige, education and power, to analyse the material items which illuminate certain privileges enjoyed by society club members of the higher ranks. In addition, I will focus my argument regarding Glaspell's socialistic views by showing her use of examples of fictional women's clubs to explain her role in and opinion of some of these groups in real life. Taking into account the several views made by Glaspellian critics such as Linda Ben-Zvi, Barbara Ozieblo and Caroline Violet Fletcher on Glaspell's association with intellectual clubs, my argument builds on their observation of the concept of a 'sisterhood ideology', which is the bond between two or more women. Through Glaspell's use of a fictional Woman's Club in 'The Rules of The Institution', I will show the superficial unity of such social elites and explore how they control the lives of working class women (referred to in the story as 'working girls'). I will also show the possibility of a true sisterhood relationship between Judith and Mary, the two women protagonists from different social backgrounds, once social barriers are broken.

I shall also draw on Sharon E. Wood's in-depth account of the history of working women's groups (such as the Youth Women Christian Association (YWCA) and Grace Dodge's working clubs in Midwestern societies) and Caroline Fletcher's article "'The Rules of the Institution': Susan Glaspell and Sisterhood' (2006) which connects the women's group

of the story to the Heterodoxy Club. These two sources will be amongst other sources which I will consult to explain the prejudiced and discriminatory operation of women's clubs and how they, following a rigidly antiquated system, repress any chances of social change for women. Finally, I will show Glaspell's continuing depiction of the Midwestern setting as one that nurtures capitalistic purposes where young working women are placed in jobs that are socially and economically disabling.¹³ In the second section of this chapter, I continue to discuss the different forms of class and gender inequality, specifically those occurring in the educational sphere, the classroom, in the short story 'Unveiling Brenda'. I will present the power struggle between the male instructor Peyton Root, who is presented as superior in social ranking, Ina Gilson who is referred to as 'Lady Ina', and Brenda Munro who is labelled 'Poor Brenda' by members of her class. Glaspell sets Brenda as an example of an individual who is cast aside, an outsider due to her uncertain origins, by presenting a version of her own personal life in Brenda's story. She also uses Brenda's freedom of speech and writing to present her ideas about the necessary resistance to gender inequalities which exclude individuals based on their social rank and background.¹⁴ By analysing certain incidents in the story, I will also show Glaspell's intention of illuminating class struggles and antagonism in different public and educational spheres through the medium of the short story.

¹³ Wood uses Davenport, Iowa as an example of a mid-sized city struggling with conflicts related to women's social roles and their employment.

¹⁴ Glaspell advocates freedom of speech in works like 'Finality in Freeport' (1916) which is based around challenging ideas guiding individuals to search for truth. Also, in *Close the Book* (1917), a theatrical adaptation of 'Unveiling Brenda' (1916), Glaspell depicts the same concept where the main characters Jhansi, a nonconformist of Gypsy parentage, and Peyton Root, Jhansi's fiancée, support free speech by critiquing the hypocrisy of traditional values and beliefs which prevent cross-race marriages.

Part I: Rebelling Against the Rules in 'The Rules of the Institution'

Published in *Harper's* magazine in 1914, 'The Rules of the Institution' has never been republished in a collected volume.¹⁵ The story captures the complicated relationship of wealth and class ranks in relation to members of a fictional Woman's Club. In short, the story recounts the experiences of Judith Brunswick, a Midwestern 'society girl' who is asked by the house committee of the Woman's Club to speak to Mary Graham, a working class young woman who works at a local factory. Judith is instructed to talk to Mary about the 'rules of the institution' in which Mary lives and on the importance of obeying its codes. As reported by the superintendent of the boarding house in which Mary resides, the young woman has broken curfew rules several times. To the house committee, Mary's conduct is inappropriate for a single woman and she must learn to respect the house rules as her working colleagues do.

Reluctant at first as to how to approach Mary and unsure of what she ought to say to her, Judith heads to the boarding house and is met by the matron who warns her about Mary's peculiar habits. Judith, insistent upon completing what she has been instructed to do, speaks to Mary and explains the importance of keeping to the rules. Instead of arguing or defending her position, Mary peacefully tells Judith that she will leave the boarding house as she is unable to live in a place controlled by rules which curtail her basic human rights, such as freedom of movement and, by implication, freedom of thought.

The encounter between the women agitates Judith as it draws her attention to her own submissive life. Judith is left distressed after listening to Mary's point of view on how one is forced to submit to 'the rules of the institution'. The house committee, the Woman's Club, finds Judith's report and sympathetic attitude towards Mary's situation ridiculous and evidently disapproves of her defence of Mary. Judith then decides to take a long walk on the

¹⁵ See full story in Appendix 1.

outskirts of town to retrace the experience Mary talks about early in the story. The story ends with Judith running into Charles Emmons, the unhappy husband of a club member. She realizes that he, too, is a victim of social codes when she learns that in the past he was coerced into giving up his personal dreams of becoming a writer to please his family's demands of running the family business. Their conversation further stirs her awareness of her own situation and acts as a catalyst for change. Sensing Charles's subservient stance Judith, ignited with determination to change her fate, vows to return to college and strives for more than her Midwestern society can offer her.

I.1 Variables of Wealth: Material Objects of Social Injustices

Throughout her fiction, Glaspell uses representations of wealth in the form of materialistic luxuries to define her characters' social ranking. Similar to earlier stories such as 'One of Those Impossible Americans' (1911) and *The Visioning* (1911), 'The Rules of the Institution' uses clothes and the automobile as material indicators which distinguish women of different social sectors. Opening with a description of Judith's dilemma in choosing the proper attire to meet Mary at Severns Hall, the story demands that we look at the minute details which act as barriers between the women, 'She could not decide what to wear. Never having known such an occasion ..., how could she tell? She decided against the gown she was wearing [and the] blue silk frock of which she herself was particularly fond of'.¹⁶ Judith's sense of uncertainty and indecisiveness in choosing what to wear, with the emphasis upon the luxurious silk fabric, defines the lifestyle divisions which segregate social groups. In one of her weekly columns, Glaspell addresses Davenport's upper middle class society girls, suggesting that they make use of their brains and hearts while taking 'invoice of [their] wardrobe so

¹⁶ Susan Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, January 1914, p. 198.

thoroughly'.¹⁷ Glaspell assigns those qualities to Judith who is a reflection of a society girl whose wasted existence denies her the intellectual benefits of real life, that is until she is stirred into self-awareness. Judith voices Glaspell's call for counteracting a system which alienates the poor. As Mary's poor status is accentuated by Judith's fancy attire, a distinguishable sign of wealth, Judith, too, is imprisoned by wealth into a pattern of life moulded for her by her social ranking. Sensing the deeper meaning of the economic gulf between herself and Mary, Judith attempts to break the socio-economic barrier by wearing 'something plain' in order 'not to make [Mary] feel the difference' between them.¹⁸ She also tries to maintain a sense of equality by equating Mary with the girls whose social standing, conventions and lifestyles she shares, 'I'll wear just what I would if going to spend the evening with any of the girls I know'.¹⁹ The need for social approval is clearly portrayed in Judith's thoughts, yet it is ironic that Judith should seek it from Mary. Glaspell, here, demonstrates how out of touch Judith is from the reality of social injustice.

However, tensions arise with Mrs. Brunswick's interference and objection to Judith equating herself to an individual outside, or more precisely beneath, their social circle. Though Mrs. Brunswick's presence in the story is minimal, her role is crucial because she serves as an example of opponents to the potential chance of social change – people like French, for example. Such ideas regarding lower working class women are recurrent in Glaspell's fiction. For instance, the characters of Mrs. Prescott in *The Visioning* (discussed in the previous chapter) and Mrs. Lawrence in *Fidelity* share Mrs. Brunswick's attitude since they believe working class women should be confined to manual labour. Glaspell presents Mrs. Brunswick as a typical Victorian personality who is enslaved by social mores. In the story, Mrs. Brunswick's conversations with Judith are limited to topics related to wealth signifiers – clothes and automobiles – objects which distinguish social rankings. Mrs.

¹⁷ Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 March 1897.

¹⁸ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 198.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Brunswick, clearly socially unaware of the state of the poor, supports her peers when she says, 'perhaps the poor need to see the nice things we have. I suppose it is one way of giving them pleasure'.²⁰ Mrs. Brunswick dehumanizes Mary by grouping her with the 'poor' and reducing her group into 'inferiors'. Her demeaning remark compels the 'poor' such as Mary to accept the unjust strictures of the rich. Serving her socialistic purpose, Glaspell here opts to expose the shallowness of the lifestyles of privileged class who impose barriers to promote class divisions between social groups.

Similar to Mrs. Brunswick in her prejudices against Mary is Fred, Judith's brother who is more hostile in his views. Glaspell uses Fred as a means of showing conventional attitudes toward women in general and women of the working class in specific. His conformist view of women is defined by the mores of his Midwestern society. Though he has not met Mary personally, Fred holds no respect for her because to him she does not possess the socially accepted feminine traits which are required of her. His descriptions of Mary are confined in terms of her relation to others – daughter, sister – rather than as a person in her own right – 'the erring daughter' and 'the unfortunate sister'. These descriptions reduce her to a kind of sinfulness which is linked with her gender.²¹ In this case, Mary is confined to feminine roles as a 'sister' and 'daughter' whereby she is expected to be obedient and subservient.

Sally Haslanger notes that feminists need gender terms to identify and explain persistent social inequality between males and females. Her analysis of gender, which acknowledges the different physical and social positions of males and females, can be used in explaining Glaspell's feminist intention of utilizing Fred as a tool which authorizes gender injustices.²² Fred uses social forces, under the pretext of biological forces, to demean Mary's

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 199, p. 203.

²² See Sally Haslanger, 'Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?', *Noûs*, 34:1 (2000), 31-55 (p. 38).

position. He regards himself as privileged because of his better social position than Mary who occupies a female body which confines her role as a 'sister' and 'daughter'. Sexism, here, is intertwined with class oppression since the words 'daughter' and 'sister' are associated with the persistent social inequalities between the male Fred and the female Mary.

In addition to Haslanger's observations, Kate Millet's ideas about gender differences explain inequality as 'essentially cultural, rather than biological' because it results from a distinction in the treatment of males and females.²³ Millet states that gender is 'the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression'.²⁴ Mrs. Brunswick clearly seems to demonstrate the point Millet is making because she does not protest against Fred's disparagement of Mary. She believes that Mary has defied and broken the rules of conduct expected from a woman. Fred expects women to exhibit gendered behaviour, which force women into subordinate social roles. In his opinion, since Mary opts to abandon these roles, she deserves to be criticized and condemned.²⁵ While at odds with Glaspell's beliefs, Fred echoes society's inclination to enforce gender differences which dictate how women and men should behave.²⁶ Using fictional characters such as Fred and his mother who discard the idea of equality, Glaspell wanted her readers to acknowledge the existence of class and gender prejudices and to demonstrate these social inequities. In doing so, Glaspell prompts the need for the struggle against gender oppression and the corruptive hierarchal systems which encumber the right for individual progression.

²³ Kate Millett, 'Sexual Politics: Theory of Sexual Politics', in *Sexual Politics* (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1971), pp. 23-58 (pp. 28-9).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26. Millet argues that women who submit to obedience become passive, ignorant, docile and emotional helpmeets for men. However, these roles are simply learned, and so to create more equality in societies, individuals should 'unlearn' social roles to diminish the influence of socialization.

²⁶ Glaspell clearly uses gender terms to show that women are oppressed. According to Gayle Rubin, women's oppression is caused by the notion that women 'have to *be* women'. However, since gender is socially constructed, the subordination of women may be reformed through social change. Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210 (p. 204).

Unlike her family, Judith gradually becomes conscious of her class and privilege. As narrated in the story, 'The thing had grown intolerable to Judith: her brother's flippant phrase [and] her mother's attitude, forced it upon her in the very way she had tried not to think about it'.²⁷ Had it not been for her family's persistence in degrading Mary, Judith's social conscience might not have been pricked. Judith is aware of Mary's class, yet she does not object to socializing with her because as a character she seems to undergo an awakening whereby she recognizes social inequalities. Her recognition of the different classes she and Mary belong to and her determination to eradicate any obstacle that might prevent her from mingling with Mary only highlights and strengthens Glaspell's message of possible social change. Glaspell, devoted to the principles of liberty in both her fiction and nonfiction articles, portrays Judith's awakening to the reality of Mary's position as a step towards breaking class barriers. She is descriptive in her narration of Judith's dilemma because she is interested in the expression of contemporary social realities since at heart she is a realist writer.

As mentioned before, Glaspell also uses the automobile to emphasize the existence of social inequality in American societies.²⁸ She pictures the automobile negatively in 'The Rules of the Institution' to reflect the distinct outlook of each class on such a technology. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the automobile was regarded as a symbol of technological advancement. It was a luxury that only a minority, the richer members of society, could afford, for there was one car in operation for every 18,000 individuals.²⁹ *The Horseless Age*, a publication specializing in new technologies, published an article on

²⁷ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 199.

²⁸ In Chapter One, I discussed Glaspell's use of the automobile as a representation of wealth in *The Visioning* (1911). Caroline Osbourne, a socialite, is described in her comfortable vehicle on a hot summer day in comparison to the working girls occupied in Caroline's father's factory who are forced to walk a long distance to reach their homes. Glaspell uses such a vivid description to intensify the theme of class oppression as an important issue to be addressed in her works.

²⁹ For further information regarding the history of automobiles and their impact on the American family life in the beginning of the twentieth century, see Folke Tkinstedt, 'The Automobile and the Transformation of the American House, 1910-1935', in *The Automobile and American Culture*, ed. by David L Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), (p. 160).

automobiles in 1902 reporting that only members of society who earned reasonably high salaries could afford to own an automobile and the costs of its maintenance. It also stated that 'many of the newspapers [in the United States] circulating chiefly among the working class try to make capital out of class hatred and lose no opportunity to hold up the automobile as a means of oppression of the poor by the wealthy'.³⁰ Members of the working class and their proponents did not accept the automobile as a useful advancement. They saw the automobile as the 'plaything' of the rich rather than a necessity.

In her article entitled 'Gender and Automobility: The Pioneering and Early Years' (2004), Margaret Walsh explains:

Those who owned ... vehicles were likely to be white and middle-class. Only small percentages of minority families owned cars. With the growing numbers of sales of second-hand vehicles in the late 1920s, some blue-collar workers were also able to buy into automobility, but their continuing ownership was tied to their ability to stay employed.³¹

Though the automobile was considered a useful tool when it was first invented, some influential individuals found the technology to have a negative effect on different members of society, mainly the poorer classes. In 1906 in Princeton University, President Woodrow Wilson opposed the use of automobiles by refusing to use it to go to his inauguration; he chose the traditional horse and carriage method of transportation instead.³² In addition, in a statement made before the North Carolina Society dinner, he stated that 'nothing has spread

³⁰ Cited in James J. Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970).

³¹ Margaret Walsh, 'Gender and Automobility: The Pioneering and Early Years' in *Automobile in American Life and Society*, (2004) <http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu/Gender/Walsh/G_Overview1.htm> [accessed 3 April 2013] (para. 5 of 11).

³² It is worth mentioning that President Wilson was the leader of the Progressive Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. He led his Democratic Party to presidency in 1913.

Socialistic feeling in this country more than the use of automobiles. To the countryman they are a picture of arrogance of wealth with all its independence and carelessness'.³³ In clear concordance with such a view, Glaspell presents the arrogance of the rich through her repetitive use of the automobile as a sign of wealth which becomes a reason for the working classes' increased feelings of oppression. She shows only the wealthy women of Brunswick and Mr. Emmons owning automobiles of their own. When Mrs. Brunswick asks Judith to allow Henry, the family's driver, to take her to Severns Hall, Judith exclaims, 'Mother! I don't *want* the car. I don't want to go there in an automobile'.³⁴ Judith is self-consciously ashamed that her possession of a vehicle may cause the working women to be antagonistic towards her. She refuses to go into Mary's spatial sphere with a material object that demonstrates her wealth and their relative poverty. However, Mrs. Brunswick, abiding to conformity, opposes Judith's viewpoint and demands that her daughter behave according to the economic position which differentiates her status from Mary's, 'Why, what nonsense! She probably knows you have an automobile'.³⁵ At the end of the story, Glaspell places Judith in a similar position to one of the factory girls when Judith 'step[s] aside for an automobile to pass', an image also used in Glaspell's novel *The Visioning*. The automobile does not stop for Judith to pass. The automobile and its owner surpass Judith, an unknown insignificant individual. Glaspell aims that Judith's situation reminds readers of the injustices the less privileged classes experience and the sense of alienation they feel. Perhaps, Glaspell felt that readers might be stimulated to think more profoundly about corrective reforms which would better and advance the position of individuals belonging to any group of the social hierarchy.

³³ Frederick Lewis Allen, 'The Automobile Revolution', in *The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), pp. 121-30 (p. 121).

³⁴ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 199.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

I.2 Mary Graham – a Fictional Glaspell with a Voice for Social Change

Glaspell usually creates women characters of opposing traits and personalities in order to demonstrate the weakness of one and the strength of the other. She also portrays the difference between women who believe in conformity and follow society's conventions and those who rebel against it by trying to defy social standards. Certainly, Glaspell supports the rebellious characters because she was something of a rebel herself in her quest for a self-sufficient literary life and desire to improve the lot of women. According to Martha Carpentier, Glaspell 'consistently portrays the middle class critically, particularly for the restrictions it places on women. Often poor and working-class women provide a moral corrective and an ideal for middle-class women, whose spoiled existences as pretty objects have denied them real life and feeling'.³⁶ Mary Graham is Glaspell's exemplification of the 'moral corrective' and rebellious voice of working class women who try to pave their way to a better life by opposing social mores.³⁷ The narrator describes Mary in the following excerpt:

[Mary] was about twenty ... and worked in the corset-factory, where she was skillful and had a good position – as those positions went ... Yet she was not a success as a worker ... she had lost several positions through what seemed shiftlessness – staying away and being late.³⁸

Glaspell provides a satirical description of the kind of job Mary holds to emphasize the nature of factory jobs. Though it is stated that it is a 'good position', it is implied that it is *only* good in comparison to the way 'those positions went'. Glaspell, a realist, represents the reality of

³⁶ Martha Carpentier, 'The Burial and Resurrection of a Writer', in *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).

³⁷ Examples of rebellious, Glaspell-like characters are: Katie, Ann and Helen in *The Visioning*; Ruth and Annie in *Fidelity* (1915); and Irma in *Fugitive's Return* (1929).

³⁸ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 200.

women workers in factories through her portrayal of Mary, a fictional construction of a working individual whose professional opportunities are restricted to less mentally challenging jobs.³⁹ As she is bored by the work at the 'corset-factory', Mary stays away and arrives late to work.⁴⁰ What Glaspell intends for readers to notice here is the reality about women working in factory jobs. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women's jobs at factories meant long hours of routine work, hard unproductive labour and low wages.⁴¹ Glaspell was aware of such realities.

In March 1898, *The Philomathian*, Drake University's most prestigious society, gave Glaspell the honour of presenting her short story 'In a Factory Town' as the final proceeding.⁴² The story is now lost but it is documented by Ozieblo that the story presented a better understanding of the labour problem from the viewpoint of the workers. Also, *The Delphic*, Drake University's literary magazine, stated that Glaspell's story was 'faithful in detail to the life it essayed to portray and fit to move the sympathies in [sic] behalf of a suffering people. Miss Glaspell has painted the picture as it is – darkened and forbidding'.⁴³ Sadly, *The Delphic* did not publish the story. Instead it printed Alice French's 'Communists and Capitalists: A Sketch from Life', originally published in Lippincott's magazine in 1878, a story which follows the philosophical dispute between a worker and countess. Given French's reputation and standing, one might conjecture as to the reasons why *The Delphic*

³⁹ Glaspell gives a similar picture of working class women in factories and industries in *The Visioning* and *Fidelity*. However, she also portrays other professions that women occupy such as housewives, 'chorus girls' and farmers. Glaspell's intention is to show how women were either objectified in jobs that were sexually appealing to men or jobs that did not allow them to use their complete intellectual abilities.

⁴⁰ What is worth mentioning here is that the corset is an item that constricts women and can restrict their breathing. It may be plausible that Glaspell uses the corset-factory as reflective of the meaning of the word.

⁴¹ Glaspell depicts examples of such dead lives in *The Visioning*, *Fidelity*, *Fugitive's Return*, *Brook Evans* (1928) and *Norma Ashe* (1942).

⁴² *The Philomathian's* society offered faculty and students annual evenings of musical and literary entertainment. The society invited members to participate by presenting papers on diverse topics relating to music and literature. Ozieblo mentions that *The Philomathian* 'welcomed Glaspell into its ranks' since 'her experience as a journalist in Davenport compelled respect, especially among younger students and those from rural areas'. Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', p. 24.

⁴³ 'Philomathian Anniversary,' *The Delphic*, March 1898, p.123.

chose to publish her story over Glaspell's. Glaspell, who suffered from class inequality while growing up, chose to demonstrate such realities in her stories.

Glaspell's purpose of portraying the vast differences between the working sector and the more privileged group is not to patronize either class or idealize the working group. On the contrary, she seeks, as Maroula Joannou observes, 'to the importance of the [poorly] paid labour of women whose economic, social, sexual, cultural and political interests were never represented within the patriarchal organisations'.⁴⁴ As a sufferer of monotonous labour, Mary chooses to revolt against 'the rules of the institution' and risks the reputation of being a careless worker who misses curfew times. Mary suffers from feelings of failure which her economic and social status force upon her and which drag her into a mental state of feeling displaced. Her 'sense of frustration' over the lost opportunities denied her because of her gender and class echoes Glaspell's early family life. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Glaspell was greatly affected by her mother's life and an important correlative to Mary's dismay is Glaspell's mother Alice's disappointment over lost opportunities. After choosing marriage over her education and career, Alice suffered extreme depression.⁴⁵ All her efforts were diverted to mundane and routine domestic chores. Linda Ben-Zvi explains that Glaspell's mother 'was a constant reminder of how the best of women can be cowed by circumstances, feel weary and detached, in lives that did not nourish or stimulate them'.⁴⁶ Haunted by her mother's unhappiness, Glaspell portrays Mary as of a similar psyche but trapped within different circumstances. Mary falls prey to the demands of industrial labour and is denied the right to intellectual growth as her existence relies on her work which barely provides her with enough money to survive. Unless Mary conforms to the 'rules' of Severns Hall which all working women should obey, she is to leave the boarding home so as to not set

⁴⁴ Maroula Joannou, 'Working-Class Women's Experience', in *Contemporary Women's Writing: From the Golden Notebook to the Color Purple* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 63-84 (p. 74).

⁴⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, there were laws banning married women from holding or pursuing teaching careers. This forced Alice to choose between her love for Elmer and her career.

⁴⁶ Ben-Zvi, 'Families in Fact and Fiction', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 19-28 (p. 28).

a bad example for the other working women. She is also judged on the basis of her economic, educational and professional levels. Deprived of the advantage of going to college to finish her education due to her poor financial status, Mary is left with no alternative but to secure a wage for a living.

The enormous production line on which Mary works yields the wealth of the more privileged, yet saps her own physical power. Mary's situation reminds us of Marxist ideas regarding the commodification of the workforce – ideas which Glaspell would have been exposed to through her association with The Monist Society. Marx refers to this kind of labour as abstract labour: Mary only works for a living rather than self-fulfilment. Marx and Engels famously described the tiered hierarchy of industrial labour:

Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeoisie class; ... they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeoisie manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.⁴⁷

Marx showed great sympathy in the plight of those who worked in difficult conditions and under the control of superior individuals. Glaspell recreates a similar scenario to the one Marx describes above. She deliberately uses Mary as a fictional version of Marxist ideas where Mary is locked within a despotic system. In the corset factory, Mary is merely an appendage of the machine and the work she is required to do is monotonous and trivial. As a

⁴⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1884; repr. 2012), p. 9.

'slave', she increases the capital of her employers and witnesses them delighting in life's pleasures, the pleasures she helps them attain but does not share.

Mary revolts against the rules which endorse a monotonous restricted life, her protest echoing Glaspell's own rebellion. According to Christine Stansell, during the beginning of the twentieth century 'female workers ... demanded a language that would express a way of life and soul. Earning money, being on one's own even if it meant being poor, living loose: there were desires of working class modernity'.⁴⁸ Stansell refers to early twentieth century societies where women lived a marginalized lifestyle free of conventions and rules and defied Victorian norms. Glaspell, having defied the norm by choosing her career over marriage, urges women through her writing to rethink their conventional lifestyles and their rigidity by introducing ideas of more liberal standards of living characterized by freedom and equality. In her own life, Glaspell preferred to lead an avant-garde life by blending in with the unorthodox Monist Society group rather than doing what was expected of her, like going to church with her family on Sundays. In the story, Glaspell shows Mary as neglecting the boarding house rules when she breaks curfew times and rejecting accepted feminine codes of conduct and obedience. This form of voiceless action, breaking the rules, is her expression of revolt as she regards the rigid rules of the institution which entail adhering to curfew timings and maintaining feminine manners as barriers to her desires. Aware of these rules yet unconvinced by them, Mary suffers from an inner conflict that drives her to question the purpose of her existence.

Referring to her life while talking to Judith, Mary confesses that 'the whole *thing's* an institution, and you're to keep the rules of that institution, and to do that you give in, till after a while you aren't *there* ... I'm tired of giving in!'⁴⁹ Mary's words 'till after a while you

⁴⁸ Christine Stansell, 'The Human Sex: Sexual Modernism', in *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), pp. 225-72 (p. 243).

⁴⁹ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 201.

aren't there' hints at Glaspell's use of absence in her silent and absent characters.⁵⁰ Complying with the rules forces Mary to submit her whole self to a system which she does not believe in or respect. In terms of social space, she is present yet rendered absent because her identity is erased by her socio-economic position. Mary is disfranchised because of her class and gender and so her identity is non-existent to those who are superior to her in social ranking. Demanding to be heard and refusing to remain non-existent, Mary breaks her silence and annihilates her absence by breaking the rules to become visible and existent. As a social agitator, Glaspell creates presence out of absence to intentionally demonstrate how women's inferiority can be originated. Mary's rebellious words underscore Glaspell's urge for social equality, calling for institutions to acknowledge the existence and impoverished lives of individuals belonging to the 'subordinate' levels of class and gender.⁵¹

One of Stansell's elements that does not apply to Mary is 'living loose'. By 'living loose', Stansell refers to the bohemian life where sexual freedom was common at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵² Glaspell's preferences towards bohemian ideals are more related to their representation of, what Joanna Levin describes as, 'an ideally "classless'

⁵⁰ In some of Glaspell's works, absence, whether in the form of mute characters or characters' physical absence, is used as an 'inversion technique', to accentuate the meaning of what is unsaid or untold. 'Inversion technique' is a term invented by Annette Kolodny to explain women writer's methods in portraying 'the stereotyped, traditional literary images of women ... for comic purposes, to explore their inherent absurdity, or, in other instances, to reveal their hidden reality, though in new ways, not previously apprehended'. In addition, women writers use the technique 'to "invert" even more generalized traditional images and conventionalized iconographic associations so that they come to connote their opposites'. Glaspell uses the inversion technique to juxtapose the meanings of silence and absence in her works. By doing so, Glaspell ensures that readers of stories and audience of plays will be influenced to explore meanings that are hidden behind the characters' absence and silence. Refer to Chapters Three and Four where my focus is on the meaning of silence and absence in Glaspell's stories. For further information on 'inversion technique' refer to Annette Kolodny, 'Some Notes on Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"', *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1975), 75-92 (p. 80).

⁵¹ Though Glaspell's works were never classified as social protest literature, it is important to note that they did address prevailing social problems such as gender, class prejudice, poverty and working conditions. Glaspell does emphasize the need for social change. Examples of social protest literature of the era are John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of the Wrath* (1939) which addresses the plight of the poor and Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1936) which was heavily influenced by Marxist ideology.

⁵² In the early twentieth century, a group of radicals from New York's Greenwich Village which Glaspell was a part of advocated the free-love movement which supported sexual freedom. Bohemian life rejected bourgeoisie notions of appropriate female behaviours. Though Glaspell moved into New York's bohemian enclave and Greenwich Village's circle, she did not engage in action in the free-love movement yet she did not refute it. Notable figures associated with the free-love movement are Edna St. Vincent Millay, Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce.

realm' and their association of their 'art, literature, and personal lifestyles to the cause of organized labour and the socialist movement'.⁵³ Glaspell, committed to social and political betterment, does hint at the existence of such a world where women advocate sexual freedom yet she chooses to portray Mary in a conservative picture with a socialistic cause to represent Davenport's women. In the story Mary confesses to Judith, "I wasn't at a dance-hall" she laughed, mockingly, "Though I would have been," she threw in darkly, "if I'd wanted to be. I wasn't with a man at all".⁵⁴ She also openly admits to Judith that she wanders off alone to 'get back to [her]self', a deeper meaningful excursion related to her sense of self.⁵⁵ Mary has to follow what bell hooks refers to as a 'predetermined, gendered script'.⁵⁶ hooks claims that 'the script that had determined what [women] should be, the identities [they] should make, was based on patriarchal values and beliefs about gender'.⁵⁷ Mary is obliged to follow patriarchal values because the function of her gender restricts her to a certain predetermined role. She revolts because she knows her capabilities go beyond what is expected yet she is not allowed to cross the line which separates the genders. Consequently, Mary finds it a must to challenge the patriarchal system by breaking free from predetermined patterns because it is a system that removes her from achieving the things she strives for.

I.3 Antagonistic Voices of Oppression

Glaspell's portrayal of the fictional Woman's Club is intended to reflect her experiences and sceptical opinion of some of the women's clubs of the early twentieth century, such as the Youth Women Christian Association (YWCA), Grace Dodge's working clubs, the Heterodoxy Club and the Tuesday Club. The YWCA and Grace Dodge's working clubs, so-

⁵³ Joanna Levin, 'The Spiritual Geography of Greenwich Village, 1912– 1920', in *Bohemia in America, 1858–1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 339-91 (p. 340).

⁵⁴ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 201.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁵⁶ bell hooks, 'Understanding Patriarchy', in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), pp. 19-34 (p. 19).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

called philanthropic groups, originated to tackle the social problems of women's employment as well as low wages and poverty. The main aim of the philanthropic works of women clubs at the end of the nineteenth century and which continued into the twentieth century was to reform and improve the characters and habits of the poor. Jane Lewis explains that middle class women, those who were mostly in charge of the groups, aimed at elevating moral and intellectual standards of women in the working classes only within the realm of domesticity.⁵⁸ However, these members showed imbalance between benevolence and authority where the latter dominated their strategies of administration evoking what Wood describes as a 'set of images more easily associated with middle class women of leisure than self-supporting workers: afternoon teas and earnest papers on Shakespeare and Milton'.⁵⁹ Glaspell stresses on this fact in 'The Rules of the Institution' by centring the events around the plight of working women in the face of the patterns of oppression inflicted on them because of their class and gender.

According to Wood, 'Assuming a moral authority based in gender, members of these groups proposed that, as women, they could offer guidance and protection to their vulnerable sisters'.⁶⁰ These clubs' aims were directed at bettering the lives of poor women and their intentions were to help working women who faced hardship, difficulty or distress. Increased leisure time gave middle class women more time to engage in intellectual pursuits and focus on civic duties within their communities. Wood also mentions that historians regard these women groups' efforts as falling under the category of 'class-bridging organizations'.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Jane Lewis, 'Women and Late-Nineteenth-Century Social Work', in *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood, and Sexuality*, ed. by Carol Smart (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 78-99.

⁵⁹ Sharon E. Wood, 'Women's Citizenship and the Problem of Employment', in *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizen, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 30-47 (pp. 46-7).

⁶⁰ Wood, 'Women's Citizenship and the Problem of Employment', p. 34.

⁶¹ Sarah Deutsch explains that some historians saw the growth of women's organizations, which specifically focused on creating egalitarian societies and maintaining social harmony between different social groups 'not simply as part of a larger reform impulse but as a distinct alternative politics – a women's politics'. These organizations differed in their strategies and ideologies as it ranged between conservative and radical thinking

However, in contrast to their initial intention of helping less privileged social groups, these clubs did not succeed in solving the problems arising from the lack of communication between different levels of social classes.⁶² The middle class women who ran such clubs were often oblivious to the realities of poor women's lives. Many of these groups and their sponsors assumed that the ideal woman's sphere was the home and that wage-paying work was debasing for women and so promoted these ideals to their 'vulnerable sisters'.⁶³

The Heterodoxy and the Liberal Clubs were considerably different in their strategies and ideologies to the two groups discussed above. Being a member of both these groups, Glaspell found her ideas somehow related to theirs as they promoted the need for expressing and discussing radical ideas which were different to the accustomed orthodox ones dominating other groups such as the Tuesday Club and Davenport's social organizations.⁶⁴ The radical groups provided Glaspell with material for her fiction and drama. For example, she was inspired to write *The People* (1917), a play discussing the fate of a magazine whose editor needs to raise money for its survival after witnessing the financial problems which faced the radical publication *The Masses* originated by Max Eastman and Floyd Dell. She also wrote *Close the Book* (1917) after her experience of joining the Tuesday Club and other social organizations. According to Brenda Murphy, Glaspell wrote *Close the Book*, the theatrical adaptation of 'Unveiling Brenda' after she was influenced by Cook's mother to make rounds in Davenport's society to establish herself as Cook's wife. However, after

about class, gender and social reform. Sarah Deutsch, 'Learning to Talk More Like a Man: Boston's Class-Bridging Organizations, 1870-1940', *The American Historical Review*, 97 (1992), 379-404 (p. 379).

⁶² According to W. Lloyd Warner, Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, while the good deeds of philanthropic organizations 'are an asset to the community', it still acts as an 'expression of the dominance and importance of the top class to those socially beneath them'. W. Lloyd Warner Marchia Meeker, and Kenneth Eells, 'What Social Class Is in America', in *Social Class and Stratification: Classic Statements and Theoretical Debates*, ed. by Rhonda F. Levine (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), pp. 60-85 (p. 68).

⁶³ Wood, 'Women's Citizenship and the Problem of Employment', p. 35.

⁶⁴ Though Glaspell was not a political activist, she was interested in political happenings and showed these occurrences in her works. See Marcia Noe, 'Intertextuality in the Early Plays of Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill', *American Drama*, 11 (2002), 1-17 (p. 10).

Glaspell was accepted into the clubs from which she had formerly been excluded, she wanted no part in them because she thought them narrow, provincial and silly. Murphy notes:

Close the Book exposes the triviality of small-town pretensions at the same time that it pokes fun at what have been Glaspell's own position, that of the "radical" who wants to divorce herself from her past and her roots, but finds it impossible.⁶⁵

The controversial topics discussed in the Heterodoxy and the Liberal Clubs did appeal to Glaspell and informed her representation of society girls which she criticized in her articles. The stories were a means of launching her own personal and cultural criticism on her society. With her focus on showing the reality of working girls' conditions, Glaspell uses the operation of the story's Woman's Club which, similar to real, twentieth century women's clubs, overlooks single and self-supporting women and treats them with less respect.

The Heterodoxy Club was founded in 1912 by Marie Jenney Howe as a discussion place for women interested in the development of more radical and liberal conceptions of political views, yet as Fletcher notes, it 'had its own form of orthodoxy and exclusivity; if a woman was not "hetero" enough, she became Heterodoxy's outsider'.⁶⁶ There was a perceived hierarchy to the group and Glaspell felt near the bottom of it. Glaspell was one of the members who felt emotionally distant from the group; she missed out on many of its meetings, and after her return from Greece, she did not renew her membership. Fletcher also explains that 'the culture of Heterodoxy seems to have alienated Glaspell, for although she was a member of the club, she kept her distance from the group, both literally and emotionally'.⁶⁷ This is evidenced by the broken appointments Glaspell missed of the

⁶⁵ Brenda Murphy, 'Glaspell and O'Neill', in *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 160-216 (p. 162).

⁶⁶ Fletcher, "'Rules of the Institution' and Sisterhood", p. 246.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Heterodoxy meetings and her antipathy towards members who she felt were complicit in the disenfranchisement of underprivileged members. Glaspell's disapproval of the club's dogmatism is reflected in her critical portrayal of the Woman's Club's members, their flawed management and the kind of power they hold in moulding and maintaining patriarchal patterns for working women under their supervision.

Glaspell's own experience with Davenport's self-righteous matrons who disapproved of her first published novel *The Glory of the Conquered; A Story of Great Love* (1909) due to its protagonists' evident independence is echoed in 'The Rules of the Institution'. Davenport's matrons resemble the leading members of the Woman's Club (Mrs. Emmons, Mrs. Van Camp, Miss Hewitt, and Mrs. Stephens) who administer and are responsible for the working girls in Severns Hall. These women have been trained not to question the inherently patriarchal rules they live by. Glaspell portrays them as the richer members of society imposing control and using disciplinary approaches on young working women while giving no heed to the well-being of the less privileged. Their selfish interests are hidden behind their haughty and supercilious personalities and their superficially created charity clubs which are ostensibly aimed at assisting working girls.

Belonging to the dominant class of society, Mrs. Van Camp, in comparison to the other members of the committee, is the firmest opponent to the idea of women's autonomy. She supports repressing ideas about female independence and teaching discipline. Blinded by the normative nature of the community she inhabits, Mrs. Van Camp expects the women in her society to exhibit proper feminine conduct which adheres to strict social codes, since to her it is the natural way of living. Women's appropriate conduct is to obey the rules and Mrs. Van Camp, simply assuming that subordination is the natural position of womankind, finds Mary's behaviour shameful. Mrs. Van Camp expresses her attacks against Mary's conduct initially under the guise of concern for the young women, claiming that it is not safe for a

single young woman to be out on her own. Her self-interest emerges when she claims that Mary 'might be arrested' and the young woman's foolish action 'would give the Hall a queer name' even if 'she did go out to think about God the rules could not be suspended'.⁶⁸ Mrs. Van Camp attacks Mary on the grounds of propriety. She finds it absurd that Mary finds her life unsatisfying and ridiculous that she wants 'more from it than she is getting'.⁶⁹ The matrons believe that Mary is fortunate and should be grateful for having the 'pleasures and classes' offered by the institution.⁷⁰ And so, instead of causing disruption by breaking rules, Mary should obey these rules. In this way, the Woman's Club forces Mary to remain in a subservient position.

The class that dominates production, represented by the Woman's Club in the story, is the one that controls the institutions that produce and publicise ideas, 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'.⁷¹ As a result, the ruling class, who are the dominant class, spreads its own self-interested ideas into all areas of life. Dennis Gilbert also notes that:

One important feature of [the] differentiation of [distinct] class outlook is the tendency for members of each group to regard their own particular class interests as the true interests of the whole society. What makes this significant is that one class has superior capacity to impose its self-serving ideas on other classes.⁷²

In other words, the rules in class-based systems are not based on compulsion but rather upon the persuasive influence of ideas borne out of self interest – as demonstrated by Mrs. Van Camp's remarks about Mary. Mrs. Van Camp is adamant on disciplining Mary and the other

⁶⁸ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 207.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Robert C. Tucker, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 172.

⁷² Dennis Gilbert, 'Social Class in America', in *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 5).

young working women at Severns Hall through authoritative influence. This way Mrs. Van Camp ensures that class boundaries are not crossed as Mary is forced to know her place in a class conscious society. Mrs. Hughes, Severns Hall's superintendent, also implements the Woman's Clubs' strategies of discipline as she is another character who supports Midwestern conformity. She strictly supervises residents' morals and enforces strict rules, such as adhering to curfew times and denying enjoyments that might endanger their souls.⁷³ Articulating her opinion of Mary, she says, 'I am very much afraid there is something in her life we do not understand. There's something queer about her'.⁷⁴ Ben-Zvi mentions that Glaspell uses the word 'queer' repeatedly in her stories to echo her arbiter's disparagement of characters who seek to break conventions in hope of attaining a more self-fulfilling life.⁷⁵ Accordingly, I believe Glaspell uses the word queer to represent individuals very much like herself, in this instance Mary, who are at odds with the social norm. Jill Dolan states that 'to be queer is not who you are, it's what you do, it's your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment'.⁷⁶ In this sense, Mary's queerness is linked with her marginalization because her behaviour goes against authority in an attempt to find more to life than mere routine factory work and domestic skills.

By relating to Mary's queer behaviour, Judith situates herself in the same slot of 'queerness'. In fact, she creates a bond between herself and Mary as she is awakened by the injustices faced by the latter. In her article, Fletcher describes how the bonding between

⁷³Matrons of early twentieth century exhibited 'higher standards of refinement, purity, and domesticity' and in return taught working women residing in boarding homes under their supervision to be the same. They saw their residents not as independent young working women but as girls who are temporarily employed and eventually will leave 'to enter their true calling as wives and mothers' and so their strategy was focused on developing young women's domestic skills. Wood, 'Women's Citizenship and the Problem of Employment', p. 35.

⁷⁴ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 199.

⁷⁵ Glaspell and her life-long friend Lucy Huffaker were known as the 'queer' ones in their hometowns since both women pursued their careers to matrimony and domesticity. See Ben-Zvi, 'Delphic Days', p. 35. Also see Black, pp. 51-2.

⁷⁶ Jill Dolan, 'Introduction: Building a Theatrical Vernacular: Responsibility, Community, Ambivalence, and Queer Theater' in *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater*, ed. by Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 1-8 (p. 5).

women places them within a kind of 'sisterhood ideology'.⁷⁷ Yet, she focuses her discussion on the sisterhood bond shared by the members of the Woman's Club who insist on protecting the rules of the institution rather than the bond created between Judith and Mary. Fletcher claims that the story 'portrays most clearly what Glaspell seems to have seen as the alarming side of sisterhood, a code of prescriptive behaviour that punishes expressions of individuality and harms eccentric hearts'.⁷⁸ Certainly, Glaspell found 'the alarming side of sisterhood' in the Heterodoxy Club where some eccentric women were made to feel a sense of inferiority and otherness even though unorthodoxy was claimed to be the official doctrine.⁷⁹ For example, Elinor Dufour felt the Heterodoxy Club wanted to excommunicate her for her opinions on the dramatic expression of Glaspell's *The Verge* (1921). Josephine Baker also criticized the members for its false claim of unorthodox dogma as she realized that the club was not any different from other groups which enforced their dogmatic codes on its members rather than embrace the members' diversities; and Ida Proper notes how Heterodoxy's ideologies demoralized her as she thought it might be a different kind of group but turned out to be dull. Though Glaspell does not directly criticize the group or its ideology, she demonstrates the same experience in 'The Rules of the Institution' where Mary is felt to be an outsider amongst other working women living in Severns Hall simply because she thinks and feels differently. Glaspell does not deny the individual's need for a community for she learned from her grandmother the necessity of reaching out to others at times of hardship.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Among feminists, 'sisterhood' refers to the connection between women who are not biologically related yet are bonded in solidarity. Fletcher clarifies that there is not one precise definition for the term 'sisterhood'. However, in relation to Glaspell's stories, 'sisterhood' is 'a group of more than two women who are strongly bonded together, and the sisters derive from the bond more power and agency than they could achieve as individuals'. Fletcher, p. 241. Other Glaspellian critics (Veronica Makowsky, Elaine Hedges, Judith Fetterley and Mary Ann Ferguson) agree that the concept of 'sisterhood' can also be applied to the bond occurring between only two women as seen in stories such as *The Visioning*, *Fidelity*, *Trifles* (1916) ('A Jury of Her Peers' (1917)), and *The Outside* (1917) ('A Rose in the Sand' (1927)).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Fletcher, pp. 246-7. Also see Ozieblo, 'Religious Fervor', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 169-90 (p. 185).

⁸⁰ Glaspell's paternal grandmother, the first Susan Glaspell, taught Glaspell the principles of perseverance, abhorrence of discrimination, courage and the need for the community which we find in her stories.

As an idealist and an obvious supporter of women as evidenced in her stories, Glaspell intends for Mary and Judith to unite as 'In the fight for freeing Mary Graham [Judith] would free herself'.⁸¹ Glaspell sees that women's emancipation and enlightenment is possible through social unity and is against any doctrine which endorsed inequality. She provides a social critique of women groups, specifically those which (perhaps unwittingly) used their power to enhance class inequality and her story 'The Rules of the Institution' presents a fictional version of the corruptive influence that may have occurred within the kinds of organizations she was a member of.

I.4 Judith's Awakening to the Importance of Social Change

Regarding herself as the spokesperson for the Woman's Club, Judith starts off her errand with a defensive stance in favour of its members, 'She did not know why she, who had come with the kindest intentions of the world, should be in some intangible way – there was the grievance – be made to feel on the defensive and ridiculous'.⁸² Yet, due to Mary's indifferent reaction to her disciplinary talk, Judith becomes unconvinced with what she initially came to do. Experiencing an inner conflict and confusion, Judith begins to see the Woman's Club as representing all the barriers that could stop an individual from reaching self-realization and thwart her potential. The conversation between Judith and Mary reveals Glaspell's attack on social injustice in relation to gender inequality and her support for social change.

Grandmother Susan used to tell stories of when her family first came to Davenport as settlers. They used to keep their lights on for passing travellers to stop by for meals even though it meant risking attacks from the Indians. See Ben-Zvi, 'Introduction: Blackhawk's Land'. Such stories had an effect on Glaspell's understanding of the bond of sisterhood. Though she portrays women's clubs as systematic organizations that somehow stifle women as shown in 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914), she projects the true need for reaching out to members of the community who would understand one's hardships in characters such Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in 'A Jury of Her Peers', Allie Mayo and Mrs. Paxton in 'A Rose to the Sand' and Millie and Harriet in 'The Girl from Down-Town' (1903).

⁸¹ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 208.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Mary awakens Judith's dormant understanding of rigid Midwestern culture. At this point, we witness the awakening of Judith's consciousness as her view of the Woman's Club changes:

... the things holding her in – things that held every one in. They arranged an order; that order must be subscribed to. They made rules; those rules must be kept. There was no sympathy with a thing that broke into things as they had planned them. Why would one wish to do a thing that was not customary?⁸³

Judith's feelings of antagonism towards the Woman's Club emerge as she realizes they stand for rules which confine women to employment at the factory and public roles restricted to the exercise of moral and domestic virtues through participation in religion and charity. She begins to see the injustices involving class inequalities which Mary speaks of, such as the denial of basic human rights and the curtailment of education.

The exposure to better educational opportunities is shown as an advantage accessible mainly to the upper middle class.⁸⁴ However, in 'The Rules of the Institution', college education for girls is not deemed an important asset and women are openly criticized for having attained a bachelor's degree. For instance, Judith's peers at the Woman's Club associate college with snobbish traits and accuse Judith of being a 'high-brow' for pursuing a college education.⁸⁵ Unaware of the caged lives they live, they feel that Judith's intellectual capabilities are unnecessary for her expected role as a wife and mother. Mary's question, 'When you're educated, can you tell things?', stimulates Judith's inactive but educated mind. Judith has come from school with a 'fine sense of life as not a fixed thing, but a thing of

⁸³ Ibid., p. 207.

⁸⁴ In *The Visioning*, Glaspell demonstrates the importance of refining the human mind with uncensored education. The protagonist Katie is condemned for wanting to further expand her knowledge with 'dangerous' education such as Socialism, Darwinism and Nietzscheism.

⁸⁵ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', pp. 203-04.

continuously unfolding possibilities. ... She was going to "do something".⁸⁶ However, caught up in the order of life in the Midwest, Judith spends the two years after returning from college 'giving in' to the conformity of her society. Mary rallies about giving in to conformity, 'give in – give in – give in! What's left?'⁸⁷ Her anger at society's regulations brings about an intellectual awakening for herself but also for Judith. Judith, too, has been dragged into a life where things are pre-shaped for her. She becomes identified by her position in society, an identification which does not fit her education and aspirations. Mary points to the fact that if she continuously relents to society's rigid conventions, she will not have much of her individuality left, a similar position to that Judith finds herself in. Mary sees that Judith's education may be a way to progress. Here, Glaspell insinuates that education as having the power to destroy ignorance, thus allowing individuals to cross boundaries and break the chains of class.⁸⁸

Aside from using Mary's character as an enticement for Judith's awakening, Glaspell also uses the character of Charles Emmons to show how social misconceptions can occur amongst members of the same class (rather than simply between different classes). At the beginning of the story, Judith's prejudices regarding Mr. Emmons are revealed as she regards him as nothing but a 'booster' who has no ideas. This changes when she learns from Mrs. Brunswick that, in his youth, Charles had planned to 'go on studying' and become a writer but his family forced him to get into business instead.⁸⁹ In this case, Glaspell demonstrates that the power of social conformity extends to men, as well as women. She focuses upon the character of a middle class man who sacrifices his dream of being a writer to go into the family business. Undoubtedly, Glaspell had in mind Cook's father who expected his son to follow his footsteps. Cook, a graduate of Harvard and the son of one of Davenport's most

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 203. The same idea of 'doing something' is mentioned by Ann in *The Visioning* which is discussed in Chapter One.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 202.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 198.

prestigious families, defied conventional values by turning his back on the family business and working in different sectors such as farming, carpentering and writing. Glaspell created a contrasting character in Mr. Emmons. Though of a similar family background to Cook's family, Mr. Emmons, unlike Cook, yields to his family's desires and social expectations.⁹⁰ Certainly, Glaspell intended to portray Mr. Emmons as a victim of his own class to emphasize how certain societal laws and customs form barriers to weaken individuals from progressing. In addition, she intends for Mr. Emmons's submission to contrast Mary's rallying against giving in to social rules.

In Judith's observation of Mr. Emmons at the end of the story, we witness her awareness of the consequences of giving in: 'She watched him. Here was one who had given in, overcome by things that were fixed; held, perhaps, in the mesh of affection. And now he was something different; something made by the little things he had given in to'.⁹¹ It is evident that even if Mr. Emmons did have the opportunity to pursue his dreams the social mores that control his Midwestern society are strong enough to dominate his decisions and so he yields to them in order to be accepted rather than to be considered an outsider: 'He said again, putting down something stubbornly insurgent in himself; "You see, we do have to keep to the rules"'.⁹² Mr. Emmons's submissive stance angers Judith because she comes to realize that an individual has the power and control over her/his own life. Judith senses his subjugation and her thoughts turn into feelings of sympathy because she knows he is weak for not having fought for his own desires. In this regard, Mr. Emmons becomes a factor in Judith's awakening to the reality of submitting to social conformity. Witnessing Mr. Emmons's submission, Judith becomes aware that conformity not only transcends gender but

⁹⁰ Mr. Emmons resembles other Glaspellian characters, such as *Fidelity's* Edith Blair, a representative of a static characters who stand as a contrast to the women protagonists who defy Midwestern societal standards. Their purpose is to highlight the protagonist's strife against rigid customary duties and emphasize the protagonists' contentious position with regards to the lower classes.

⁹¹ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 208.

⁹² Ibid.

also social classes since the power of social conventions which control Mary also control Mr. Emmons.

As with most of Glaspell's stories, 'The Rules of the Institution' is left open without any confirmation or clear sense of the fate of the characters. Judith asserts that she will not 'give in' and follows her desires by planning to seek out her former college friends who have gone on to pursue careers. Glaspell leaves Mary's fate unknown and the reader is not given any more information about her after the meeting with Judith. Even though Mary exerts a strong sense of self-knowledge and social justice with her defiance of the rules of the institution, her importance to the story seems to be her role as a catalyst in Judith's life. Mary is not given any agency in the story either at plot level or at meta-level not only because of her lowly status. One might argue, that she is not given any agency by Glaspell as she is simply a pawn for Judith's awakening. Glaspell utilizes Mary as device to awaken the sensibility of a middle class woman. Mary, an individual who shows willingness to challenge the antiquated system that dehumanizes her and the women around her, challenges the status quo and the legitimacy of the Woman's Club since they take advantage of their influential position to displace her. But Glaspell knew that her readers were primarily women of a similar socio-cultural background as Judith and pitched the story to jerk them out of their own ignorance and prejudices.

Part II: Power Struggles in 'Unveiling Brenda'

Set in the fictional Midwestern state of Ioda, 'Unveiling Brenda' revolves around the experiences of Peyton Root, a university instructor at the fictional University of Ioda and the nephew of the city's governor. Enrolled in Peyton's class, Brenda Munroe, the daughter of a milkman, is different to most of her classmates and is looked down on by her university peers who refer to her as 'Poor Brenda' because of her lowly social and economic status. However,

Peyton is challenged by her intellectual essays and is attracted to her regardless of the objections he faces from his social circle, amongst whom are Peyton's family and Brenda's colleagues at school. They find his attraction absurd and unacceptable, but Peyton ignores this and continues to pursue Brenda.

In her portrayal of Peyton's peers, Ioda's university community, Glaspell criticizes certain inherited social values and human qualities passed on to future generations especially Ioda's institution of learning since it resembles Iowa's educational community. Glaspell critiques certain social trends which control ideas and which censor any means of individual expression, thus lowering educational levels. Glaspell's contempt towards such institutions of learning is clear in Peyton's disapproval of the University of Ioda, which he sees as 'insensitive' to individuals of lower rankings because of its rigid rules and conformity. Peyton, the voice of reason, scorns his society's standards: 'what standards! What's the difference between a milkman and a wholesale grocer?'.⁹³ Through Peyton, Glaspell denounces the snobbery of Peyton's peers for excluding intellectual but lower class women like Brenda from their high society.

Mrs. Shields, the wife of Peyton's Head of Department who is driven by a personal agenda, attempts to lure Peyton away from Brenda to bring him closer to Ina Gilson, daughter of one of the university's influential regents. In her attempts to bring Peyton and Ina together, Mrs. Shields reveals a hidden secret about Brenda's origin as a 'waif'.⁹⁴ This revelation and the ensuing gossip impel Brenda to run away to find her true origins. Ironically, Peyton becomes more attached to Brenda and the story ends with the couple growing closer regardless of society's disapproval, thus destabilising social and class barriers.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 60.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

II.1 'Snob Power' and Class Inequality

Before his arrival to the United States in 1950s Walter Allen, the British novelist and literary critic, believed that 'class scarcely existed in America, except perhaps, as divisions between ethnic groups or successive waves of immigrants'.⁹⁵ However, having lived in the Midwest, Allen learned that the 'snob power' of the upper class locals, who had strict moral rules and cultural authority, still existed. In 'Unveiling Brenda', Glaspell depicts the workings and ramifications of the 'snob power' of the upper middle class with a focus on specific spheres, the social circle and the classroom. Applying Allen's description of Midwest American societies to the story, we find that the characters nearer the top of the hierarchy perceive values and behaviour as dispensable criteria of class in comparison to social standing and wealth, which are perceived as the defining variables of class.⁹⁶ Glaspell shows that class differentiation is institutionalized through the economic status which separates members of the society. Writing in hope of an egalitarian and socially reformed society, Glaspell attacks the repressive conventions held onto by characters such as Mrs. Shields who promotes class difference and who enforces class segregation on the basis of individuals' social background and affluence, as seen with the displacing of Brenda. Mrs. Shields, resembling the self-righteous and prudish personalities of the Woman's Club members in 'The Rules of the Institution', follows a system whereby members of society with similar social positions and incomes mingle together and separate themselves from mixing with the lower groups.⁹⁷ From Mrs. Shields's perspective, Brenda is 'too original for university circles.'⁹⁸ Glaspell makes an interesting point here about education not necessarily being free of the conventions which

⁹⁵ Quoted in Paul Fussell, 'A Touchy Subject', in *Class: A Guide through the American Status System* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), pp. 15-23 (p. 17).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹⁷ Glaspell tends to depict segregated neighbourhoods to present different class ranking as a way of illuminating the problems of class discrimination. Examples of novels depicting this fact are *The Visioning*, *Fidelity*, *Fugitive's Return*, *Norma Ashe* and *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931).

⁹⁸ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 60.

govern society. Mrs. Shields claims that Brenda does not fit in with the wealthy because of her father's occupation as a milkman.

Encountering the pressure of economic and social dislocation, Brenda faces a subtle animosity and rejection by her classmates because of their ideas about her social position and uncertain origins. Unlike most of Glaspell's heroines, Brenda is portrayed as confident and unchallenged by society's criticism of her. She cares little for social niceties and displays a sense of otherness by opposing the norm in order to revolt against traditions which cater to inhibiting an individual's fulfilment. As Brenda asserts, 'I felt that I wasn't in my place - that I didn't belong ... I came to like the feeling that I didn't belong - that I was outside - by myself. It - it made me what I am.'⁹⁹ Unrestricted by rules, Brenda acknowledges and is content with her position as an outsider because, to her, an outsider is someone who can be free from social restrictions. Clearly Brenda's attitude displays Glaspell's empathy toward outsiders, a word she often uses to describe either individuals who have been alienated from society or those who try to break free from restrictive social conventions. However, Brenda's confusion arises upon her exposure to the truth of her origins. She finds out that she has been adopted by the milkman's family and rumours circulated by the university's community insinuate that she is of gypsy lineage. Brenda is not embarrassed of her current guardians, and she is not ashamed of her possible gypsy heredity. Indeed, she feels that as being the daughter of a milkman distinguished her from her peers, her possible gypsy stock also 'sets her apart' from the society around her.¹⁰⁰ Brenda fits Marcia Noe's description of Glaspell's heroines as the:

true seekers sometimes searching for self-knowledge or fulfilment. Very often they are alienated individuals who, while seeking to resolve conflicts within themselves or

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁰⁰ Glaspell, 'The Rules of the Institution', p. 76.

with others, find they must understand the past in order to define themselves and their relationship to their community.¹⁰¹

Glaspell portrays Brenda as an example of someone in search of fulfilment. Brenda's insistence on 'unveiling' her past is to ensure and validate the authenticity of her 'inferiority' which she has grown to be proud of. What is worth noting here is the transference of control. The title of the story suggests that Brenda is unveiled by those around her, perhaps even exposed by them. However, her quest to find out about her origins means she seizes the power of unveiling for herself – controlling her past, and, thereby, her future. Upon her finding out that her real father is not a gypsy, but a working labourer who mends boilers, and her mother a teacher at a Sunday school, this nonetheless confirms her position as an outsider and this allows her to distinguish herself from the superficial middle class that had alienated her in the first place.

Brenda embraces and builds her status through hard work and intellectual self-achievement.¹⁰² She challenges her male instructor and peers with her intellect that in some ways she might be seen as a New Woman. Glaspell's conception of the New Woman is a woman who constitutes certain characteristics: intelligence and intellectual vivaciousness, wittiness and intrigue. In one of her articles, Glaspell compelled women to adopt these characteristics:

You must have sufficient resources within yourself not to be afflicted with *ennui* every time there is no man in sight, and when the man does come into view, you must

¹⁰¹ Marcia Noe, 'Susan Glaspell (1 July 1876-27 July 1948)', in *American Novelists, 1910-1945. Part 2. Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. by James J. Martine (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1981), pp. 66-72 (p. 67).

¹⁰² Brenda echoes Glaspell's words in *Ambrose Holt and Family*, 'What we need, perhaps more than any other thing, is to be permitted to have as much mind as we have'. Susan Glaspell, *Ambrose Holt and Family* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1931), p. 148. Conformity does not stop Brenda from 'hav[ing] much mind' because, to her, freedom is achieved and felt through intellectual autonomy.

stand ready to cope with him on his own grounds rather than docilely and demurely wait for him to fill your ear with pretty nothings.¹⁰³

Targeting upper middle class women readers, the above excerpt clearly conveys Glaspell's strong support for women's intellectualism as a way of enabling women toward sexual equality. Glaspell uses Brenda's character, an example of the personae she speaks about in her column, to prove that each individual, regardless of her class and gender, is responsible for discovering her own capabilities. Brenda's character is only an example for other women to venture outside the limits of their social circle in order to make use of their brains and to progress intellectually. Glaspell encourages women to release their minds from captivity to be able to create their own unique and civilized existence as a way of escaping the barren lives of conventionalism. She also uses Brenda as a model for female defiance against restrictive social conventions which do not allow women to equate themselves with men.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to Brenda's intellectualism is the vacuity of the 'society girl', whom Glaspell criticized consistently in her columns and who is represented in the character of Ina Gilson. Glaspell enjoyed parodying and satirizing Davenport's upper middle class society girls because she witnessed their daily banal routine which was dominated by boredom, gossip and social partying. One of Glaspell's descriptions fits Ina's character:

Do not be pleased with yourself. You are not superior in your individuality. It is only that fortune has favored you with worldly things. Your position gives you so many opportunities and you utilize almost none of them.

¹⁰³ Susan Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 17 October 1896.

¹⁰⁴ Glaspell's character and background resembles Brenda's character since she herself, a farmer's daughter with good writing skills, defied Davenport's social conventions when she left her hometown to continue her studies. According to Fletcher, Glaspell did receive the advantages of middle class luxuries such as 'college education, artistic development, and world travel' but 'only by virtue of her intelligence, talent, and drive, and her writing often displays a double consciousness: she looked at her own and others' middle class behaviours with the critical eyes of a girl who had grown up as a poor farmer's daughter'. Fletcher, p. 251.

Oh, these Society girls, primping their way through life. If they only knew how shallow their efforts, how limiting their vision.¹⁰⁵

Inheriting her family's social ranking and customs, Ina chooses to eliminate any member who does not fit her social circle.¹⁰⁶ She is socially constructed to justify and naturalize women's suppression and this is evident in her reference to 'Poor Brenda'. Described as a 'lady', Ina's labelling of Brenda as 'poor' exemplifies how she observes Brenda from 'above', subjugating Brenda's position. Ina does not want to socialise with Brenda because this would defy social standards. Her objection to Brenda represents the conflict between convention and conformity. Just like a mechanical doll, Ina is curtailed by what she has been taught to be the proper conduct of a woman of high social standing. Daughter of one of the most influential regents of the university, Ina is trapped in a role where her actions, thoughts and expectations are sheltered and dominated by inexperience. Even though Ina attends university, her classes do not help her flourish intellectually because her interest lies more with social parties where she fishes for eligible bachelors. Aware of Peyton's prestigious position as the nephew of the governor, she seeks him out as a potential suitor. However, Ina does not interest Peyton on any level, socially, intellectually or physically. Instead, she baffles him when she demeans Brenda by referring to her as 'Poor Brenda'. Peyton question: 'Why poor? He didn't see why anybody as brazen as that need be poor. Very well fitted indeed, he should say, for coping with the world in which she found herself'.¹⁰⁷ Unlike Brenda, Ina does not cope well with her university classes and instead secludes her mind within the confinements of Ioda's accepted standards of upper middle class femininity. Her mind is crippled and her intellectual scope

¹⁰⁵ Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p.6 .

¹⁰⁶ According to Gilbert, the position of socialites amongst members of their community is one of prestige. They usually have strict rules concerning women, of whom they expect good conduct to suit their class. The social mores dictated by these families tend to reflect wider social ideals regarding female behaviour and propriety. Gilbert, 'Social Class in America', p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 57.

does not exceed the mind of a naïve girl whose only purpose in life is to end up in domestic bliss with the right match.

In describing Ina, Peyton echoes Glaspell's voice, 'How could youth be so stupid? – so banal!'¹⁰⁸ Glaspell aligns herself with Peyton in this case since he criticizes the superficiality and naiveté of some of his female students. Coming from Peyton, this might be construed as sexist but the voice is clearly that of Glaspell. At certain points, Peyton is a mouthpiece for Glaspell as his voice, in this instance, strongly resembles Glaspell's scorn of the society girl who lives a 'superficial, aimless life'.¹⁰⁹ However, in most instances Brenda is Glaspell's mouthpiece as she clearly reflects the author's personae and life. For example, Brenda subtly criticizes Peyton when he questions her selection of writing on the topic of 'dolts' (discussed in the following section of this chapter): 'I would be interested in knowing what governed your selection of a subject'.¹¹⁰ Peyton does find Brenda's paper to be audacious. It seems that he probably thought Brenda incapable of coming up with the topic herself, but was rather governed by some impulse or external force to write such an essay. His statement is not intended at provoking or challenging her. He rather questions her selection out of curiosity of finding out who wrote an interesting paper like hers. One thing to be noted here is Glaspell's use of the word 'governed' which raises attention to the concept of control. Peyton could have simply expressed his admiration for Brenda's work which certainly compliments her intellects. However, Brenda's defensive reply 'I thought we were just to write of what was in our minds' hints at the idea of freedom of speech which Glaspell strongly supports in stories such as 'Finality in Freeport' (1916).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Glaspell, 'Social Life', *The Weekly Outlook*, 6 February 1897, p. 6. What is interesting here is Glaspell's utilization of some kind of literary cross-dressing in taking on the voice of a man and shifting to a woman as her way of kicking against gender construction. This proves her to be more of a dynamic and revolutionary writer of fiction.

¹¹⁰ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 58.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Glaspell had clearly been working through various versions of the theme of social and gender inequality. A play called *Close the Book* offers a similar storyline to 'Unveiling Brenda'. Glaspell attacks university people through the female protagonist Jhansi who declares that the university social circle, haughty and supercilious, mistakenly believe themselves to be important people of culture in the community of their university town. Similar to Brenda, Jhansi is convinced that her freedom is more important than subjecting herself to the traditional rules of the university faculty members whose pride lies in their social status. Both Jhansi and Brenda demand social transformation through the acceptance of all individuals and refuse to be regarded as anything but inferior to the norm because, to them, inferiority is the norm and their embrace of it is an act of solidarity. Jhansi is aware of how the upper middle class shield themselves from other social groups, 'You come of people who have been walled in all their lives. It doesn't cage you'.¹¹² Similarly, Brenda represents the liberated free-thinking woman who refuses to 'cage' herself within the walls which society has built. She fights against society's restraints by voicing her opinion in the assignments she writes for Peyton's course. Again we see Glaspell pushing an agenda of necessary social change, social acceptance and the erasure of gender discrimination. But in this point of her career, her women characters have become more voiciferous, though quietly so, in calling for class and gender equality.

II.2 The Importance of Education in 'Unveiling' Realities

Glaspell draws on Cook's teaching experiences and its difficulties as serious concerns in 'Unveiling Brenda'. In *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell recounting Cook's experiences:

"Is there any hope for the unimaginative mind?"

¹¹² Susan Glaspell, 'Close the Book', in *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi and J. Ellen Gainor (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., Publishers, 2010), pp. 35-46 (p. 37).

A farmer's daughter put that question to Instructor Cook, after that young man, just home from Florence, had been teaching English in the University of Iowa ...

He held out hope for the unimaginative mind, though it would seem he got the hope by dodging the question. A dull lifeless education had stiffened where there should be supple freedom. Iowa was not civilized. It knew nothing about success in life itself as apart from success in profession or business.¹¹³

Cook saw that the institution of learning in Iowa differed from his own definition of what constitutes a 'proper' education. His own interests, experiences and enthusiasms were not welcomed, perhaps not understood, in what he called a primitive place built by early settlers who had not acquired the advantages of civilization.¹¹⁴ As a teacher who was passionate about education, he had a 'hearty instinct against authority'.¹¹⁵ He saw that this kind of authority affected education in Iowa because the youth saw education only in terms of his "'practical" [value] – that is, worth money'.¹¹⁶ He also found trouble refining his students' minds as he had to deal with both the poor students, children of farmers and tradesmen, and the rich students, children of lawyers and physicians. Like Cook, Glaspell saw the reality of the 'unimaginative mind', which dominated many of the youth of her Iowan hometown at the beginning of the century, as an important issue. This is why she chose to portray the fictional Ioda in 'Unveiling Brenda' as resembling Iowa in its failure to understand what she at least perceived to be the 'true' meanings of success.

¹¹³ Glaspell, 'Instructor Cook', in *The Road to the Temple*, pp. 79-84 (p. 79).

¹¹⁴ Cook found gaps in the American literature curricula because it did not enlighten students with the depth of what Greece's culture and Dante offered. Similar to Cook, Peyton, interested in reading Nietzschean, despises American literature's apparent superficiality which he sees as centred only on entertainment instead of depth and worthy American issues. Peyton describes the literature as 'a toddy with a stick left out' because he feels that compared to European literature it is trivial. Susan Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', in *Her America: 'A Jury of Her Peers' and Other Stories*, ed. by Patricia L. Bryan and Martha C. Carpentier (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 55-80 (p. 61, p. 78).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Similar to Cook in his educational and social background is Peyton Root. In the story, Peyton is described in a slightly mocking tone as 'nephew of the governor' and 'Mr. Root of Harvard and Heidelberg; he was Peyton Root of Des Champs - proud capital of the fecund state, a city which boasted as giddy a social life as ever scandalized a metropolis'.¹¹⁷ Peyton's social position gives him the advantage of being in control, however, this position also imprisons him since he is tied to obligations which he cannot easily free himself of. High expectations of Peyton situate him in a place where class barriers control an individual's association with other members of society. Peyton's associates, the university's influential regents, believe that he should 'bring the fruits of a rich social experience' to the Iodian community due to his Harvard and Heidelberg social experiences, as long as these experiences suit the conventional rules of the university.¹¹⁸ However, the difference between Peyton and other members of his social circle is in his belief that his social position is not as important to him as the importance of a valuable education which allows an individual to think beyond society's shallow views.¹¹⁹

Peyton is intellectually challenged by Brenda's performance in his class and the boldness of her ideas in the assignments he sets. Unaccustomed to such audacity in the expression of ideas customarily unspoken, Peyton is intrigued by her confidence. Brenda's essay 'On the Pain of Teaching Dolts' criticizes her classmates, who are also Peyton's students, by labelling them 'dolts' since they are unappreciative of knowledge, specifically the knowledge Peyton contributes to them through his courses. Fuelled by ideas of independence, Brenda asks: 'Why should a noble soul unveil itself to dolts?'¹²⁰ Here we

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 56. Like Peyton, Cook went to Harvard and Heidelberg for his studies to attain a degree in law and prepare himself to teach English Literature and Philosophy in an American University in the Midwest. In addition, Cook's family's high esteem reputation amongst Davenport's community forced him to live up to the standards of the prestigious Cook family.

¹¹⁹ Peyton is the complete opposite to other Glaspellian educators who censor the path to truth. Examples of rigid conventional tutors are Miss. Collins in *Fidelity* and Miss. Sisson in *The Visioning*.

¹²⁰ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 56.

witness Brenda's ability to acknowledge the importance of education coming from a 'noble soul' which she sees as the true spirit of a learner. Peyton's surprised remark, 'There was a girl in his class who actually had the face to write this thing and sign it and hand it in! Brenda Munroe', addresses an important issue.¹²¹ Peyton's observation shows his surprise at a woman's capability of expressing her views. He is not used to his female students being 'brazen' in expressing their thoughts as he believes them to be simply less confident and vacuous. Peyton is appalled at his students' assignments and the topics they choose to write about and mocks their narrow interests. Commenting on Ina Gilson's 'What My Books Mean to Me', Peyton retorts, 'He would like to suggest to Miss Gilson that she next write on 'What My Toes Mean to Me'.¹²² However, when he comes across Brenda's paper, he compliments its boldness and then further comments on Brenda's unusual name thinking '*who* Brenda Munroe was Queer name'.¹²³ Peyton's use of 'queer' echoes Mary's queer behaviour in 'The Rules of The Institution' which is discussed in the previous section. It signifies Brenda's challenging personality, which in Peyton's opinion, pours scorn upon and unsettles the usual order of his class. From another angle, Peyton's labelling of Brenda as 'queer' may foster the idea of gender inequality as he falls prey to discriminating Brenda for her work due to her gender. When asked about her selection of theme Brenda, defiant in character, retorts: 'I thought we were to write of the things that interested us ... of what was in our minds. I will try to write with more restraint ... more conventionally'.¹²⁴ Instead of being complimented on her liberated thinking by a 'noble soul', Brenda feels she is hemmed in when she writes freely.

Here Glaspell hints at how women's writing at the beginning of the twentieth century was restrained because of what they were expected to write. In her play, *Inheritors* (1921),

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹²² Ibid., p. 56.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 57.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 58-9.

Glaspell explores the thematic concern dealing with censored education and the suppression of free speech specifically on college campuses. Glaspell herself faced the same problem as a journalist and had to subtly blend most of her satirical comments criticizing society girls with words of wisdom in her columns to avoid censorship. She uses Brenda's audacious character and bold ideas to voice her own convictions which assert the fact that the power of defiance lies in the written word. She attacks institutions of learning by deriding the reactionary attitudes of its most distinguished representatives who she sees as negatively controlling education. Brenda's reaction to Peyton's remark hints at Glaspell's attitude towards learning institutions. Both character and author are strongly vocal in their writings which are acts of revolt against what stifles women's voices. Admiring Brenda's personality for its assertiveness, Peyton becomes aware of the difficulty of overcoming class barriers:

She wasn't at the places where acquaintances are advanced. And while there was between them a delightful little classroom understanding, as between two lively souls in a world of dolts, it didn't seem to have any tendrils out into the wide world beyond the classroom. This, Instructor Root one day decided, was a state of things which had existed long enough.¹²⁵

Due to his developing affection for Brenda, Peyton comes to recognize the class-based social conventions which keep them apart. He knows that in order to advance his acquaintance with the milkman's daughter, he will upset and disrupt the social life of his Iodian community. And so Glaspell portrays Peyton rebelling against his family, friends and colleagues for Brenda's sake, 'he thought about the whole world he knew. He knew that everything he had

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

been part of would be pitted against what he was doing. And with all of that in the scale against Brenda - well, it weighed about a feather'.¹²⁶

Resembling other Glaspellian matrons, Mrs. Shields wants to maintain the social status quo. Throughout the story, Mrs. Shields acts as the force that attempts to widen the social gap between Peyton and Brenda.¹²⁷ She notes that the 'university is no place for a rebel' by explaining to Peyton that Brenda's 'silly little skit', an article entitled "Suppose They Left Me Out" published in *Iodian*, the university's newspaper, challenges Iodian behaviours and this prevents Brenda from getting into the sorority, an opportunity which could have granted her social acceptance.¹²⁸ According to Mrs. Shields, Brenda's rejection is due to her inability to 'go about it right to get in'.¹²⁹ This observation reveals Mrs. Shields's own cunning plan and illuminates the importance of her name. Glaspell's use of Mrs. Shields's name is worthy of note because it embodies a meaning which is equivalent to the rigid ideologies she follows. A shield is a person or thing providing protection. Mrs. Shields protects her own conventional ideas by rejecting Brenda. She also 'shields' information from Peyton and manipulates facts in order to climb to a higher professional level. She exposes Brenda's secret identity to Peyton for personal gain, 'If you are fond of Brenda Munroe ... don't talk to her in public about waifs ... Because she is one.'¹³⁰ Even though she socializes

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

¹²⁷ In her observation on Glaspell's plays of the second decade of the twentieth century, Noe states, 'A consideration of the political/cultural milieu in which ... Glaspell wrote [her] early plays illuminates the ways in which they endorse an ethic of rebellion and non-conformity, enact the plight of the Other, and demonstrate how authority and power shape the dominant forms of knowledge and discourse, and thus govern behavior'. Noe's observation clearly describes Brenda's plight against Mrs. Shields, an individual in an authoritative position, who tries to govern behaviour even though she does not succeed at doing so. Noe, 'Intertextuality in the Early Plays of Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill', p. 10.

¹²⁸ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 60. Though the author is vague on the contents of Brenda's article, it is implied that Brenda criticizes the sorority's values giving no heed to be part of a superficial group which encourages social snobbery. Fletcher observes that 'the story 'Unveiling Brenda' provides a particularly vivid portrayal of a dangerous sisterhood, a college sorority that rejects the free-thinking Brenda Munroe. The sorority casts off Brenda after she critiques it in a satirical story for the college'. Fletcher, p. 254. Though Glaspell critiques the dangerous code of 'sisterhood' in upper middle class groups, she also focuses on portraying Brenda's ability to withstand difficulties and progress in an environment which rejects her to provide instances of possible defiance.

¹²⁹ Glaspell, 'Unveiling Brenda', p. 60.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

with the elites of Ioda, Mrs. Shields seeks even further social prominence. Critical of middle class indulgences, Glaspell presents Mrs. Shields as a social leader – ‘wife of the head of his department, a woman wiser in the ways of the world than most of the faculty wives ... attached to the idea of making her husband president of the university’.¹³¹ The description proves Mrs. Shields to be a social climber whose only way of accomplishing her goal is getting Ina closer to Peyton and pushing Brenda further away. Her attachment to Ina Gilson is not instigated from genuine affection for the girl but due to Ina being the daughter of the influential regent which complements Peyton’s social standing as the governor’s son. Thus, Peyton’s attraction to Brenda stands in the way of Mrs. Shields’s hidden agenda and by eliminating Brenda she secures her husband’s prestigious position, and her own.¹³²

The narrow-mindedness of Midwestern society and its rigid conventions are elements which Glaspell consistently rejected in her stories as they were deeply embedded in class and gender discrimination. As seen in the discussion of this chapter, Glaspell rejects the socio-cultural values which lead to the social, intellectual and economic oppression of women. She expresses her views against a range of cultural environments which seem to enable the exploitation and curtailment of opportunity for those who are less privileged. She urges society to reconsider attitudes to those who are in some way different and regarded as inferior or superior depending on one’s perceived position. Glaspell focuses on the conflicts arising specifically in Midwestern communities where ambitious individuals find conventions too limiting for their personal development or self-expression. ‘The Rules of the Institution’ and ‘Unveiling Brenda’ are two examples of Glaspell’s short stories wherein gender inequalities

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹³² Glaspell portrays certain middle class women as basing their class identities on their husbands’ social ranks regardless of their own background origin. In *Ambrose Holt and Family*, Glaspell questions this absurd idea through Blossom’s query: ‘Does a working wife base her class identification on her husband’s occupation, her own occupation, or some combination of the two?’ Mrs. Shields opts for the first. Glaspell, *Ambrose Holt and Family*, p. 195.

and class discrimination are depicted in different spheres: social, professional and educational. Glaspell may not depict direct images of social change, yet she proposes ways of achieving it through the efforts and experiences of women, such as Mary, Judith and Brenda, who attempt to attain equality in societies where communal systems abuse power for the benefit of the wealthier members of society.

Developing from and building upon Chapter One, in this chapter I have explored Glaspell's attempt to draw attention to power struggles in women's social groups and educational spheres to show that it is nearly always the rich who seek to preserve the social status quo. They rarely wish to instigate change. Representing Glaspell herself and her struggle in a class-based society which was dominated by class ranks and wealth, Mary, Judith and Brenda try to pave their ways against the rigid conventions of small town Midwestern society. Regardless of their less privileged status, Mary and Brenda, independent free spirits who defy social mores, work for social change as it may just grant them the educational and professional opportunities they so desire. These two chapters demonstrate Glaspell's commitment to using her writing as a means of social change. Glaspell shows women who are curtailed by their environments yet who continue to agitate and yearn for a better life. In *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931), Glaspell defines success as simply 'making the most possible of oneself'.¹³³ Certainly, Glaspell subscribes to such a view. But she also shows how one can be prevented by their socio-environs in pursuing this aim. In this regard, Glaspell casts a coldly realist authorial eye on the plight of women and the possibilities of change. While inspired by the socialist rhetoric of her peers, her husband, her journalistic reports, Glaspell's fiction often shows an awareness of the limitations of such ideals.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 144.

Chapter Three

The Silenced Voice in Glaspell's Narratives

'The voice you hear is not my speaking voice – but my mind's voice. I have not spoken since I was six years old. No one knows why – not even me. My father says it is a dark talent.' ~ Jane Campion, *The Piano* (1993)

According to French feminist theorists, such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, language is phallogocentric and therefore effectively silences women. Women must discover new female voices with which to express themselves. In Jane Campion's acclaimed film *The Piano*, Ada McGarh, the heroine of the story, does not speak until the end of the film. Throughout the film, we listen to her thoughts and we come to understand that she finds refuge in her silence. Though Ada may feel she has nothing worthwhile to say, we the audience are aware that she has plenty of important things to say. Ada's expressive medium and new female voice are her piano and the notes she plays.¹ Interpreted differently by the characters in the film, Ada's silence and expressive voice connotes different meanings: strength of will, sensuality and repression. Though Campion's film is not directly linked to Glaspell's work, it does address the issue of elective mutism and the seeming failure of language from a woman's perspective, its inability to articulate her reality. As in Campion's film, within Susan Glaspell's life and works, we see that silence is of central importance because it represents a world where words fail to express the truth about women's hardships and experiences such as those discussed in the previous chapters. Her characters, not unlike Ada, often choose a life of contemplative silence, protecting themselves by withholding their voice.

Before proceeding to discuss how Glaspell presents silence as the strongest means of communication in her fiction, it is important to note how Glaspell's stories have themselves

¹ Kimberly Chabot Davis, 'The Piano and Feminist Political Identification', in *Postmodern Texts and Emotional Audiences* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), pp. 55-95 (p. 73).

become 'silenced' works due to her marginalization in the American literary canon.² For example, Joanna Russ in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) mentions false categorizing (women being labelled as 'non-artists'), and the double standard of content (the labelling of one set of experiences as more valuable than other, such as male experiences of war versus women's experiences in the household) as two of the reasons which led to the disregarding of women writers' works, hence the silencing of their works at the beginning of the twentieth century.³ These reasons certainly apply to Glaspell's fiction.

As touched upon earlier, Arthur Waterman, writing in the 1960s, classifies Glaspell as a minor writer and her novels and short stories as 'shallow and ephemeral' because they mainly focus on 'trivial' women's issues.⁴ Waterman disregards the authenticity and value of Glaspell's works in offering a better understanding of specifically Midwestern women's socio-cultural positioning during the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, it is a fact that Glaspell's fictional works are issues-driven and this reason most likely expedited her stories' fall from fashion. Certainly, the advent of literary modernism in the United States shifted the emphasis of much literary fiction and criticism from issues-centred work to aesthetics and experimentation. Glaspell, while attuned to the developments and concerns of modernism, was not an overtly experimental writer and, one might say not unlike Sarah Orne Jewett, Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather, was excluded from critical treatises and anthologies.

² Many critics such as Elaine Showalter, Nina Baym, Annette Kolodny and Carolyn G. Heilbrun observe and highlight the marginalization of women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century which they saw as the deliberate suppression of female writers. Glaspell's side-lining is discussed in depth in the Introduction to this thesis.

³ Joanna Russ subdivides her book into eleven chapters; each chapter discussing a cause for women writers' marginalization in the literary field. Other causes are prohibitions, denial of agency, isolation and responses. Russ mentions many neglected authors of the time such as Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Willa Cather and Katherine Mansfield. Similarly, Tillie Olsen, one of the first pioneers of second-wave feminism, discusses some of Russ's points in addition to explaining several reasons for the silencing of women writers, such as colour, class and sex. See Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 1st edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). Unlike Russ, Olsen includes Glaspell's name amongst many other women authors in her book and states a brief statement about the reasons behind their books 'suffer[ing] the death of being unknown'. Tillie Olsen, 'One out of Twelve: Writers Who Are Women in Our Century', in *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), pp. 22-46 (p. 40).

⁴ Arthur Waterman, 'From Reporter to Local Colorist', in *Susan Glaspell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp.17-31 (p. 23).

Writing in her weekly column about Mary Newberry Adams's speech at a meeting of the Daughters of the Revolution, Glaspell observed that 'despite the fact that histories have mostly been written by men, who slighted or ignored [women] altogether, [women] were worthy a place in the foremost ranks of the world's patriots, philosophers and statesmen'.⁵ Glaspell was aware that women deserved to have their voices heard and acknowledged as they were effectively silenced due to their subordinate social (and gendered) status. She herself wrote articles and stories/plays to further the cause of women's emancipation and draw attention to gender inequalities, as portrayed in the previous chapters of this thesis.⁶ However, several obstacles were complicit in the silencing of her written works, especially in the case of her fiction, such as the selling of the metal plates of her books for the war effort making it impossible for her works to be easily reprinted. Alongside this massive blow to her critical and literary reputation, she found her work frequently compared (often unfavourably) to her protégé Eugene O'Neill. And certainly her consistent labelling as a regionalist sealed her reputation as a minor writer.⁷

Glaspell's marginalization and her silenced works are not only a result of the factors mentioned above. Glaspell also chose to destroy most her personal correspondences that would have helped us know more about her. According to Barbara Ozieblo,

this void that the biographer encounters is, we can only suppose, a silence that Glaspell chose for herself when she destroyed her correspondence; it is also a silence

⁵ Susan Glaspell, 'The News Girl on the Congress of Mother', *Des Moines Daily News*, (1 June 1900).

⁶ According to Barbara Ozieblo, although 'Glaspell never openly argues for suffrage or any other candescent woman's issue, the freeing of woman from society's ludicrous chains is a theme that persuades all of her essays for the *Weekly Outlook*'. Barbara Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 7-34 (p. 21).

⁷ According to Ozieblo, historians have managed to erase Glaspell's intervention in O'Neill's discovery although she helped launch his career. For a lengthy description of Glaspell's involvement in O'Neill's discovery see Ozieblo, 'A Sense of Mission', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 63-90 (pp. 84-7).

that she must have known intimately, for she transforms it into a literary device that her women protagonists wield as a weapon or a protective shield.⁸

Glaspell's silenced works parallel her deployment of silence in her short stories and novels, as will be discussed in this chapter, whether in the form of absent characters or mute characters. Glaspell does not only use silence 'as a weapon or a protective shield' as Ozieblo suggests. She also uses it as a metaphor for communication to suggest the possibility of individuals going beyond the simple view of silence as merely an absence of sound. Glaspell points out to the advantages of silence as a form of nonverbal communication strengthening one's confidence, enabling a given character to go beyond the limits of words to be able to deal with life experiences. However, it is important to note that even though Glaspell uses silence as a mode of expression, she does not negate language as an important means of communication because her women characters often use their voices at the end of the stories, such as in the case of 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927) and *Fugitive's Return* (1929).

In the previous chapters I presented Glaspell's portrayal of social problems based on gender and class inequality in different spheres: domestic, professional and educational, as reflective of women's realities in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this chapter I will focus on depicting Glaspell's employment of silence as a medium of expression used by her women characters as a way of revolting against such inequalities. First, this chapter will present diverse theoretical meanings of silence in literary works by prominent theorists such as Adam Jaworski, Ihab Hassan, Anna Richards, Susan Bordo, Elaine Showalter and Susan Sontag. Each of these thinkers provides theoretical and pragmatic understandings of silence which I will refer to in my analysis of Glaspell's works.

⁸ Barbara Ozieblo, 'Silenced Mothers and Questing Daughters in Susan Glaspell's Mature Novels', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 137-57 (p. 138).

Secondly, I will explore two ways by which Glaspell utilizes silence: silence in the form of absent characters and the silence of mute characters. My analysis of Glaspell's use of absent characters as a method will demonstrate the importance of silence in literary texts, what they stand for, what their absence symbolises and how important their absent presence is. Referring to Maurice Maeterlinck's static theatre and his influence on Glaspell, I will discuss three different narrative contexts, 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917), 'One of Those Impossible Americans' (1911) and *The Visioning* (1911), to show Glaspell's competency in utilising the experimental technique of absent characters in different settings and social conditions and the reasons behind her use of silence as a symbolic representation of power.

Shifting from the technique of absent character, my final section will focus on Glaspell's utilization of silence as it metaphorically conveys the meaningful communication between mute protagonists. Discussing the short story 'A Rose in the Sand', my discussion concentrates on the silent relationship between Ellen Paxton and Allie Mayo. My thesis of both characters' silence as constituting revolution and empowerment will explore how the characters' silence is a reflection of their inner thoughts and their minds. Willingly choosing to silence their voices is a way of blocking any form of vocal communication between them and the world around them. I will show that the deployment of silence is a tool which offers a kind of authority for the women in these stories.

Part I: Theoretical Meanings of Silence and Silence in Glaspell's Fiction

Defining silence is quite a difficult task owing to its abstract quality and the array of meanings and roles ascribed to it. However, many theorists attempt to define silence in relation to its position in literary discourses and as it is deployed by literary writers. My aim in offering a few explanations of silence by modern theorists is to aid our understanding of Glaspell's notion of silence and the reasons behind her employment of the motif in her

fiction. A simple definition of silence is the absence of voice or the condition of being silent. The absence of voice can be attributed to any number of reasons. Some of which are the refusal to use speech as a means of protest, the inability to fully express what one feels or thinks, the choice to remain at a distance or unknowable when addressed with unwanted speech, or the intention to withhold thoughts and details.

According to the contemporary theorist Adam Jaworski silence, as it is commonly used in literature, is an indirect form of communication that has certain advantages for communicators such as the strengthening of one's confidence and the ability to go beyond the limits of words and express oneself using a different mediums.⁹ Jaworski's positive formulation of silence is not shared by Ihab Hassan who sees silence as a weak form of a communicative medium used to deal with the unspeakable when in extreme psychological states such as anger and ecstasy. In other words, Hassan refers to silence as a metaphor exposing the inadequacy of language due to one's inability to use speech and the failure of words to convey one's true feelings or thoughts while Jaworski sees silence not as the antithesis of communication but as a form of communication in itself to transcend spoken or written language.¹⁰

Feminist theorists and critics also regard silence differently. Anna Richards observes that 'to be silent, modern feminist criticism has taught us, is not necessarily to withhold communication. If, in the past, women have had their voices suppressed, ignored, or belittled, they have also chosen to say nothing as a means of expression or a strategy for resistance'.¹¹ Women reject the use of language not because they are submissive; instead, they reject a

⁹ Adam Jaworski, 'Silence and the Study of Communication', in *The Power of Silence: Social Pragmatic Perspectives* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1993), pp. 1-27, (p. 8).

¹⁰ See Ihab Hassan, 'Metaphors of Silence', in *The Frontiers of Literary Criticism*, ed. by David H. Malone (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1974), p. 202; Ihab Hassan, 'Silence, Revolution, and Consciousness', *The Massachusetts Review*, 10.3 (1969), 461-78; Ihab Hassan, 'Prelude: Lyre without Strings', in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Ihab Habib Hassan, *The Literature of Silence* (New York: Knopf, 1968).

¹¹ Anna Richards, 'Suffering, Silence, and the Female Voice in German Fiction around 1800', *Women in German Yearbook*, 18 (2002), 89-110 (p. 89).

language that is insufficient to express their views of their oppressed condition. Remaining mute allows them to show a refusal to participate, a silent revolt, and this position may provide a pathway to liberation. On the other hand, Susan Bordo and Elaine Showalter insist that women in the past have been forced into silence because of patriarchal dominance rather than choosing to be silent freely. Bordo argues that women's silences represent 'the condition of the silent, uncomplaining woman - an ideal of patriarchal culture' while Showalter states that silence was forced upon women not due to the insufficiency of language to express women's consciousness but because women were denied access to the full resources of language.¹² Referring to Virginia Woolf's lectures on women's writings, Showalter explains Woolf's protest against the censorship which prevented women from expressing the same verbal utterances as men.¹³ Comparing herself to Joyce, Woolf believes that literature is not literature when it is concealed or missing parts: 'All that we [women] have ought to be expressed – mind and body – a process of incredible difficulty and danger'.¹⁴ The 'incredible difficulty and danger' which Woolf refers to is the risk of being critiqued, rejected, misunderstood and cast aside.

Showalter also claims that 'the holes in discourse, the blanks and gaps and silences, are not the spaces where female consciousness reveals itself but the blinds of a "prison-house of language"'.¹⁵ Borrowing her ideas on language from Woolf, Showalter believes that language is a patriarchal construction, designed to make sense of an inherently patriarchal world, and therefore inimical to expressions of womanhood and female issues. As a result,

¹² Susan Bordo, 'The Slender Body and Other Cultural Forms: The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity', in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 165-84 (p. 177); Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 243-70.

¹³ One must consider the time when Woolf struggled to be heard, a time when many women writers such as English writers Charlotte and Emily Brontë and Mary Ann Evans and American writers Nelle Harper Lee and Louisa May Alcott used pseudonyms to be taken seriously and become acknowledged.

¹⁴ Virginia Woolf, 'The Speech: Manuscript Notes', in *The Pargiters*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 163-7 (p. 164).

¹⁵ Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', p. 255.

women's literature, trapped within the constraints of language, is repressed because it is endangered by a limited linguistic range which is dominated by an inherently hegemonic language. Similar to Woolf and Showalter's views on language, Janis P. Stout asserts that 'language itself has been possessed, owned, by the male ... Yet it is in the very language of patriarchy that women must speak if they are to speak at all'.¹⁶ Instead of finding a new female voice as suggested by Showalter, Stout believes that women should use the male-dominated language to fight their repressive voices. Showalter proposes that women writers need to find a new female language perhaps a voice that is different from the dominant male language in order to abolish the 'ghosts of repressed language' or their voices will remain ignored, undervalued and unheard. Showalter does not consider that the use of silence is a sign of power. However, Glaspell's works prove otherwise since she uses a unique female voice in her utilization of silence as an articulate language. If Showalter's interpretation of the language used in women writers' works of literature were applied to Glaspell's stories, one would surmise that the mute protagonists, imprisoned within the prison-house of language, are incompetent and unable of expression. However, my reading of Glaspell's stories will portray the counterargument of such a deduction.

Susan Sontag's postmodern critique of art offers a positive perspective of silence as used by modern artists. She affirms that women artists' choice of silence adds to their power and authority because they are more satisfied with being silent than speaking.¹⁷ In this case, silence can be understood as a metaphor to free the artist from 'servile bondage to the world' as it shifts away from language and towards the 'aesthetic of silence'.¹⁸ Sontag also asserts that silence occurs as a decision and 'remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many

¹⁶ Janis P. Stout, 'Introduction: Silence, the Critic, and the Good Little Girl', in *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), pp. 1-23 (p. 17).

¹⁷ See Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, 1969), pp. 3-34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue'.¹⁹ As silence is the absence of words, its presence in dialogue is opaque for the listener as it proposes an array of possibilities in interpreting it. Silence demands a more sensuous and conscious experience where awareness is intensified as it represents unsaid speech.

In concordance with Jaworski, Richards and Sontag's formulations of silence, I regard silence in Glaspell's fiction as a form of resistance, hence, a source and weapon of power rather than solely an attitude of repression. There is a link between silence and self-expression in Glaspell's narratives because. Paradoxical as it may sound, Glaspell's strategies of reticence, her characters' absence of utterance or their use of unspoken words are themselves articulate. While the 'voice' seems like a plausible communicative means to express one's feelings and thoughts, Glaspell substitutes it with absence or silence in the works discussed in this chapter to convey the power of those who have been rejected, forgotten, mistreated and oppressed.²⁰ As Ozieblo and Dickey have noted, Glaspell's women are present in the works yet 'they have decided not to speak, and so not participate in society, their choice giving them a sense of power'.²¹ The gaps and absence of dialogue between the women characters or their present absence are positive because their silence, a still audio of nothingness, becomes the powerful vocal embodiment of the unspoken when their strength of voice or presence proves to be weak and inaudible.

Glaspell experiments with silence to explore the relationship between the medium and women's power rather than their dispossession. She does not portray her women

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁰ Annette Kolodny's 'inversion technique' is useful in explaining Glaspell's inversion of silence from weakness to strength. In 'Some Notes on Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"' (1975), Kolodny explains 'inversion' as a method used by women writers in which they 'invert' traditional literary images to connote their opposing images. For example, 'love is revealed as violence and romance as fraud; suicide and death are imaged as comforting and attractive, while loneliness and isolation become, for their heroines, means to self-knowledge and contentment'. Annette Kolodny, 'Some Notes on Defining a "Feminist Literary Criticism"', *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1975), 75-92 (p. 81). In this chapter, I present how Glaspell uses silence as her communicative medium rather than using speech or voice, the traditional means of communication.

²¹ Barbara Ozieblo and Jerry Dickey, 'The Short Plays: *The Outside*', in *Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 31-2 (p. 35).

protagonists' silences or absences as resulting from oppressive hierarchies disempowering women. Instead, she projects them as a form of power, as a refutation against the inadequacy of words to express the unspeakable, as a means of accessing the inner self by retreating from the world to get to know the self better and as a rejection of the labelling and identifying of the female voice as inferior. Glaspell knowingly uses silence as an empowering 'form of speech' and 'element in a dialogue', as proposed earlier by Sontag. She substitutes language, which Sontag regards as 'the most impure, the most contaminated, the most exhausted of all materials out of which art is made of', with bodily gestures and scenes of nature to translate the power of silence as a form of resistance against misunderstanding in stories such as 'A Rose in the Sand'.²²

Part II: Silence in the Form of Absent Characters

As previously discussed, one of Glaspell's most distinctive experimental tools in demonstrating the power of silence is her utilization of the absent character, specifically the unseen woman in her theatrical productions. Glaspell uses the absent character in her plays *Trifles* (1916), *Bernice* (1919) and *Alison's House* (1930), and this trope is the focus of many studies by Glaspellian critics.²³ 'Through the technique of piling detail upon detail of setting, dialogue, props, and action' as Marcia Noe notes, 'Glaspell makes this unseen woman vividly present onstage'.²⁴ Glaspell relies on the elements of drama to create a powerful connection between the absent character and audience. Her creation of a 'vividly present' unseen woman on stage is associated with the meaning with which Glaspell drives us to construct. For

²² Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', p. 14.

²³ For studies on Glaspell's use of the absent characters in her dramatic works see Marcia Noe, 'Reconfiguring the Subject/Recuperating Realism: Susan Glaspell's Unseen Woman', *American Drama*, 4.2 (1995), 36-54; Stretch; Jackie Czerepinski, 'Beyond *The Verge*: Absent Heroines in the Plays of Susan Glaspell', in *Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp. 145-54; Kristina Hinz-Bode, *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression: Language and Isolation in the Plays* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2006).

²⁴ See Noe, 'Reconfiguring the Subject/Recuperating Realism: Susan Glaspell's Unseen Woman', p. 39.

example, in *Trifles* because Minnie Wright is not present on stage, we as readers are forced to use the theatrical details and bodily gestures between other characters we see on stage and the conversations we hear to make meaning out of her situation and the events that have occurred before the commencement of the play. To ensure the reader's participation in creating meaning, Glaspell creates a strong absent character whose influence affects those present on stage.

In a 1919 newspaper article on reviewing dramatic productions, critic John Corbin praised Glaspell's *Bernice*: 'The little play is quite beautifully simple and deft, perfect in each of its several characterizations as in the great central personality of Bernice'.²⁵ Referring to Glaspell's use of the absent character Bernice, Corbin asserts that the importance of the play lies in the things that are unsaid. Corbin also draws upon the similarity between Belgian playwright and 1911 Nobel-Prize winner Maurice Maeterlinck and Glaspell. During her trip to Europe in 1908, Glaspell was exposed to and influenced by the dramatic works of Maeterlinck who extensively utilized dramatic silence in what he referred to as the static theatre.²⁶ Believing in the power of nature symbolising reality, Maeterlinck explored the dramatic action within oneself through the complex inner emotions of his characters' minds and souls by omitting words, a way of transcending language, from his dialogue and relying mainly on movements and gestures.²⁷ In 'The Tragical in Daily Life' (1896) Maeterlinck offers examples of motionless and soundless scenarios such as 'the silence of the doors and windows and the quiet voice of light', settings of silence marked by no external action contributing to the understanding of the presence of one's soul.²⁸ Maeterlinck's influence on

²⁵ John Corbin, 'Seraphim and Cats', *New York Times*, (1919).

²⁶ In *The Glory of the Conquered; A Story of Great Love* (1909), Glaspell mentions Maeterlinck as an important artist whose works are important to the protagonist Ernestine. Ernestine keeps his work in her library and refers to him as Mr. Maeterlinck, conveying her great respect for the writer.

²⁷ See Susan Glaspell, 'The Outside', in *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi and J. Ellen Gainor (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), pp. 57-65 (p. 58); Susan Glaspell, 'Bernice', in *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, pp. 92-114 (p. 92).

²⁸ Maurice Maeterlinck, 'The Tragical in Daily Life' ('Le Tragique Quotidien'), in *The Treasure of the Humble (Le Trésor des humbles)*, trans. by George Brandt (Paris: Société du Mecure du France, 1898), pp. 97-119.

Glaspell is clearly seen in her omission of important elements required for the advancement of action whether in a play or a story. She uses dashes, pauses and body movements rather than words to deliver the meaning of her stories to her audience and readers. It is probable that Glaspell adopted Maeterlinck's techniques of the static theatre to enrich her own use of the absent character. Instead of using words, similar to Maeterlinck, Glaspell relied on the power of absence and silence. Glaspell uses the same technique of the absent character in her short stories, such as 'A Jury of her Peers', a fictional version of *Trifles*, 'One of Those Impossible Americans' and in her novel *The Visioning*, however discussions on the absent characters in her stories, other than the acclaimed 'A Jury of Her Peers' have been minimal. The difference between the absent characters on stage and in narrative texts is that the former is controlled by the theatrical elements while the latter is managed by the interference of the reader who has to contribute in interpreting events based on whatever details the author provides him/her with. While previously I have mentioned my disagreement with Hassan's perception of silence, I do agree with his sense that 'silence ... remains ever at the threshold of awareness. It is a category of intelligence of the twentieth century, and particularly of its avant-garde imagination'.²⁹ By saying that silence is at the 'threshold of awareness', Hassan seems to suggest that silence is active, not passive or inert. Again, in thinking about Glaspell's deployment of silence or absent characters, each one of these protagonists is an instigator of some kind of change – whether it is personal, social or political. Hassan goes on to attribute silence to the avant-garde and while Glaspell has never been known as a particularly avant-garde writer (at least not in terms of her prose fiction), her deployment of silence demonstrates that she does indeed have experimental proclivities. While these might not extend to the formal pyrotechnics of the better-known modernists, Glaspell is committed to radical themes and radical causes. Her use of silence gives the reader a more active role in

²⁹ Hassan, 'Prelude: Lyre without Strings', p. 12.

the creation of meaning within the text – it makes the reader an agent in the production of meaning, thereby creating a connection between the work of fiction and all its implications and the reader – a bridge between real and imaginary worlds. In fact, one might surmise that Glaspell is effecting real and actual change in the interaction between reader and text.

Silence, being dynamic and avant-garde, influences us to interpret texts differently since its literary expression is inseparable from its conceptual implications. In her study on works by writers such as Jane Austen and Willa Cather, Stout proposes that silence in literary texts 'invite[s] the participation of the interactive reader ... in the creation of meaning'.³⁰ In my critical analysis of Glaspell's works, I find that the absence of the female protagonist in some of her stories represents a powerful embodiment of the unspoken female experience. Despite the fact that they never appear in the story, they are responsible for many, if not all, of the situations in the narrative as their absent presence drives the action of the story forward. In many cases, without their absent existence, there would be no story in the first place, for their absent presence inhabits the narrative, the setting and the characters present as will be discussed in the following section in the narratives 'A Jury of Her Peers', *The Visioning* and 'One of Those Impossible Americans'.

II.1 Minnie Wright's Powerful 'Absent' Presence

Glaspell's well-known story 'A Jury of Her Peers' recounts the story of the unseen protagonist Minnie Wright who is accused of murdering her husband, John Wright, in his sleep. The readers are exposed to the description of the location of the murder, the Wrights' Iowan farmhouse, and the broken conversations between other characters in the story. These facts provide readers with information on Minnie Wright's personality and oppressed life. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are asked to join the sheriff (Mr. Peters), the county prosecutor and

³⁰ Stout, 'Introduction', p. 5.

the neighbour (Mr. Hale) to accompany them to the house to gather some clothes for Minnie who we are told is being held in the town prison.

According to Sarah Emily Morrow in her thesis 'Absent Characters as Proximate Cause in Twentieth Century American Drama' which discusses *Trifles*, the theatrical version of 'A Jury of Her Peers', 'absent characters in American drama often serve as the "proximate cause" for the action'.³¹ The 'proximate cause' for the action in both *Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers' is Minnie Wright; without her, the play and story would lose their entire premise. Minnie's act, signified in her absence, raises social issues and requires interactive reading on behalf of the reader, which reminds us of Stout's idea about the trope. Some of these issues are Minnie's motives for killing her husband (if indeed she has killed him), the roles of the other women in interpreting and filling Minnie's silence, and the gender inequality exhibited in the Wrights' marriage.

By cancelling Minnie's presence, Glaspell clearly invites her reader to interpret her character's silence in order to understand the logic behind the story. Minnie's guilt in committing the murder is never questioned, neither by the male characters who try to find evidence to solidify the case against her nor the women protagonists who attempt to analyse the 'trifles' behind her killing her husband. However, Glaspell situates her readers in a similar position to the women, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, as they are the two characters who guide the readers through their own interpretation of what might have happened. Glaspell implicitly directs them to sympathize with Minnie's oppressed social position because they, too, share Minnie's lifestyle. As Linda Ben-Zvi puts it, 'Since the audience never actually sees Minnie, it is not swayed by her person but, instead, by her condition, a condition shared by other

³¹ Morrow explains that 'proximate cause' does not originate from literary studies but from tort law yet it can be applied to works of literature like the ones she discusses in her thesis (Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), and David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984)). See Sarah Emily Morrow, 'Absent Characters as Proximate Cause in Twentieth Century' (unpublished thesis, Georgia State University, 2009), p. 2.

women who can be imagined in the empty subject position'.³² Ben-Zvi here draws attention to Glaspell's portrayal of feminine-related issues. Glaspell imitates the prevailing social forces of early twentieth century Midwestern societies which silence women by eliminating Minnie's voice to enlighten the reader of the oppressive social conditions which force women into subservient positions. Even though she uses Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters as Minnie's mouthpiece, it is Minnie's absence, and not the women's condition, which emphasizes the women's own social positioning, perhaps even Glaspell's presupposed position had she not used her works as her voiced activism. If it were not for Minnie, who acts as an impetus driving the story forward, these women would have continued to overlook their own realities. Minnie's absence, more effective than her presence, offers more insight into the inferior situation of poor Midwestern married women of the early 1900s. Because of her absence, Minnie is denied of any chance of defending herself which can be read as a kind of unfortunate subordinate position. However, the power Minnie has in her absence is one she could not have possessed in her presence because her absence does not only reveal the truth about her personal situation, it also sheds light on the unequal social conditions of many other marginalized women who are suppressed and delegitimized by traditional male legality and morality.

Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are compelled to deduce and analyse Minnie's hidden motives for killing her husband, and in doing so give a voice to the voiceless, incarcerated Minnie. Analysing Minnie's identity and lifestyle, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters reveal that in her youth Minnie 'used to wear pretty clothes and be lively when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir. But that – oh, that was twenty years ago'.³³ However, after her marriage to John Wright, Minnie changes completely in character and appearance.

³² Linda Ben-Zvi, "Murder, She Wrote": The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, in *Susan Glaspell Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 19-48 (p. 35).

³³ Susan Glaspell, 'A Jury of Her Peers', in *Her America: 'A Jury of Her Peers' and Other Stories*, ed. by Patricia L. Bryan and Martha C. Carpentier (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 81-102 (p. 90).

She leaves the choir, loses her vibrancy and pretty clothes somehow turning into a caged songbird. The transformation of Minnie Foster, a seemingly popular beautiful choir girl of mellifluous voice, into Minnie Wright, an old, plain, invisible, voiceless housewife enforces Glaspell's idea of conventionality and patriarchy's effect on women. This idea is depicted through the portrayal of John Wright as a dictatorial husband who imprisons his wife in a farmhouse. Mrs. Hale describes John Wright as a 'hard man' and compares 'pass[ing] the time of day with him ... like a raw wind that gets to the bone'.³⁴ The description clearly reflects John Wright's harsh personality. Instead of offering a life full of productivity and hope owing to the fact that he lives on a farm, John is a difficult character, sickening and deadly like a 'raw wind', destroying what is hopeful and beautiful (both Minnie and the dead bird the women find concealed amongst the absent woman's belongings). His character also signifies his emotional emptiness and clarifies the kind of relationship the Wrights have.

Subjected to the rigidity of male authority, Minnie is expected to be obedient even if her husband is difficult, and so restricted by her husband's character she turns into a lifeless and voiceless individual broken and oppressed by societal rules. Minnie's experience is not too different from the lives of the two farmhouse wives who go through her things. Carla Kaplan explains that 'given their experiences, *as women*, Glaspell implies [that Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale] cannot help but understand. And they not only sympathize but collaborate'.³⁵ Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters uncover the truth of Minnie's situation and disinter the motive for her alleged crime – which they then conceal – and in doing so come to re-evaluate their own lives as well as understand the kind of oppression women like themselves face.

As Glaspell conveys with the title of the story, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters represent Minnie's jury and holding such a position requires them to reach a verdict. Experienced in

³⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

³⁵ Carla Kaplan, 'Reading Feminist Readings: Recuperative Reading and the Silent Heroine of Feminist Criticism', in *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 168-94 (p. 181).

domestic chores and wifely duties, the women find the domestic debris of the house of Minnie's kitchen, the traditional woman's sphere which the investigative men consider inconsequential in their search for evidence, as reflective of Minnie's emotional and mental state. For example, the dirty towels, open fruit jam jars and the unsewn quilt represent Minnie's unhappy and repressed life. Glaspell uses these objects as tools to communicate what is ineffable and true. According to Jackie Czerepinski, 'absence has a gravitational force, drawing other characters to the physical and psychic spaces left by the protagonists'.³⁶ Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peter realize that Minnie's kitchen is haunted by its owner's soundless voice and holds more mysteries that need to be unravelled. Attempting to relive Minnie's life and experience her emotional state, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters analyse the evidence and reach a verdict only after their discovery of the broken birdcage and the dead canary wrapped in a beautiful box. Assuming that John Wright has killed the canary, symbolic of the emotional strangulation and silencing of Minnie, the women believe that this may have triggered Minnie's incentive to murder her husband.³⁷ Though they do not declare Minnie's guilt, their belief of her culpability is insinuated:

Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her eyes met the eyes of the other woman. There was a moment when they held each other in a steady, burning look in which there was no evasion nor flinching. Then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the

³⁶ Czerepinski, 'Beyond *The Verge*: Absent Heroines in the Plays of Susan Glaspell', p. 149.

³⁷ My interpretation of John Wright killing the bird differs from past studies. It may be very possible that Minnie herself killed the canary bird as it reminds her of her lost self. The canary obviously is symbolic for Minnie Forster, the choir girl with the beautiful singing voice. Described by Mrs. Hale, '[Minnie] – come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself. Real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and – fluttery'. Glaspell, 'A Jury of Her Peers', p. 96. Minnie might have wanted to silence the bird in order to silence her inner struggle which is depicted in the trifles portrayed, such as the disoriented kitchen objects and badly sewn quilt. This inner struggle caused by the bird forces her to reminisce about her past life, a painful experience as she is unable to go back to who she was due to her husband's dominance. Silencing the bird by killing it stops her painful turmoil and somehow puts her in a position of power. As her husband kills her liveliness, she kills the bird. In addition, my interpretation is further supported by Mrs. Peters comment, 'Of course we don't know who killed the bird' which allows the possibility of Minnie being the killer of both her husband and bird. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

conviction of the other woman – that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour.³⁸

What is interesting in this quotation is the use of the term 'other woman' – it is interchangeable here for Mrs. Hale (in the first mention) and Minnie (in the latter instance) – reinforcing my assertion that Minnie in many ways is synonymous with her peers. She is not unique in her personal and emotional deprivation but rather interchangeable for any other Midwestern woman. In addition, adopting Maeterlinck's static dramatic effect, Glaspell uses the description of the women's body movements as a powerful embodiment of communicating meaning to express the inexpressible. The silent communication these women exchange prove that silence here seeps into a place where words cannot penetrate. The women do not communicate in speech but rather by looks which are not interrupted nor invaded by a language which could silence them or one which might lead to the conviction of their 'peer'.

II.2 The Absent Minor Character in 'One of Those Impossible Americans' (1911)³⁹

Another story where the hidden character is of importance is 'One of Those Impossible Americans'. Set in Paris, the story revolves around an American woman Virginia Clayton and a nouveau-riche man from Cincinnati, William P. Johnson. The reader is offered glimpses of the lives of rich American women living in Paris. Virginia and her high class female companions spend their time mingling with members of their social group. Due to their experience of living lives free of financial constraints, these women are unfamiliar with the harsh lives of the less fortunate.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

³⁹ 'One of Those Impossible Americans' was first published as 'According to His Lights' in June 1911 in *American Magazine*. It was then reprinted by Fredrick A. Stokes in a collection of Glaspell's short stories under its current title.

Mr. Johnson seeks Virginia's help at one of Paris's luxurious department stores to find a suitable gift for his sick wife who never appears in the story. Accompanying him from one store to another, Virginia is unable to satisfy the man's taste. As events unfold we learn of Mr. Johnson's background and the hardships he has endured to become a rich and successful businessman. We also learn that his excessive devotion to his wife springs out not only from her complete commitment to him during his years of poverty and, later on, success, but also out of compassion and sympathy for her unstable mental state. He declares that Mrs. Johnson has been a great supporter to him in the past and is currently ill. Due to her illness, she has not been able to enjoy her husband's newfound wealth. Mr. Johnson recounts fragments of flashbacks from his past to unveil the truth about his marital and professional life. Focusing on his wife, he describes her role, her perseverance and the obstacles she faced to support him in order to secure their financial status.

Mrs. Johnson's absence creates an ambiguous space, open to multiple interpretations. Although Glaspell does not give definite clues as to what actually occurs to Mrs. Johnson, the character can be regarded as one of Glaspell's utilizations of 'speaking silences'. Mrs. Johnson's role as an absent character is not as dominant as Minnie Wright's part in 'A Jury of Her Peers'. However, Glaspell uses Mrs. Johnson's hidden character to address the important issue of prejudices faced by the underprivileged classes due to class distinctions. Similar to Minnie Wright, Mrs. Johnson's role as depicted is one of constant yielding to male authority. Her desires, hobbies and hopes are concealed as Mr. Johnson chooses to reveal only the information that he feels necessary, only the information that links Mrs. Johnson to him. Acting as her mouthpiece, Mr. Johnson presents Mrs. Johnson in a fragmented form, offering the reader only a brief account of her personality and previous life. He never reveals Mrs. Johnson's first name thus creating a barrier between the absent character and the reader (and Virginia) where the acquaintance is rather superficial. Mrs. Johnson's title as Mr. Johnson's

wife confines her to her marital duty as a wife and appendage of her husband. She is simply the submissive wife who supports her husband and sacrifices her well-being for the sake of bettering their family's position. This description marginalizes Mrs. Johnson, situating her in a subservient position.

What differentiates Minnie Wright from Mrs. Johnson is that readers are exposed to the former's life through the perspective of female characters, farmwives like Minnie herself, who understand and interpret her life because they relate to her. Mrs. Johnson's position is not fully explored because her husband, a man, is unable to understand what has brought about her apparent mental illness. For Mr. Johnson, Virginia's role is to provide advice on what clothing and items Mrs. Johnson might like to receive. She also is the means for Mr. Johnson's unburdening of himself, recounting his unhappiness at his wife's unhappiness. In a way, Virginia is the receptacle for his story and for the untold story of his wife – the woman whose tastes and desires he presumes she can know based on their shared sex. What is interesting is that were the women to somehow communicate, or if Virginia was to learn of Mrs. Johnson, there is a barrier between them: Mr. Johnson. And while Mr. Johnson is depicted as the loving husband who goes on a shopping spree to purchase the most expensive items Parisian stores have to offer, he is also the means by which his wife's story is suppressed. He tells his version of her story, but her own story, her own voice never emerges. Indeed, it is difficult not to sense the dominance he has over his wife. Protective of her and sympathizing with her condition, he is, in many ways, not unlike to the character of John in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' (1892), a text which, as Anita Duneer has observed, was influential on Glaspell's writing.⁴⁰ In Gilman's text, John assumes he knows what is best for his wife, the unnamed protagonist of the story, yet he does nothing to

⁴⁰ See Anita Duneer, 'On the Verge of a Breakthrough: Projections of Escape from the Attic and the Thwarted Tower in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*', *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 18.1 (2006), 34-54.

stop, and arguably hastens, her descent into mental illness. He demands that his wife remain faithful to her domestic duties and denies her any right of expression. As a result, the narrator is forbidden from exercising her imaginative and creative skills and spirals into emotional despair.⁴¹ Similarly, Mrs. Johnson's psychological instability may be a result of suppression caused by an unknown internal conflict which drives her to suffer from a mental disorder. Or perhaps it is attribute to the stifling, yet misdirected attentions, of her ostensibly well-meaning husband. Both Gilman and Glaspell's women suffer locked within marital situations where their talents and abilities are unneeded and even unwanted. And at the heart of each story, indeed at the heart of most stories throughout this thesis, is the issue of control. Neither woman can control her domestic space, is prohibited from participating in public space, and therefore is unable to control their lives, their stories, or even the articulation of their own realities. Both stories, albeit in different ways, deal with the ramifications of the suppression of a woman's voice, and demonstrates that suppression by means of withholding the very identity of the woman in question – both are known only as appendages, the wives of Mr. Johnson and 'John'.

Though only briefly mentioned throughout the course of the narrative, Mrs. Johnson acts a corrective instrument awakening Virginia to the realities of a working woman's hardships and her own barren life as a high society girl. Mr. Johnson describes his wife by highlighting the contrast between the rich women, represented by Virginia and her friends, and poor working women. Unlike the women he encounters in the department stores and coffee shops of Paris, Mr. Johnson explains that Mrs. Johnson is a hard working woman who has never been lured by the luxurious life of the privileged and never indulges in his

⁴¹ Gilman's story 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' (1892) is famous for its attack against the 'rest cure', a treatment adopted by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, a prominent specialist in nervous disorders. The treatment strictly instructed patients, specifically women, to abstain from any mental activities which could stress the brain and engage more with domestic chores. After suffering from extreme inner depression, Gilman was advised to refer to Dr. Mitchell's treatment which further worsened her condition. Inspired by her own condition and the treatment she underwent, Gilman wrote 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' to convey her own feelings, thoughts and experiences on the treatment.

newfound wealth. Johnson explains, 'I'm worth more 'an a million dollars – and my wife gets up at five o'clock every morning to do washing and scrubbing. Oh, it's not that she has to ... but she thinks she has to'.⁴² Unlike Virginia who enjoys a life free of such menial duties, Mrs. Johnson is unable to live a life of leisure because she is unable to adapt to a life of luxury. Mr. Johnson's view of the rich women is clear in his statement, 'These women here, all dressed so fine, nothing to do but sit around and eat this folderol, *they* have it easy – don't they?'⁴³ His rather cynical observation brings to mind Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) in which Veblen critiques the leisure class for exempting themselves from work due to their wealth and for their consideration of any form of labour as a sign of socio-economic weakness.⁴⁴ Defining themselves as lords of their communities, the upper classes of society settle themselves into non-productivity. Glaspell depicts the rich American women in Paris in the same way through Mr. Johnson's observation. She perfectly conveys the psychological impact society has over an underprivileged individual. On behalf of his wife, Mr. Johnson feels that his wife does not fit into the higher social classes and as he was prejudiced by Virginia's peers, so will his wife had she been with him. In a way, Glaspell exhibits society's ruthless treatment of those who do not belong to their class.

We learn more of what Mr. Johnson wants his wife to be: a newly rich woman at ease with the luxuries of the wealth he has amassed over the course of their marriage. Mr. Johnson is bitter at the fact that his wife, unlike those American women enjoying their time in Paris, cannot enjoy the fruits of his success. He observes the difference between his wife and the women who 'have it easy' and has falsely come to believe that materialistic things may bring his wife joy. What Mr. Johnson is unhappy about is that Mrs. Johnson seems unable to

⁴² Susan Glaspell, 'One of Those Impossible Americans', in *Lifted Masks; Stories* (Lexington: Hard Press, 2010), pp. 5-17 (p. 15).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ See Thorstein Veblen, 'Conspicuous Leisure', in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Dover: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), pp. 43-62; Thorstein Veblen, 'Conspicuous Consumption', in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 63-70.

exhibit the social ease that these women born into money have. Ironically, we never learn any of her thoughts or garner any ideas of how she wants her life to be. One may assume that Mr. Johnson knows Mrs. Johnson well – she is after all his wife - however, we are not exposed to Mrs. Johnson's view. We only see her through the eyes of her husband who sees his wife in terms of her relationship to him, first as a working housewife, then as a rich wife's man who should enjoy life. He never presents her as a person in her own right. Mr. Johnson is unable to see that his wife needs to reach a state of self-fulfilment even if it is through domestic chores. These duties, however demanding and laborious, have fulfilled her time and consumed her energy, allowing her to feel worthwhile and needed. Mrs. Johnson is aware of the importance of her role as a housewife, it seems she knows her work supports her family's financial status. And so when her skills, which provide her with a social and familial purpose, are no longer required due to her husband's success, Mrs. Johnson, disappointed and bereft of work, grows to feel unproductive and suffers from some kind of psychological disorder. She refuses to accept the material items, such as diamonds and clothes, that her husband offers her. It seems that refusal is Mrs. Johnson way of protecting her position in her husband's household. In contrast to what her husband believes to be true, Mrs. Johnson feels unworthy of the success he has achieved. She feels she does not have a claim on her husband's wealth and must therefore perform menial duties in order to earn her place in 'his' household.

The importance of Mrs. Johnson's absence is reinforced at the end of the story through Virginia's remark which carries a hidden reference to her own understanding of Mrs. Johnson's position:

“You never can tell,” murmured Virginia. “It just goes to show that you can never tell.”

And whatever it was you never could tell had brought to Virginia's girlish face the tender knowingness of the face of a woman.⁴⁵

What is interesting here is the ambiguous phrase, 'you never can tell' which may be understood as a rhetorical statement (you never know) or as a surprised reaction to the knowledge of something new (you never can tell or you know, but you must keep it to yourself, i.e. you keep a secret, do not reveal something you know to be true). The latter interpretation suggests that Virginia (note the name here, suggestive of innocence and immaturity) has come to know something new. Through her encounter with Mr. Johnson, she has learned something and plans to keep her knowledge to herself. There is also a noted change from Virginia's 'girlish face' to 'the tender knowingness of the face of a woman' (a term usually given over to the acquisition of sexual knowledge/experience). Here, Virginia seems to have learned something through her interactions with Mr. Johnson or perhaps through her interactions with Mrs. Johnson (with Mr. Johnson as an intermediary). Glaspell's purpose of using Mrs. Johnson as a corrective tool is justified at the end of the story when Virginia learns that materialistic things are of no value to Mrs. Johnson's sense of individuality. They do not help or appeal to Mrs. Johnson because her well-being and sense of individuality can never be achieved. Glaspell depicts Mrs. Johnson's position as reflective of the socio-cultural status of both the working woman and the rich society girl. Glaspell uses her absence as a method of enlightening readers to the way women were perceived at the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁴⁵ Glaspell, 'One of Those Impossible Americans', p. 17.

II.3 Helen: The Absent New Woman in *The Visioning*

In *The Visioning* Glaspell creates the absent Helen, a woman advocate activist, as a representation of the New Woman.⁴⁶ In Glaspell's works, the 'New Woman' is a representation of the new independent, social reformist (and often rebellious) female. The mentioning of Helen in the story is quite significant owing to the type of woman she is. Helen, as narrated by the author and described by other characters in the story, possesses traits that are foreign and opposite to the domestically oriented women in the novel such as Katie Jones and Caroline Osborne. She is an independent working woman, who advocates women's suffrage and works for the advancement of women's socioeconomic and cultural status. Glaspell's intention of keeping Helen absent although she remains palpably present is an emphasis on the fact that, at the time of the novel's publication – the beginning of the twentieth century, there was scarcity of such women in towns like Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. Most women were dedicated to domestic duties and social gatherings, 'womanly' roles.⁴⁷ Helen may be absent from the novel but her absence is powerful because it encourages readers to consider their own socio-cultural position and she proposes ways of bettering the quality of the individual life.

Helen, similar to Mrs. Johnson in 'One of Those Impossible Americans', acts as a corrective example for other women in the story, specifically the protagonist Katie. In contrast to Katie, Helen represents a powerful image of the modern woman who rejects giving up her independence. Helen defies the strict conventions of a society which refuses to acknowledge the concept of female autonomy. After being exposed to the superficiality of her own life and the deficiency of her education, Katie sees her life as trivial when compared to Helen's successful life. Her involvement with social gatherings and managing household

⁴⁶ See Chapter One for more discussion on Glaspell's use of the 'New Woman'. Also refer to Gail Finney, 'Ibsen and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. by James McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 84-105 (p. 95).

⁴⁷ Refer to Chapter One for the different roles of women during the early part of twentieth century as represented by Glaspell's women characters.

chores prove to be insignificant in comparison to Helen's chosen way of life. Katie regards Helen as an ideal example of success as she is an independent woman working for bettering women's positions by having a role in women's suffrage.⁴⁸ In contrast to Katie's minimal home education, Helen makes use of her learning. She seizes a life that is not dependent on men by breaking the frame of obedience, while Katie is curtailed in her ambitions for a better education, and her obligations toward constraining social systems trap her in the world of domesticity. Glaspell uses Helen to influence women who are in Katie's position to contemplate the kind of life they lead and the one they miss had they chosen a path similar to Helen.

Although applied retrospectively to Glaspell's works, Betty Friedan's ideas about the value of education suggest that education should, and can, make a person 'broad in outlook, and open to new experience, independent and disciplined in thinking, deeply committed to some productive activity, possessed of convictions based on an understanding of the world and on [her] own integration of personality'.⁴⁹ Helen is an example of the kind of woman Friedan describes. Similar to Glaspell, Helen refuses to acclimate herself to a life without education. Through Helen, Glaspell directs women to search for possibilities of developing themselves to become better individuals by ignoring the social mores which will only impede the progress of their thoughts and prevent them from being the equals of men.

Helen is absent and in her absence there is some power even though she is shaped by men's, Fred and his father's, versions of her. Each gives a different interpretation and opinion of her personality and life. Regardless of this information, Glaspell ensures that the readers get a sense of Helen's strong personality and inattentiveness to convention and customs. A

⁴⁸ A similar character to Helen is Annie, a lower class woman in *Fidelity* (1915). She refuses to be held back by her Midwestern hometown's principles and her enthusiasm for knowledge directs her to a learning path regardless of her rank. In addition, Annie breaks the barricades built by sex-directed education which restricts women's roles.

⁴⁹ Betty Friedan, 'The Sex-Directed Educators', in *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 132-59 (p. 143).

threat to male supremacy, Helen challenges hegemonic conventions and acts as a corrective example for women who are blinded by the conventions that would pin them down. For example, in his description of Helen, Fred tells Katie that she is 'very much what [Katie] would have been if [she'd] lived out there and had the advantages [Helen] ha[d]'.⁵⁰ This statement awakens Katie to the reality of her own life and makes her step back to think of how she should proceed with her own life. It instigates Katie's unearthed feelings for liberation.

Fred further explains that Helen has a strong sense of independence which makes her determined to continue her work even after marriage. Though he does not explicitly declare it, it is evident that Fred finds Helen's independent spirit appealing. He is not challenged or offended by her strong persona; on the contrary he supports it. Fred's view of Helen is very different from that of his orthodox father, the Bishop who represents religion and society's rigid strictures. An underlying battle is sensed between these two male characters in their perspective of an independent woman. The Bishop believes that Helen is a threat to his family as she dares to defy what he preaches in churches and refuses to adhere to the conventions of proper (submissive) conduct of women. In her absence, Fred, the antithesis of his father, defends Helen's position explaining that she has a right to her own independence even after their marriage. Successful women of the time such as Helen were frequently ostracized and fought against as they ventured into questioning social conventions and challenging them. Glaspell's decision to hide Helen's character somehow mirrors her own character and situation. A private person herself, Glaspell was a subtly defiant character. She fought against rigid strictures by hiding her convictions in her absent characters and stories.

Using silence in the guise of the absent character as an indirect informative function in her writing, Glaspell proposes that readers consider interpreting for themselves the lives of

⁵⁰ Glaspell, *The Visioning*, (Lexington: Filiquarian Publishing LLC., 1911; 2011), p. 74.

the absent characters. Her use of the absent character in the three pieces of fiction discussed above is evidence of the empowerment of women through silence and absence. The women exert their existence and are vocal through the characters who are present, in settings, conversations and body movements. Whether through a main absent protagonist like Minnie Wright or a minor hidden character like Mrs. Johnson and Helen, Glaspell not only gives her readers the opportunity to witness the powerful meanings of silence, but allows them to interact with her texts to create the meanings her silence stands for.

Part III: Silence in Mute Characters

At the heart of much of Glaspell's fiction lies the voice of silence. Glaspell portrays her mute characters as embracing silence as a means of asserting their free will. Through characters such as Mrs. Paxton and Allie Mayo in 'A Rose in the Sand', Glaspell suggests that being silent, cutting off any verbal communication, allows the possibility of discovering one's own voice by listening to the inner self. This phase of silence is not repressive because it does not occur as a result of the limitation of expression, it rather occurs as a form of inner meditation where silence is necessary and required for deep thinking. According to Ben-Zvi, some of Glaspell's plays which utilize silence, such as *The Outside* (1917), *The Verge* (1921) and *Bernice*, are attempts at creating 'what Maeterlinck called "that intangible and unceasing striving of the soul toward its own beauty and truth," moving beyond even language to the silence used to convey inner struggle, the unsaid more eloquent at times, and more significant, than the said'.⁵¹ I contend that Glaspell uses the same method in her fiction. She moves beyond language to draw attention to the silence hidden in the spaces between the words in order to reveal the untold stories of the women concealed in the narrative.

⁵¹ Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Travel at Home and Abroad', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 93- 102 (p. 96); Maurice Maeterlinck, 'The Tragical in Daily Life', p. 112.

Most of Glaspell's 'mute' heroines run away from a social system where a male character is the primary authority figure who curtails the life of the protagonist in some way or another. In a way, one might read her creation of such characters as constituting Glaspell's own literature of protest, the silent protest of fighting a discourse that perpetuates women's oppression. The Midwestern location she uses as a setting for most of her stories is a good example of what may constitute a rigid patriarchal system which mutes women's voices as it leaves them no alternative but to adhere to its rigid regulations ~ as in the case of Mrs. Paxton and Allie Mayo to be discussed in the following section.⁵²

As established earlier, Hassan suggests silence to be a substitution for speech due to one's inability to express extreme mental states such as the 'void, madness, outrage, ecstasy, [and] mystic trance'.⁵³ Glaspell's mute characters go through extreme psychological experiences, however their choice to remain silent is not due to their inability to express the inexpressible. They resort to silence as a form of isolation in order to prevent any potential communication with the outside world. The absence of what the characters might have said but do not say portrays more than any words could their internal courage and their defiant positions. The refusal to speak becomes more of what Bordo describes as a 'rebellion against the linguistic and cultural rules of the father and a return to the "mother-tongue" the semiotic babble of infancy, the language of the body'.⁵⁴ The image is one of real revolution where silence connotes the refusal to participate in a male-shaped language, a desire to return

⁵² Glaspell belonged to a highly religious family, 'Religion ruled all aspects of life for the Glaspells; the parents missed no opportunity to remind their wayward daughter of God and His sacred Word.' Ozieblo, 'The Duties of a Daughter', pp. 13-4. Glaspell's father Elmer would have preferred his daughter to stay home instead of pursuing her studies though he supported both of her brothers' education. Refusing to be a victim of conventions shaped by hegemonic systems, Glaspell chose not to surrender to her father's wishes in order to become a writer. Stout describes the nature and role of women, according to traditional beliefs, to be dominated by silence. It is a 'condition for women, an aspect of their rightful submissiveness, or even a natural state, a manifestation of women's innate passiveness'. Janis P. Stout, 'Preface', in *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion*, pp. vii-xii (p. vii). Using the power of silence, Glaspell '[spoke] of and through silence out of a tradition of being silenced' to express her views, through her novels, on what might have been her fate and the fate of many women who were in her position and did not fight for their rights. Stout, 'Introduction: Silence, the Critic, and the Good Little Girl', p. 9.

⁵³ Hassan, 'Prelude: Lyre without Strings', p. 13.

⁵⁴ Bordo, 'The Slender Body and Other Forms: The Body and and the Reproduction of Femininity', p. 175.

to the pre-socialised language/communication of infancy and a refusal to engage in a language which is not her own.

III.1 Silence in 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927)

'A Rose in the Sand' is a fictional adaptation of Glaspell's play *The Outside* produced in the summer of 1917. The story revolves around Ellen Paxton who comes from the city to reside in an abandoned lifesaving station in Cape's End. Assuming she comes to mourn for her husband's death, the locals regard Ellen as peculiar for having chosen to live in a deserted harbour and for hiring Allie Mayo to manage her household.⁵⁵ Allie, a local widow who does not speak unnecessarily, has remained silent for over twenty years as a result of husband's death at sea.

Experiencing the toughest part of winter in her new home, Ellen does not communicate with anyone and spends most of her days pondering the surrounding environment: the old harbour she lives in, the new lifesaving station, the horse Prince who has been neglected by the rescue team due to his old age, the sand dunes and the trees. After observing Ellen's behaviour for a few weeks, Allie breaks her silence and questions Ellen's detachment from society and her choice of a silent life. Allie tries to encourage Ellen to take an interest in how the trees fight the dunes for survival. Ellen refuses to give in to Allie's intrusion and persistent attempts to communicate. Readers then learn that Ellen's silence is a result of past events which occurred in her previous life with Ned Paxton, her husband of ten years. Ellen assumed she has led a happy marriage, 'At least, she had supposed they were

⁵⁵ Glaspell sets her story in a lifesaving station which is based on a real station in Provincetown owned and renovated by Mabel Dodge. For more information see Brenda Murphy, 'Glaspell and O'Neill', in *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 160-216 (pp. 162-68).

happy'.⁵⁶ However, she is faced with a harsh reality when she discovers that Ned has left her for another woman.

Unwilling to give up, Allie continues in her attempts to break Ellen's silence and requests that the city woman foster a recently orphaned illegitimate child named Esther. Ellen refuses Allie's offer to find refuge and peace in observing 'the Outside', the meeting point between sand dunes and vegetation. She witnesses the struggle between the sand and trees. As the images of nature clear her thoughts, she begins to contemplate her past experience. She discovers that the way to heal is in fighting to survive. The story ends with Ellen watching a rose emerge from the sand. Realizing that she must demonstrate the same tenacity, Ellen goes back home and tells Allie that she will adopt Esther.

By presenting Ellen and Allie as silent women, Glaspell gives her reader the opportunity to create some of the meaning provided by the author in the text and the action in it. Stout comments that readers are the 'co-creators in the dynamic of the text, the potential or submerged text as well as the text printed' when silence is dominant.⁵⁷ By trying to figure out what the characters might say and what they choose not say at all, readers create their own understanding of the mute characters. And because of the ambiguous nature of silence, readers are influenced to speculate whether Ellen and Allie's silence is a sign of retreat or an exertion of power by contemplating the untold stories of the women.

Ellen and Allie's silence does not substitute for their unspoken words. Their silence is rather a tool aiding them to say 'nothing' and a way of preventing them from communicating. Finding no reason to express their feelings to anyone, both characters show clear signs of not needing to justify their mute position to their surrounding communities. Here, Glaspell seeks to link women's language to freedom by creating a new form of communication, silence,

⁵⁶ Susan Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', in *Her America: 'A Jury of Her Peers' and Other Stories*, ed. by Patricia L. Bryan and Martha C. Carpentier (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), pp. 207-20 (p. 218).

⁵⁷ Stout, 'What They Don't Say: Conversation and Narrative Withholdings in Austen's Novels', in *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion*, pp. 24-65 (p. 26).

without respect to the original form of spoken language. This act of rejecting the use of speech proves Ellen and Allie's rebuff against the confining forms of language. Inventing their own unique dialect, they create a protective shield in order to develop their own 'otherness', a quality acquired and possessed through silence.

Ellen and Allie's silence is somehow linked and prompted by loss – the loss of the husband. Kristina Hinz-Bode notes that 'in their mute and secluded existence, [Ellen and Allie] have decided to withdraw from life in order to shut out the pain it has in store for every feeling human being'.⁵⁸ In this instance, Hassan's formulations on silence as resulting from the inability to express extreme emotions or pain may be plausible because both characters are silent and both women experience a painful past. However, Ellen and Allie's silence is a form of retreat from the world to reflect upon their past and present and heal through defiance for a better future. My interpretation recalls Kate Chopin's 'The Story of an Hour' (1894) where, upon the discovery of her husband's death, the protagonist Louise Mallard secludes herself in her room for an hour of silence. In that hour, Louise experiences mixed emotions of pain and pleasure, but most important of all, liberation. She remembers her previous life and anticipates the future with excitement as she discovers that she is finally free from the bondage to her husband. She does not use words to express her thoughts and feelings; instead she holds readers in the rushing flow of her mind, exposing them to her experience ~ the awakening of her senses to her new life.

Similarly, Glaspell exposes us to Allie and Ellen's inner views about life. As mentioned, Allie's reason for being aloof and quiet is a result of her grieving for her husband's death. She passes years of non-verbal communication with those around her because language does not suffice her need to express her painful experience. According to Czerepinski, Allie Mayo's 'voluntary aphasia' is similar to the silence of the missing

⁵⁸ Kristina Hinz-Bode, 'The Outside (1917): Survival through Communication', in *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression: Language and Isolation in the Plays* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2006), pp. 87-102 (p. 89).

protagonists in Glaspell's plays since the absence of voice can be equated with the absent character.⁵⁹ Both the absent and mute protagonists, as Czerepinski states, exemplify 'Glaspell's suspicions about the efficacy of language particularly for her marginalized women'.⁶⁰ Ellen and Allie are marginalized individuals not only due to their peculiar personalities but also because they are considered anomalies by a society which is mainly constructed around familial life. As Ozieblo notes, Ellen and Allie

are no longer wives and so they cannot be mothers, seemingly losing all right to identity ... [T]hey protect themselves from rejection and scorn heaped on a woman without a man; denied the status of "wife," [and so] they make clear that they do not want society's attention.⁶¹

Based on Ozieblo's interpretation, Ellen and Allie choose silence as a way of revenge and of scorning society. As they lose their titles as wives, they lose their social position, the one linked to their husbands, thus losing their defined place and identity in society. In a way, they are marked with otherness. Here, Glaspell might be seen to be pre-empting the kinds of ideas raised by French feminist critics such as Simone De Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex* (1949), for instance, De Beauvoir discusses the notion of woman's 'otherness'. She states that woman is defined in relation to man as she is not considered 'an autonomous being ... she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. [Man] is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other'.⁶² Though De Beauvoir's idea was theorized after Glaspell's time, it seems to speak directly to Ellen and Allie's socio-cultural position. Without their husbands present,

⁵⁹ Czerepinski, 'Beyond *The Verge*: Absent Heroines in the Plays of Susan Glaspell', p. 152.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ozieblo, 'Silenced Mothers and Questing Daughters in Susan Glaspell's Mature Novels', pp. 147-48.

⁶² Simone De Beauvoir, 'Introduction', in *The Second Sex*, ed. by H.M Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. xix-xxxvi (p. xxii).

Ellen and Allie are displaced in a society which regards the husband as an important defining figure. In this light, Ellen and Allie are viewed and considered outsiders by the locals and so they use silence to express their contempt for society's perception of women who have no husbands.

Protesting against a language that does not translate their feelings of otherness and alienation, Ellen and Allie prefer silence to the language that overpowers them. Richards states that the reticence of female characters can be read 'as a protest against patriarchal language, as a sign of integrity, or as the expression of an "alternative" truth'.⁶³ In Allie's case, she rejects language because it is a language shaped by hegemonic systems and not expressive of her suffering. Allie uses silence, 'a superior means of communication', as a weapon against the language that causes her suppression because that same language is unable to deliver her view of the world in a system dominated by patriarchal silencing of the female voice.⁶⁴ Though Allie strongly holds her silence in value due to her disappointment at a language that has failed her, a spark of hope in returning to speech arises with Ellen's arrival to the Cape. Glaspell shows that Allie's desire to speak once more is excited because Allie finds a woman who speaks the same *language* as she. Finding that Ellen uses silence as her language of expression, Allie is motivated to return to verbal communication in order to bond with Ellen as she realizes one true commonality between herself and Ellen: their resorting to silence as a resistance mechanism. By observing Ellen, Allie is granted an opportunity to see a reflection of herself in another individual, a woman immersed in silence mirroring her (Allie's) inferior situation regardless of the different circumstances that have prompted it.

Ellen's utilization of silence is slightly different from that of Allie. The reasons for her silence are not revealed till the end of the story but from the moment of her arrival at the

⁶³ Richards, 'Suffering, Silence, and the Female Voice in German Fiction around 1800', p. 89.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Cape she is defined and discussed in terms of her lack of a husband, 'How was she ever going to get along without Mr. Paxton?'⁶⁵ Here, Glaspell clearly raises the issue of female dependency on the husband. Again we see how Ellen is defined by her husband's absence, indeed she loses her identity with his desertion. The locals are oblivious to the fact that her silence is a reaction to her husband's infidelity rather than his death and that her disappointment in the institution of marital life brings about her silence as the desperate alternative to speech. King-Kok Cheung explains that many women authors show messages in their stories conveying the heartbreak of women protagonists who are too distraught to speak: 'The unspoken or unheard testimonies become powerful indictments on the page, and it is through the written word that [women authors] give voice to their grievances and eventually find redress'.⁶⁶ This idea may be easily applied to Glaspell who portrays Ellen's painful experience of heartbreak after her husband deserts her. Ellen's suspension of speech is her way of turning away from expression and an expressive power in its own right.

The escape location Ellen resides in, a place 'way off across the sand, on the outside sea' parallels her silent position as it isolates her from the rest of the town, 'Suddenly Ellen Paxton arrived at a decision. That abandoned lifesaving station was the place for her. She would go there at once and remain there.'⁶⁷ Glaspell uses Kolodny's inversion technique to juxtapose the traditional role of the lifesaving station.⁶⁸ The harbour, a place associated with

⁶⁵ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 207. Glaspell projects the image of the betrayed wife in many of her works such as *Fidelity*, *Fugitive's Return* (1929), *The Outside* (1917) and *Bernice* (1919). The betrayed woman is always demonstrated as blamed for the failed marriage even though she is the victim of infidelity. For example in *Bernice*, Laura, Bernice's sister-in-law comments on the absent protagonist's failure of maintaining a successful marriage. She says, 'It's unfortunate Bernice hadn't the power to hold Craig' because she was not a 'very good wife'. Glaspell, 'Bernice', pp. 101-2. The same idea is portrayed in 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927) but in a very subtle manner. None of the characters say explicitly that Ellen is to be blamed for her failed marriage, but by reading Glaspell's many works which portray similar scenarios, we may conclude that it is implied.

⁶⁶ King Kok-Cheung, "'Don't Tell': Imposed Silences in the Color Purple and the Woman Warrior", *Modern Language Association*, 103 (1988), pp. 162-74 (p. 164).

⁶⁷ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 207.

⁶⁸ Kolodny's 'inversion technique' is a process by which writers transpose conventional interpretation of an image, idea or object to portray its opposite meaning. See footnote 23, page 8 and footnote 50 page 93 for a full description.

homecoming and safety, which was formerly used to save lives is not safe anymore. This dangerous place becomes the harbour Ellen embraces:

It's awful lonesome ... [and] even hard on ... natives Over there against the sea she could see the house which was to be her home, a place abandoned even by lifesavers for the sea had washed in, making too precipitous a descent for launching the boats.⁶⁹

The geographical location of Ellen's new home guarantees her isolation from the Cape's End community because of its unsafe nature. By shutting herself away from society, Ellen is in a position where she is not obliged to abide by its rules. She uses her escape location as a shelter and a shield against the outside world, the society that regards her as an inferior and outsider. Noelia Hernando-Real suggests that Mrs. Patrick in *The Outside*, the female character who parallels Ellen Paxton in 'A Rose in The Sand', 'has chosen an abandoned place to equal the feeling of abandonment she experiences, and she has not made any change to turn this place [the old lifesaving station] into what could be called a home, giving no hint that this can be a shelter in the traditional sense'.⁷⁰ Certainly Ellen does not turn her home into a joyful place, which was the initial plan she had with her husband when they bought the lifesaving station for their summer escapes. However, disagreeing with Hernando-Real's assertion, Ellen uses the lifeless abandoned place as 'a shelter in the traditional sense' because it protects her from what she dislikes and that is communicating with society. Though abandoned, the station is a harbour, a place where Ellen is able to overcome the pain of the past. It is also a place which empowers her as it distances her from society's misconceptions and prejudices of her.

⁶⁹ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', pp. 209-10.

⁷⁰ Noelia Hernando-Real, 'Geodichotomies in the Configuration of Dramatic Geopathology', in *Self and Space in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company Inc., Publishers, 2011), pp. 59-90 (p. 77).

The comparison Glaspell draws upon between the station deserted by its male inhabitants and Ellen who is deserted by her husband is further enhanced by Prince, an 'old horse retired from service'.⁷¹ Prince is left to wander between the old lifesaving station, his former home, and the new harbour where he is considered 'retired', 'He ought to be done away with, but the ol' man don't like to do it'.⁷² Prince is unwanted by his owner, the lifesaver, and so is displaced, sent away wandering aimlessly as he and his services are no longer needed. The animal is subject to the whims of his owner, forced into exile, the space between the two harbours. Similarly, Ellen's increased sense of degradation and displacement is a response to Ned's ill treatment of her. During their first years of marriage, Ned states Ellen will 'make a lovely mother'.⁷³ However, as Ellen's inability to conceive children is established, Ned compares Ellen to 'no longer a growing thing, but [something] pulled up and tossed aside', thereby debasing her identity.⁷⁴ Unable to take on the role of motherhood due to her inability to biologically conceive a child, Ellen is cast aside. Ellen fails at fulfilling her physiological destination and so is of no use to Ned just as the horse is of no use to his owner.

Glaspell tends to draw comparisons between her characters and the natural world to help us understand her characters' personalities, reflect on their mental state and show their dynamic development from the beginning to the end of the story.⁷⁵ In addition to comparing Ellen to an unserviceable horse, Glaspell utilizes an ambiguous picture of the woods to intensify the image of Ellen's inner self and her internal transformation. In his discussion of the traditional symbols of western literature, J.C. Cooper describes the woods as a symbolic

⁷¹ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 211.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 219.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ While studying at Drake University, Glaspell was exposed to Emersonian ideas about the correspondence between the natural world and human emotions. Emerson's influence on Glaspell is clearly portrayed in 'A Rose in the Sand'. As Ben-Zvi notes, Glaspell adopts Emerson's belief that 'knowledge of the self and the world can be gained by intuition that transcends language and that the little things of life could carry the weight of the universe'. Ben-Zvi, 'Travel at Home and Abroad', p. 96. Also, see Marcia Noe, 'Region as Metaphor in the Plays of Susan Glaspell', *Western Illinois Regional Studies*, 4 (1981), 77-85 (p. 84); Veronica Makowsky, 'Passive Resistance to Active Rebellion: From *Trifles* to *the Verge*', in *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 59-82 (p. 65).

‘place of testing and initiation, of unknown perils and darkness’ where the soul enters ‘the secrets of nature, or the spiritual world which man must penetrate to find the meaning’.⁷⁶ The woods, resembling the old harbour in function as it is situated outside society, represents the place where Ellen goes to for shelter, ‘in silence [Ellen] left the [new] harbor and turned in the woods’, thus signifying Ellen’s quest to evade trapping social mores for a life of contemplation.⁷⁷ Cooper’s suggestive symbolic meaning of the woods makes sense here as we witness Glaspell’s intention of using the woods as Ellen’s meditative space. In the quiet and secretive atmosphere of the woods, Ellen is able to feel free and secure and contemplate about the meaning of her life while witnessing the changes in nature. Enriched by the diversity of her surroundings, Ellen is taught to listen to her consciousness for a better understanding of herself and this gives her the strength to seize direction of her life.

The silence which emerges from Glaspell’s depiction of the natural environment is closely allied to what Max Picard expresses in *The World of Silence (Die Welt des Schweigens)* (1948), ‘The things of nature are filled with silence. They are great reserves of silence ... in the expectant stillness, the silence in things increases. Things seem to sink in silence’.⁷⁸ The motions of nature bring about a kind of epiphany for Ellen. She comes to realise the power implicit in the soundless movements of the natural world as she witnesses it in the struggle between the sand dunes and the woods:

One day she walked over to the line where dunes met woods. There was a high hill with which they threatened the woods, and from that hill of sand she could see all sides around – the woods, and the town at the edge of the woods, and at the edge of

⁷⁶ J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 71.

⁷⁷ Glaspell, ‘A Rose in the Sand’, p. 209.

⁷⁸ Max Picard, *The World of Silence*, trans. by Stanley Goodman (London: Harvill Press, 1948), pp. 138-40.

the town the harbor – where men were safe; turning the other way were dunes and outer sea, the Outside.

She formed the habit of walking over to that place where the dunes encroached upon the woods, where the Outside threatened life. She was unable to keep away from that line of death. She could see tops of trees which the sand had covered; the buried things gave the sand its form.⁷⁹

Glaspell conveys two opposing ideas in the images of the woods and the sand dunes. In the first instance, we have a kind of harmony; 'the line where dunes [meet] sand' offers no immediate sense of struggle. The image depicts the woods peacefully yielding to a stronger force of nature, the sand dunes. However, this sense of natural harmony is almost immediately undercut by the conflict between the 'hills of sand' and the woods. In that intersection, the sand dunes threaten to consume the woods and all that they contain by demanding total submission. There is a kind of dominance in their encroaching the woods, a power play between the 'inside' and 'the Outside'. Pushing this analogy a little further, one might make the case that this struggle within the natural world is indicative of Ellen's psychological struggles. The outside world, the world of society, is that which threatens her emotional, 'inside', well-being. It threatens to undo her and to consume her. The suffocating sense of 'the Outside' is evident in the final line in the reference to the 'buried things' which give 'the sand its form'. What is quite interesting here is Ellen's seeming fascination with this fine line between 'life' and 'death', her frequent return to the place 'where the Outside threatened life'. Perhaps there is something within Ellen which desires consummation, something within her which wants to submit to the more dominant and annihilating force and perhaps this is why she opts to set herself 'outside' society by selecting an existence steeped

⁷⁹ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 212.

in silence. Observing the stealthy, silent interaction between the woods and the dunes, one might argue that Ellen hopes to channel some of that power in setting herself as someone outside the normal lines of communication. Bordo makes the case that silence offers something of a primitive, unsocialised state – precisely what Ellen recognizes in the workings of the natural world. Therefore, one might reasonably make the case that Ellen's elective mutism is an act of appropriating power for herself.

In *The Road to the Temple* (1927), Glaspell describes the inspirational setting for *The Outside* and 'A Rose in the Sand', the dunes in Cape Cod:

I loved [the line] where the woods sent out the life that can meet the sand, and the sand in turn tries to cover the woods – a fighting-line, the front line. It seemed to us a valiant, a dramatic line and we seldom passed without noticing, as in tribute'.⁸⁰

Glaspell's description of the line between the two natural spaces implies a kind of warfare, a battle. Indeed, she uses the phrase 'fighting-line' in her observation and duplicates the image in 'A Rose in the Sand' to parallel Ellen's inner thoughts. The tension between the dunes and the woods is an important thing to look at as both environments suggest dangerous natural unsocialized spaces, physically situated away from civilization and society life represented by the town which Ellen and Allie turn their backs towards. In depicting such a combat, Glaspell perhaps tries to show that Ellen defies social norms by practising a language no one speaks: silence. Instead of communicating with society through speech, she communicates with regions and nature by observing the natural cycle of life which civilization overlooks. In doing so, Ellen is able to meditate and reflect and so she becomes one with nature. Her unity with nature is facilitated by her silence.

⁸⁰ Susan Glaspell, 'Paths to "The Spring"', in *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Ferderick A. Stokes Company, 1927), pp. 286-97 (p. 287).

Continuing with the description of the story's geographical location, Glaspell reflects on Ellen's state of mind by portraying the harbour as the safest place, 'where men [are] safe'.⁸¹ It is important to note here that Glaspell uses 'men', suggesting that while men are safe within the confines of the society which women reject, Ellen and Allie situate themselves near 'the Outside' where it is dangerous, 'Men died right out there in front of Ellen Paxton's house'.⁸² Hinz-Bode comments that 'A Rose in the Sand' is perceived as an illustration of how women succeed in restoring life where men can only fail'.⁸³ For Ellen, the place is a safe haven, whereas for men, it is a place to die. Considered outsiders, Ellen and Allie choose 'the Outside' and silence as a 'form of rebellion against patriarchal society's banishment of women to invisibility', as Ozieblo suggests.⁸⁴ 'The Outside', which is the strongest force of nature in the story, is most destructive, yet Ellen finds herself 'unable to keep away from that line of death'. She finds comfort in the barren world because it is easier for her to find empowerment in silence just as she witnesses it in the power of nature rather than remain humiliated in a society that would judge her for having been left by her husband.⁸⁵

Using the natural world, Glaspell associates silence with clear perception and right judgment. In the world of silence, Ellen develops an undistorted opinion of the images she witnesses in her observation of the dunes, the woods and 'the Outside', as well as discovers the depths within herself. Ellen's agitation with Allie's intrusive observation is only natural as it poses a threat to the harmony Ellen enjoys with the natural world. Ellen dislikes Allie's

⁸¹ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 212.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Hinz-Bode, 'Introduction', in *Susan Glaspell and The Anxiety of Expression*, pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

⁸⁴ Barbara Ozieblo and Jerry Dickey, 'Notes', in *Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 192-98 (p. 195 n.6.).

⁸⁵ Basing their comment on *The Outside*, Ozieblo and Dickey state that 'both women [Ellen and Allie], seeing themselves "outside" a society that is built on couples and families, take refuge in themselves and, knowing that society will make exiles of them, create their own exile in silence and solitude', Barbara Ozieblo and Jerry Dickey, 'The Short Plays: *The Outside*', in *Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell*, pp.33-36 (p. 34). Ellen and Allie in 'A Rose in the Sand' face the same criticism from society though it is only inferred from analysing Glaspell's descriptions of nature rather than stated explicitly.

persistent surveillance of her actions even though Allie's watchfulness is benign in intent. She utters her first words with difficulty, "'Did you want something?'" [Ellen] asked, forced by the thunder of wind and sea to raise her voice but speaking in a studied tone of everyday things.'⁸⁶ Ellen's unfamiliarity with language is obvious as she is cautious in using a form of expression foreign to her. She rather prefers be left alone in the silence of her comfort zone. Here Glaspell emphasizes the idea of non-verbal communication as conflicting with verbal speech by using images of roaring 'thunder of wind and sea' to contrast with Ellen's silent voice. Due to the loudness of the 'thunder of wind and sea', Ellen's verbal utterance is forced, as she is made 'to raise her voice', because she talks against her will. However, her silence is associated with free will because she wants to remain mute. Therefore, by speaking, Ellen is portrayed in a position of weakness because she is performing an act against her will. Having to verbally question Allie's looks removes Ellen from her wordless comfort zone and into the verbal sphere that she tries to avoid. Allie's silent reaction creates a power dynamic which stimulates Ellen's verbal outburst, thus forming a connection between the two women through a language they chose to desert. In discussing the relationship between the women in the dramatic version of the short story, *The Outside* wherein the Ellen Paxton character becomes Mrs. Patrick, Hernando-Real explains the connection between the women:

Allie offers Mrs. Patrick the point of support the abandoned woman needs: the female connection, the reconciliation with the community Mrs. Patrick had rejected. Women's coalition ... is also a means of negotiating the power of place in *The Outside* ... Mrs. Patrick and Allie do not ally because "they like it," but their union is a form of survival in a hostile environment.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 212.

⁸⁷ Noelia Hernando-Real, 'Dramatic Principles of Departure', in *Self and Space in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 146-74 (p. 169). Due to the striking similarities between the plots of the play and the story, it is

As Hernando-Real suggests, Allie somehow acts as Mrs. Patrick's support system (in *The Outside*) and Ellen's (in 'A Rose in the Sand') because of the common factors between them: a mutual communicative language and their refusal to reconcile with society.⁸⁸ Their union, shown through these factors, allows them to create a strong and solid, yet silent bond which is unspoken and unheard. The four protagonists in the play and the short story relate to each other because they understand that each one of them carries a past of difficult experiences and so they become each other's safe harbour. Without understanding the hardships forced upon each of them, specifically the one related to their absent male spouses, neither Ellen nor Allie would have reached the self-realization they sought, nor would the bond between them have been created.⁸⁹

Aside from being dominated by silence, the story is also characterised by the absence of the male characters. The power of silence which Ellen and Allie possess is instigated by the absence of their husbands. In the story, neither Allie nor Ellen's husband is present yet we witness their effects on the protagonists. As Ben-Zvi notes, 'Glaspell depicts the inarticulate power of women to understand the shared experiences of other women unstructured by language but nevertheless communicated through mutually shared pain'.⁹⁰ Glaspell attempts to show women a way of freeing themselves from the tethers of society by freeing her women

safe to say that Hernando-Real's comment may be applied to the characters of Ellen and Allie in 'A Rose in the Sand'.

⁸⁸ As Glaspell portrays in other stories and plays as well, the bond between women, when established, is necessary for unity. Glaspell conveys the power of the unity between women characters in 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917) (Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters), *Chains of Dew* (1922) (Dotty and Mother) and *Bernice* (Abbie and Margaret). One ought to stress the fact that the power of unity and understanding between the mentioned women protagonists is made through silence and not through dialogue, with the exclusion of Dotty and Mother in *Chains of Dew*. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters and Abbie and Margaret's connection is made by understanding the silence of the absent Minnie Wright and Bernice respectively. The notion of silence in 'A Jury of Peers' and *Bernice* differ slightly from that portrayed in 'A Rose in the Sand', but still serves the same purpose discussed in this chapter.

⁸⁹ In the play (*The Outside*), Glaspell experiments extensively with dialogue. Ben-Zvi and Gainor explain that the women in the play engage in a dialogue that 'takes the form of self-discovery ... [they] stumble over words as they make way their way to some new awareness'. Glaspell, '*The Outside*', p. 58. The 'stumb[ing] over words' might suggest that the women are incompetent with the language they try to speak. However, in 'A Rose in the Sand' Ellen and Allie 'stumble over words' because they see the inefficacy of a language which serves as the voice of a hegemonic class, and so is corrupt as it does not convey the truth of their experience. In addition, verbal utterances interrupt the inner dialogue of their thoughts thus corrupting their meditative state.

⁹⁰ Ben-Zvi, 'Susan Glaspell's Contribution to Contemporary Women Playwrights', p. 154.

characters from the chains of a structured language. She portrays Ellen and Allie's strength in their ability to be unshaped by language as they simply abstain themselves from using it, and by doing so they gain control over their communicative ability. A structured language would shape the nature of their problems but this same language is not equipped to express their problems, and so the women choose to use another medium of expression. They prove that language culturally alienates women and silence magnifies the limitations of language.

Ozieblo and Dickey state that in *The Outside* 'it is Allie who, roused by the lifesavers' futile attempts to restore life, turns to nature, and returns to the promise of human communication as she tries to convince Mrs. Patrick that her words are now necessary to save them both'.⁹¹ Similarly in 'A Rose in the Sand' Allie's first words to Ellen are those commenting on the struggle of the woods. Allie compares the woods and Ellen:

The two women drove at the enforced snail's pace across the mile of sand. It was just before they reached the line of the woods, as they came up to the little outposts of vegetation, that the thing happened ... the woman who was being driven looked at the driver in inquiry. Allie Mayo broke the precedent of twenty years. She spoke an unnecessary word.

She pointed to the woods. "*They* fight too," she said in a queer scraping voice, then reached for the whip and sharply touched the horses.⁹²

Glaspell's description of 'the enforced snail's pace' shows the movement with which Ellen and Allie enter and advance into a world of self-realization prompted by the natural world. Allie finds her connection with Ellen stimulating enough to break her twenty years of silence. She also discovers that she possesses the power to encourage Ellen, who in the above excerpt

⁹¹ Dickey, 'The Short Plays: *The Outside*', p. 34.

⁹² Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 213.

is described as being driven by Allie, to communicate with her. Although the word 'driven' may mean control, in this case, Glaspell uses it to project Allie as guiding Ellen to verbal communication. Allie's breaks silence only to portray that the woods' silent defiance, 'they fight too', resembles Ellen's internal struggle. Her speech does not insinuate the powerlessness of her silent position; it only shows her ability to use the language she chose to abstain from had she wished to use it again. In addition, her power is signified in her use of the whip, the silent movement of action, showing the control she has over the horses.

The pivotal point in the story occurs when Ellen takes note of a single rose growing and emerging from beneath the sand.⁹³ Allie's comment, 'Things take root in the sand, and when there's enough growing there – they've *got* the sand. It's anchored', shows that the rose, though placed in a habitat different to that in which it naturally grows, can still survive.⁹⁴ The rose, a delicate plant, grows better in moist and fertile soils. However, Glaspell places the rose in a kind of soil where there are lower levels of nutrients than other soils and its chance of survival is slight to reinforce the ideas of strength, determination, liberation and defeat. Challenged by the sand's aridity, the rose still manages to anchor its roots in the sand. Glaspell depicts the empowerment of adjusting to foreign environments by providing Ellen with the incentive to struggle for survival. She aims at showing that any form of displacement can be difficult, oppressive and unjust, yet when the willingness to survive is possible:

⁹³ The image of displaced 'flowers' is a recurrent one in Glaspell's works. In *The Visioning* (1911) and *Ambrose Holt and Family* (1931), Glaspell, through metaphorical descriptions, associates displaced flowers with women protagonists Ann and Blossom. It is interesting to note that Glaspell often compares her women characters to delicate flowers, and this is not intended to portray them as weak individuals. Certainly, one might say the delicate nature of a flower is traditionally associated with femininity. However, the flower only stands as a metaphor for a woman who is forced to be cultivated and shaped by society, yet in Glaspell's stories the flower usually defies conventions and exhibits a kind of wayward wildness.

⁹⁴ Glaspell, 'A Rose in the Sand', p. 213.

In a stiff frightened way she bent and smelled. Next instant she was kneeling on the sand. For when she smelled she knew she was not mistaken, knew that a wild rose was indeed blooming in the sand ...

There it bloomed in the sand, alone and undismayed, fragile and authoritative. The whole Outside could not daunt it, for back of it was something more powerful than the Outside. Back of it was the will to grow. Back of it was the way of life.⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that Glaspell invites us to compare Ellen to the delicate flower to consider her personal strength. Certainly, the delicacy of the flower is associated with a certain version of femininity. Ellen relates to the image of the fighting rose she witnesses because she, perhaps unconsciously, sees it as a reflection of her own life. As the rose adapts to the low-nutrient soil, she too can adapt to using language which she rejects to fight against the social norms which displace her.

In addition to the rose, Glaspell adds another element to resemble Ellen's displacement, the orphan girl:

Returning one day to her home on the Outside [Ellen] was stopped by a sound from within the house, a sound that made her pull back as if something had been flicked before her eyes. It was a laugh. It was a *child's* laugh. She had started to retreat when Mrs. Mayo came out of the house.⁹⁶

Glaspell intentionally presents the scene so that Ellen hears the girl's laugh before she sees her to emphasize the audial image associated with the little girl. The ringing of the child's laughter 'from within the house' through the dominant quietness awakens Ellen's senses to

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

another medium of expression which does not use any verbal utterances. Unaccustomed to laughter and disliking the sound of anything but her silence, Ellen 'pull[s] back' when she hears the child's laugh as she finds the girl's laughter an affront to her code of silence.

The child, a symbol of innocence, hope and fertility, brings many complex meanings into Ellen's world because of what she represents. Finding no one to care for Esther, Allie hopes that Ellen might take an interest in mothering the orphan, 'I wish you'd take that little girl, and let her – let her show you how to *laugh* at the sand'.⁹⁷ Allie, as Ozieblo explains, is 'charmed out of her desire for solitude by a little orphan girl, and aware that she too is a victim of a lax social morality – evidently rejected, the child has no known father. Allie decides to add her to the refuge for unwanted women that the abandoned station on "The Outside" has become'.⁹⁸ The child, not unlike Ellen and Allie, is displaced by a society that regards familial constructs a social necessity. However, unlike the women, the child is able to laugh (a voiced, yet speechless language) at the sand; hence suggesting her power of defiance. This recalls Bordo's idea of returning to 'the semiotic babble of infancy, the language of the body which challenges the male language'. Regardless of her unfortunate situation of being fatherless and alienated, Esther, unconsciously, uses sound though not speech to set an example for the women to overcome their past experiences. Furthermore, the significance of the child lies in her name Esther. Esther, originally a Jewish queen who was an orphan and a celebrated matriarch, means myrtle signifying a plant, thus aligned with the natural world. Perhaps Glaspell uses the name Esther and all the meanings associated with it to point toward an interpretation of the child in the story as a representative hope. Coming from an unknown patronage, Esther resembles the rose which enriches Ellen with hope.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

⁹⁸ Ozieblo, 'Silenced Mothers and Questing Daughters in Susan Glaspell's Mature Novels', pp. 149-50.

Glaspell succeeds in creating texts which voice the power of the unspoken word to emphasize women's internal struggles against gender and social inequalities. Through the use of her experimental absent characters and mute female protagonists, Glaspell vocalizes the suppressed experiences of women's alienation and displacement. However, Glaspell does not use silence as a form of weakness. As shown in this chapter, she demonstrates silence as a medium of expression signifying women's empowerment. Refuting the marginalization of women, Glaspell shows women such as Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in 'A Jury of Her Peers' as unifying to analyse the life of an absent woman who is not allowed to voice her own defence. She situates them in a position of power by allowing them to retain information that might convict a farmwife not unlike themselves of murder. Glaspell also conveys silence as a protective shield in 'A Rose in the Sand' by which Ellen and Allie prevent their association with the outside world. Their silence substitutes and rejects a language that has failed to convey their vocal needs and also serves a meditative remedy in which they observe the natural world and empower themselves through the images of the life cycles they witness. They doubt the adequacy of language as it does not serve them well to explain the severity of their situation and so they choose to silence its medium ~ their own voices.

Chapter Four

Fugitive's Return (1929): The Return of Voice

‘Does absence have flesh? I asked my body.
Only the one you created, it said in return.’ ~ Shinji Moon, *The Anatomy of Being* (2012)

In the epigraph above, Shinji Moon presents an interesting dialogue between the self and the body. What is interesting here is that in the exchange of dialogue between the physical and psychological entities, Moon personifies absence, an abstract notion, in the form of flesh to keep it present and alive. By creating a concrete ‘flesh’ out of an abstract ‘absence’, the self solidifies the existence of its non-existence. The body’s response reminds the self that its (the self’s) own entrapment is an occurrence of itself; the self ‘creates’ its own absence. Through the dialogue, the idea of absence is kept real as Moon reminds us that in noticing the absence of anything, its presence is implied.

In a similar way, Glaspell uses the absence of her characters and their voices to demonstrate the importance of acknowledging and comprehending their untold stories. In the previous chapter, I discussed four stories - ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ (1917), *The Visioning* (1911), ‘One of Those Impossible Americans’ (1911) and ‘A Rose in the Sand’ (1927) - where Glaspell depicts silence, in the form of the absent character and as a medium of expression, to represent realistic reflections of the untold stories of women’s entrapment and empowerment. For instance, Glaspell, having covered the Hossack murder case during her career as a journalist at the beginning of the twentieth century, replicates the events in her story ‘A Jury of Her Peers’ to voice the undisclosed story of Margaret Hossack who is projected in the absent character of Minnie Wright. Although Minnie is absent in the story, her story is kept alive and is relived through Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Peters and readers who

collaborate to create a logical account of Minnie's life based on the details provided by Glaspell.¹

Glaspell stories are embedded with the characters' voicelessness, a key element in understanding the female identity. To some social commentators, for instance Bessie Dendrin and Emilia Riberio Pedro, 'speechlessness has traditionally been seen as a defining quality of womanhood whereas having a voice is seen as a threat to female identity'.² As women are regarded as the muted group, they are marginalized and silenced in many of the public spheres, as discussed in the beginning chapters of this thesis. Such a view depicts women in a submissive position. My discussion in Chapter Three rejects examples of such formulations by theorists Susan Bordo and Elaine Showalter who note that women are silent because they are written out of fiction. Though Bordo acknowledges that the state of muteness may be an act of protest and rebellion, she leans towards the view of silence as submissive by defining women's muteness as a form of retreat enforced by 'an ideal of patriarchal culture'.³ Showalter also notes that the cause of women's silence is not 'that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, and circumlocution'.⁴ They claim that the gaps in texts, forms of silence, are a representation of the repressive condition of twentieth century women's lives which women experienced due to the nature of their gender and the hegemonic culture in which they live.

¹ In *Trifles* (1916), *Bernice* (1919) and *Alison's House* (1930) Glaspell shows the absent protagonist as the dominating force that directs the play or story's action forward. The absence of the female protagonist may seem a weak point, however her very absence becomes a powerful presence. For instance, Glaspell allows the readers to explore the motives which lead characters such as Minnie Wright in *Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917) to murder her husband and Bernice in *Bernice* to confuse her family and friends over her sudden death. In addition, Glaspell's absent characters give readers the opportunity to get involved with the story as they co-create and interpret the action and the reason behind the absence and the motives of the absent characters.

² Bessie Dendrin and Emilia Ribeiro Pedro, 'Giving Street Directions: The Silent Role of Women', in *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Adam Jaworski (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 215-38 (p. 219).

³ See Susan Bordo, 'The Slender Body and Other Cultural Forms: The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity', in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 165-84 (p. 177).

⁴ Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 243-70 (p. 255).

In concurrence with Bordo and Showalter, Janis P. Stout makes a similar observation in defining women's silence in the work of authors such as Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter and Joan Didion. She states that 'silence or effective silence, not being heard or not being free to speak authentically, is a mark of women's repression in a masculinist culture. It is, indeed, a mark of victimization'.⁵ Stout does not only refer to the literal meaning of the silence as 'not being heard', but the figurative meaning which holds a deeper sense. Silence in this case represents women's speech which is ignored and not understood due to the social constraints that stifle women's voices.⁶

According to the critics mentioned above, women's silence which is viewed as a 'mark of victimization' in a 'masculinist culture' suggests their compliant position in many cultures and this perhaps explains why the silent woman in realistic works of fiction is often looked upon as a weak individual. Disagreeing with this negative portrayal of silence, in the previous chapter, I made the case that silence in Glaspell's fiction and plays is not a sign of submissiveness; instead it is an expressive medium perfected by a female author to express and reflect upon the actual silent positions of women of her time.⁷ Glaspell uses silence, a

⁵ Janis P. Stout, 'Introduction: Silence, the Critic, and the Good Little Girl', in *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), pp. 1-23 (p. 13).

⁶ For further information regarding the possible reasons for the suppression of women's voices, refer to Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 1st edn (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). In addition, a discussion of Russ's reasons is mentioned in Chapter Three.

⁷ Several factors taken from the examination of Glaspell's life contribute to the explanation of her motives for creating strong, silent yet subservient women. Glaspell did not play a significant role in the creation of her critical reputation, as she consistently effaced herself from any praise regarding her works. This attitude in downgrading her own artistic abilities in a way silenced her own name. For instance, in *The Road to the Temple* (1927), a biography of George Cram Cook, Glaspell gives all credit for the creation of the Provincetown Players to her husband Cook. See Mary E. Papke, 'Susan Glaspell's Naturalist Scenarios of Determinism and Blind Faith', in *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*, ed. by Martha C. Carpentier and Bárbara Ozieblo (New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 19-34 (p. 20); Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Preface: A Pioneering Life', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. xii; Martha C. Carpentier, 'Greece/Greek as Mother's Body in *The Road to the Temple* (1927)', in *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 26-42 (p. 27). Although it was Cook who started the idea of founding a theatre that focused on representing serious American drama which differed from what he regarded as superficial in Broadway plays, it was Glaspell who was considered the bigger asset to the theatre since she produced most, if not all, of the best Provincetown Players' plays. See Bárbara Ozieblo, 'A Sense of Mission', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000) pp. 63-90 (p. 88). Veronica Makowsky, 'Whose Life Is It Anyway? *The Road to the Temple*', in *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (Oxford: Oxford University

method of expressing the unnoticed and unheard, and allows her characters to redefine it as the refusal to speak based on complete free will. Her storylines end up with the emergence of stronger independent women with more audacious personalities. I specifically examined the short story 'A Rose in the Sand' and by looking closely at the main characters of Ellen Paxton and Allie Mayo who remain mute for most part of the story I argued for Glaspell's use of silence as a source from which power and strength are drawn. I demonstrated how these women characters eventually come to seize speech as a means of expression after using silence as a tool for meditation and self-discovery.

In Chapter Three, I presented examples of women's marginalization by demonstrating Glaspell's uses of the absent character and silence not as promoting the absence of women's voice but as a vociferation of the power in their absence and silence. Through this chapter I have extended my discussion of Glaspell's view regarding the reality of women's social, cultural and economic marginalization through her use of the mute protagonist. I intend to build on the previous chapter's discussion by adding some different observations regarding Glaspell's use of silence. Continuing to project silence as power and meditation, I argue that the four stories ('A Jury of Her Peers', *The Visioning* and 'One of Those Impossible Americans' and 'A Rose in the Sand') are in fact rehearsals for Glaspell's long experiment with silence in her novel *Fugitive's Return* (1929).

This chapter aims to portray *Fugitive's Return* as a literary continuum where Glaspell empowers her protagonist Irma Lee Shraeder by granting her a journey outward to a foreign land, Greece. My synopsis and examination of Irma's history, her social conditions and the hardships she endures will further strengthen my deliberations regarding Glaspell's socialistic leanings and my sense of how her work offers realistic reflections of her own life as

Press, 1993), pp. 83-100 (pp. 91-2); Mary Heaton Vorse, *Time and the Town, a Provincetown Chronicle* (New York: Dial Press, 1942), p. 24, pp. 116-17.

discussed in Chapters One and Two.⁸ In addition, I have chosen Jacques Lacan's mirror theory as my analytical framework in analysing Irma's silent personality as it illuminates the character and tallies with Glaspell's interest in early psychoanalysis. Lacan's theory describes the protagonist's psychological state and her reasons for willingly deciding to remain mute. Her choice stands as a rejection of the patriarchal language with which she finds it impossible to express herself, an observation made in the previous chapter on 'A Rose in the Sand'.

In addition, I will trace Irma's temporary residence in Greece, a setting where she is able to avoid any sort of obligation to communicate with the Greeks due to her lack of knowledge of their language. Glaspell's two-year experience in Greece provided her with an essential foundation in shaping her choice of silent character and in constructing the complex storyline of *Fugitive's Return*. She witnessed how women were systematically denied access to power on the grounds that they are the submissive gender. Her observation of the subservient position of women in the Greek society, a position she refused to hold and fought against, makes it clear as to why she chooses silence as the means by which Irma expresses herself. Greece also serves as a suitable setting for Glaspell's novel as it portrays the position of the 'silent, uncomplaining woman – an ideal of the patriarchal culture', as previously categorized by Showalter, and how Glaspell transforms this image into a powerful silent expressive woman.⁹

Finally, I will briefly mention Irma's relationship to other women characters in the story and discuss how their lives provide her with insights on her perception of her own selfhood. I will focus on Irma's silent relationship with Stamula as it is the most crucial in exemplifying Irma's silent empowerment. This analysis will enable me to translate Irma's silence as an authoritative means of communication and her phase of silence as a positive

⁸ In *Fugitive's Return* (1929), Glaspell combines most of the feminine thematic concerns which she addresses in her wider oeuvre. Some of the themes Glaspell addresses in her novels and plays, which are directly linked with women's issues, are false identity, motherhood, alienation and displacement, class discrimination, repressed desires, and individuality.

⁹ Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', p. 255.

period that leads to the awakening of her consciousness and the shaping of her individuality. I will allude to Ihab Hassan, a postmodern American literary theorist, who observes silence from an interesting angle. He notes that ‘silence is never completely soundless. It is not death, the void, or primeval night. It is rather a condition that permits us to hear the heart beating and the nerves scratching. The heart is our being, the nerves our consciousness’.¹⁰ As Glaspell uses a similar understanding of silence to the one Hassan refers to in her presentation of silence, I will use his concept of the soundless room to reflect the inner thoughts of Irma’s consciousness and the elimination and removal of her voice and speech from the text.¹¹ This reflection will support my chapter’s aim of showing that Irma’s silent inward speech not only represents her strength but also helps her to develop her personal power. In particular, this chapter aims at exploring Glaspell’s utilization of her novels as a vocal medium to deliver some of the observations of her own personal experiences in Greece. These observations find their articulation in Irma’s mutism, her silence is a powerful mode of expression.¹²

¹⁰ Ihab Hassan takes the concept of the soundless room from John Cage’s account of when a technician asked him to step into a soundproof room and describe what he heard. Cage heard two sounds, low and high. According to the technician, the low sound Cage heard is the sound of his heart beating and the high one is the sound of his nerve scratching. See Ihab Hassan, ‘Silence, Revolution, and Consciousness’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 10.3 (1969), 461-78, (p. 474).

¹¹ Glaspell does not deploy stream of consciousness, used by writers such as Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. In Glaspell’s stories, the flow of the characters’ interior monologue is tempered by the omniscient narrator’s voice. Glaspell does not cancel the characters’ voices but rather adds a narrator’s voice, one that echoes her own to express and exert her own views in the stories.

¹² Glaspell portrays much of her own personality in the protagonists she creates in stories and plays. She never wrote a biographical account of her life and before her death she destroyed many of her personal correspondences with family and friends. It is important to note that Glaspell’s decision to keep her life private parallels the symbolic silence existing in her works. In addition, the analysis of Glaspell’s protagonists adds a useful insight to the understanding of the socio-economic condition of women in the twentieth century, it also helps in understanding the author’s outlook on such conditions.

Part I: *Fugitive's Return*: A Story Retold¹³

Fugitive's Return is divided into three parts. Chapters One to Eighteen are set in the present where we are first introduced to Irma as she attempts to commit suicide as a result of her daughter Birdie's sudden death. During these chapters, the novel moves between Cape Cod and Greece, two places where Glaspell herself resided. The events in Chapters Nineteen to Thirty-Five are a series of extended flashbacks: starting with a trance of Irma's past when she lived in Midwestern Iowa with her parents and ends with her attempt of suicide which occurs at the beginning of Chapter One. Finally, Chapters Thirty-Six till the end of the novel take us back to the present where Irma is in Greece and the events continue from where Chapter Eighteen has ended. What is striking here is the way in which Glaspell constructs her story, the way with the present is interspliced with the past. This construction gives the novel some kind of psychoanalytical reverie or even a trance where Irma recalls and revisits her past in order to understand herself in the present.

The first part of the novel focuses on Irma's present losses: her separation from her husband Dan Shraeder and the death of her daughter Birdie. Feeling her life is worthless, Irma's attempt to end her life is stopped by Janet, Irma's close cousin. Janet helps Irma get away from Cape Cod by sending her off to Greece using the identity of Myra Mead, Janet's friend and a suffrage supporter.¹⁴ On the boat to Greece, Irma remains mute and spends her time observing and analysing the passengers' personalities and lives. A middle-aged archaeologist, Anna Mead, befriends Irma and becomes protective of the mute protagonist.

¹³ My reason for giving a lengthy synopsis of *Fugitive's Return* is due to its unavailability today. The novel is one of Glaspell's novels which went out of print. Its metal plates were sold to the war effort in World War II, as discussed in the Introduction section of this thesis, and as a result it has been lost alongside Glaspell's many works.

¹⁴ Myra Mead is one of Glaspell's minor characters. The author does not disclose much information about her except for her strong support of women suffrage. Myra resembles Helen in *The Visioning* (1911). The brief mention of their personalities and their line of work emphasizes Glaspell's idea of the strong independent woman. Glaspell's intention of including these women even through mere citing is deliberate as she sets them as archetypal examples for the women protagonists.

Upon her arrival in Greece, Irma, with no prior notice, leaves Anna and heads to Delphi on her own.

The setting moves to Greece, specifically Delphi and the mountains of Parnassos. The description of the setting and Greek life is influenced by Greek allusions and mythologies. In Greece, Irma lives among Greek peasants who treat her with respect and admiration. She becomes known as the silent Kyria of the Archai and her muteness gives her a mysterious quality and a kind of superiority. The Kyria becomes famous and her 'word' in its silent form is considered sacred and her minimal communication with others is regarded as a divine gift. New characters are introduced in this section of the novel. Elias, owner of the Hotel Pythian Apollo, offers Irma a place to stay and becomes the caretaker of her day-to-day affairs.¹⁵ He recruits his sisters, Stamula and Vascelo, as servants to help in managing Irma's house. Stamula, a Greek peasant and a typical domestically oriented woman becomes Irma's silent companion and teaches her the secrets of weaving and nonverbal communication. Vascelo, a tremendously angry widow and mother of two, becomes Irma's cook.¹⁶ Theodora, a refugee from Asia Minor, is later brought in by Elias to help Vascelo manage Irma's household.¹⁷ She falls in love with Andreas, a handsome shepherd who is imprisoned for raping Constantina. Finally, Constantina, daughter of Demetrius Platais a Greek local peasant and father of six girls, is the only girl shepherd on the slope of Parnassos and a cursed 'woman girl'. She is a victim of her own society because of her physical appearance. She is described as a dwarf woman who looks like a little man. Constantina's condition of being an abnormal being displaces her and outcasts her.

¹⁵ Glaspell's depiction of Elias's character is based on Athanasius Tschalos, a waiter at the Pythian Apollo Hotel, whom she and Cook met in Greece. Also known as Thanasie, Athanasius left his job at the hotel to help the couple settle in Greece and became Cook's companion.

¹⁶ Vascelo is a good representation of a Greek peasant widow. In the novel, she is depicted as turning her withheld anger at the loss of her husband into aggression against her children since they act as obstacles preventing her from remarrying. She yells and screams at them within her maternal sphere; other than that, her voice ceases to exist in Greek's strictly patriarchal community.

¹⁷ Theodora's character is also based on a real refugee who escaped from the Turkish persecution. She was the maid Glaspell and Cook recruited in Delphi.

The second part of the novel focuses on Irma's historical and social background. Born and raised in Iowa, Irma Lee, daughter of a farmer, faces many difficulties while growing up. Irma is unsatisfied with her life, finding it unfair in comparison to her cousin Janet's life. As Janet and Irma's mothers are sisters, Irma sees the difference between her aunt, who marries a rich man and enjoys a privileged life in the city, and her mother Rose who struggles with her husband Ed's financial and social status. The Lee family suffer many hardships and are forced to reside in the poorer area of town where German immigrants are abundant.¹⁸ Ashamed of her family's poor status and unable to be content with her reality, Irma's feelings of resentment increase as she longs to belong to a privileged class like the one Janet enjoys. As a result, she secludes herself in an imaginary world where a different and better life saves her from her present life.

A family crisis occurs which leaves the Lees almost bankrupt. Irma finds herself forced to work as a teacher in an elementary school far away from home to help support her family. She meets Horace, a farmer, who falls in love with her and asks her to marry him. However, she rejects his marriage proposal because she feels her life with him will simply be a replica of her parents' difficult life. After her parents' death, Irma moves to the city to live with her aunt who has constantly been a support to the Lee family. However, although Irma finally lives the life she always dreamed of, she still feels alienated from Janet's prestigious social circle and so secludes herself again in her own world by shutting people out.

When Irma finally meets Dan Shraeder and marries him, she assumes that their marriage may save her from her lowly status, specifically those related to money and class. However, she faces other problems such as Dan's infidelities and their miscommunication which lead to the failure of their marriage. After her divorce from Dan, Irma finds comfort in

¹⁸ The German immigrants were known to be of a lower social and financial status. See Chapter One for a biography of Glaspell's family's historical background with a focus on social class, Glaspell's outlook on it and her family's relation to the German immigrants. Also see Sharon E. Wood, 'Introduction: The Belva Lockwood Club', in *The Freedom of the Streets: Work Citizen, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1-13.

mothering her daughter Birdie who becomes the sole reason for her existence. She focuses all her efforts on motherhood. Tragically, an unfortunate incident where Birdie gets infected with infantile paralysis causes the girl's death.

The final part of the novel takes us back to Irma's present in Greece. The events escalate as conflicts arise between the locals. Andreas's decision to marry Theodora entices Constantina's anger, compelling her to kill him. Andreas's father swears to avenge his son's death by killing the shepherdess. Wanting to save Constantina from a death sentence and an oppressive life Irma runs away again, this time with Constantina, in order to save the child's life.

Part II: Irma's Rejection of Vocal Expression

As depicted in the synopsis above, Glaspell does not narrate the events of the story in the traditional chronological way but rather in a series of fragmental flashbacks to reflect the protagonist's state of mind in its inconsistency and instability. The geographical shift in *Fugitive's Return's* storyline is vital to the understanding of Irma's psychological development and her decision to remain mute in a place where she experiences cultural dislocation and her subsequent decision to return to speech in a place far away from home. For instance, we find Glaspell condensing the description of Irma's socioeconomic problems in the Midwest, a place within which Glaspell usually associates social and class inequality with the displacement of less privileged individuals. Glaspell portrays Iowa as a place of cultural dislocation which traps Irma in a life she refuses to accept. Due to her poor status, Irma is unable to feel a sense of belonging and even after her marriage to Dan she is further displaced as she does not fit into her husband's high ranking social group (not unlike Mrs. Johnson's inability to fit into her newly-moneyed lifestyle in 'One of Those Impossible Americans'). These experiences imprison Irma between her haunted past and her need to

escape her present. However, when the story's setting shifts to Greece, Irma's state of mind clears away enabling her to view her life with a more objective eye as she is not confined to the centre of her problems. Though Irma is unable to socially integrate, using speech, with individuals in her Midwestern locale due to the difference in social and class levels, she mingles harmoniously in silence with the peasants of Greece.

In the opening scene of the story, we witness a kind of psychological rebirth in Irma, 'She stepped from her bath - a moment she had always liked: as if the past could be washed away'.¹⁹ Glaspell conveys Irma's bath (water) as representing two conflicting ideas (opposites). One way of interpreting the above quotation is by considering the bath as a symbol of life or its preservation; thus symbolizing Irma's awakened senses. However, from another angle, the bath, resembling the warm amniotic waters of the womb, secludes Irma within an interior sphere – it shields her from the penetrating interruption of an exterior world she chooses to evade. Here, the bath can be interpreted as silencing the past as Irma associates it with erasure, the washing away of preceding events which remind her of a reality she yearns to forget. As she steps away from the bath waters, perhaps this signifies a movement outward, a portent of her escape to Greece, her departure from the Midwest, and a sign of her bid for life (after all, once the child is expelled from the secluded waters of the womb she/he makes that bid for life – uncomfortable and cold as it might seem at first). Irma's revived consciousness disturbs her and what goes on in her mind becomes a painful reminder of her sorrows, 'Thoughts trying to get to her - thoughts wanting to know they were in her, still living there – ready'.²⁰ Here, Glaspell deploys an interior monologue to expose readers to Irma's inner voice.²¹ Irma's thoughts are personified as an intruding person,

¹⁹ Susan Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1929) p. 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Glaspell also relies on the diegetic approach, inserting her own voice into the story by embodying the narrator in order to comment on the various conversations between characters as well as on Irma's thoughts. As Glaspell uses her works as her vocal medium, this method gives Glaspell an entry into the world of her own narrated events and allows her to subtly communicate her own opinion and ideas to the reader.

constantly ready to invade and destroy her inner peace. She despises her presence in a world where she is controlled by obtrusive memories that haunt her. Her defence mechanism against this invasion is to suppress her thoughts by silencing them. And so to rid herself from such negative feelings, she resorts to suicide as an option to end her sufferings and block her thoughts permanently.²²

However, Irma's suicide attempt is botched by Janet's knocking at the door which turns the course of events, 'it did not seem one could leave life, with Janet in the house'.²³ Glaspell inserts Janet's intervention as a way of forcing Irma back to reality and, more importantly, a reminder of her own existence. The sounds of Janet's voice and knocking forcing their entrance into Irma's room resembles the intrusive thoughts dominating Irma's secluded world. The knocking on the door is reminiscent of Kate Chopin's 'The Story of an Hour' (1894) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-Paper' (1892). The protagonists of both stories are locked up in their rooms with nothing to occupy their time but their thoughts. Inside their bedrooms where they do not speak to anyone, the women are in a protective sphere where their thoughts are not monitored, judged, disturbed or stopped. Like Hassan's 'soundless room', the place is blocked from any outer interference except what occurs within the unimpeded individual's mind.

Mary E. Papke compares Irma to the women characters in *The Outside* (1917) stating that Irma 'moved completely into another place in which there was finally so little difference

²² In her stories, Glaspell tends to repeat certain incidents which may seem minor but which hold deep and significant meanings. The idea of suicide has been mentioned several times in Glaspell's works, for instance in *The Visioning* and *Bernice*. As Irma is prevented from killing herself by Janet in *Fugitive's Return*, so is Ann stopped by Katie in *The Visioning*. The interruption in both cases signifies the salient idea of a 'sisterhood ideology', the bond between women, in Glaspell's works which I mention in Chapter Two. Even though Katie is not familiar with Ann at the commencement of the story, still her instincts urge her to save a woman on the verge of self-destruction. In *Bernice*, Glaspell deals with suicide differently. The absent protagonist Bernice misleads the other characters in the play to believe that she has committed suicide because of her husband's infidelities. It is not until the end of the story that the truth of Bernice's natural death is revealed to some of the women characters, specifically to her best friend Margaret. By fooling her husband in leading him to believe that her death is unnatural and an act of suicide, Bernice feels she has mockingly defied his oppressive dominance in her death.

²³ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 13.

between life and death that she attempts suicide'.²⁴ Irma's hopelessness stimulates her to equate life with death, perhaps out of fear of anticipating a future without her daughter Birdie.²⁵ For Irma, taking her life becomes the complete and permanent form of silencing her inner voice that reminds her of a painful present. Suicide becomes more of a numbing act and a form of protection by which she prevents her mind from thinking:

Irma Shraeder did not want to live any longer ... there was no longer any reason for ... listening for running feet and the silence no laughter breaks. For six weeks she had listened. Now she would go to sleep, where she would not listen for what she would not hear.

She would go to sleep and not wake because there was no reason for waking. To what further duty – to what new delight – indeed, to what old sorrow? The anguish had struck her dead at the center – all except the listening – and it is not seemly that that which is dead, live.²⁶

The above excerpt displays Glaspell's use of silence as an important device in the portrait of a feminine consciousness. The onset of silence in Irma's life is emphasized in the following phrases, 'no longer any reason for [...] listening'; 'she would go to sleep'; 'she would not listen for what she would not hear'. As previously established by Hassan, silence acts as a barrier between the outer world and the silent self/individual/character. And silence, according to John Cage's philosophical definition, is the existence of ambient and

²⁴ Mary E. Papke, *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), p. 108.

²⁵ In *Fugitive's Return*, Glaspell portrays suicide from Irma's point of view, the protagonist who is on the verge of ending her life. This enables the readers to understand and explore the protagonist's motives and psychology in resorting to such an inevitable decision of ending her life. In *The Visioning*, Glaspell portrays suicide from another angle. Katie witnesses Ann on the verge of committing suicide and again the reader is exposed to the thoughts of the aiding character who prevents the deed and turns the course of events.

²⁶ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 4.

involuntary noise rather than the complete absence of sound. Here, Glaspell provides a similar image where Irma is more alert to her own thoughts and feelings by listening to the 'soundless room' of her mind. The absence of the sound of her daughter is concurrent with death, loss and emptiness. In this instance, 'listen[ing] for what she would not hear' is more than mere nothingness; it is rather Irma's own consciousness resounding only in her mind. Her mental representation of her grief traps her by blinding her to any other alternative but suicide. She is fixated on her sorrow and is unable to see that one way of surviving the crisis is by reflecting on the misfortune that has happened to her and using it to her own advantage. She is only able to do so when she realises that her wisdom lies in the silence she uses as a means of expression, something she achieves after her travel to Greece as discussed in the latter section of this chapter.

After stepping out of the bath, Irma sees her reflection in the mirror. It is then that she becomes aware of her existence and the different stages in her life. This realization helps her to pull back from her attempt of suicide to the first scene of her rebirth:

She let her glance just touch the mirror, for not to do this would be effort. Yes, this was her body. She knew it. In this she had lived and had her being for thirty-five years. It had been a baby. A little girl [...] This body she saw one last time had grown to womanhood [...] It had been a bride; a pregnant body.²⁷

Like the bath, the mirror reawakens Irma's senses to her existence as a female human entity. In just a few sentences, we are exposed to Irma's transformation from a child to a girl to a wife and finally a mother. Irma's self-recognitions of these stages of biological womanhood define her feminine capabilities and her view of herself only as a corporeal being. At this

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

stage, Irma is portrayed as nothing but a biological entity. She is an object existing to occupy the biological role she assumes. As her duties of motherhood and wifedom cease to exist as a result of the death of her daughter and separation from her husband, Irma finds no reason to stay alive because her womanly duties as a mother and wife are taken away from her. And so instead, she chooses reclusiveness and silence (death) as her gateway to complete freedom.

It is useful at this point to draw on some of the ideas of Jacques Lacan, especially given Glaspell's interest in early psychoanalysis. Glaspell was aware of the psychoanalytical theories of the time and engaged with psychology in her works such as *Suppressed Desires* (1915) in which she critiques society's obsession with Freud's new theories. In *Fugitive's Return*, Glaspell anticipates and touches on future psychoanalysis by projecting Irma's reflection in the mirror as evoking some of the ideas associated with Lacan's mirror theory. The theory offers a useful framework in understanding Irma's complex personality in association with her silence and in highlighting the process of Irma's self-identification with herself which occurs with the formation of her Ego.²⁸ The term Ego, according to Lacan, refers to the personality or the individuality of a person formed through the process of identifying one's own mirror image. Irma is able to recognize her specular image yet is unable to synchronize all of the roles pertaining to that image. She is also unable to acknowledge all of her roles as belonging to one person, herself. Alternatively, she views each of her roles separately as she sees her reflection in the mirror as a series of fragmented

²⁸ Inspired by the works of Henri Wallon who speculated that humans and animals respond to their reflections in mirrors, Jacques Lacan introduced the notion of the 'mirror stage' in 1936 in his paper 'Le Stade du miroir'. The paper discussed how infants aged six to eighteen months recognize their reflections in the mirror as an object seen from the outside. In the early 1950s, Lacan developed his theory further by stating that the mirror stage is not one that could be confined to a certain phase in a child's life. It is more of a presentation of a permanent structure of subjectivity which can occur at any phase of an individual's life. A reflection allows the individual to establish a relationship between the self and his/her reality. This connection is important for the development of one's self-identity since the individual makes a connection between his/her image and his/her body. See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytical Experience', in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), pp. 75-81.

images where each image is an individual with a different role: a daughter, a mother, and a wife.

Irma's inability to view herself outside the female biological roles contributes to her feelings of otherness. Veronica Makowsky states that 'since Irma really sees no self beyond her roles as wife, mother, or sex object, her plan of suicide seems a logical extension of that lack of self; if no gaze validates her existence, she really does not exist'.²⁹ Irma imprisons herself within female biological roles, thereby negating her individuality. To resolve such an internal struggle is to identify herself with one wholesome image combining all of her roles in order to succeed at reaching her Ego. Irma's whole and fragmented images are related to my discussion of silence as power and meditation. The point where Irma's fragmented self clashes with her wholesome image is the moment she elects for mutism. Irma does not mentally separate herself from her thoughts and feelings; she rather embraces silence in order to get in touch with her complete being. At this point, Irma's voice ceases to exist. Her refusal to speak, despite her ability to do so, becomes a journey in and towards silence which she undergoes in order to connect with her inner self.

Irma's fractured rather than wholesome identity confusion is related to her refusal to speak and is attributed to her failed marriage and Birdie's loss. Initially, Irma's conception of matrimony is based on an idealistic picture of marriage. When she marries Dan, Irma's preconceived hopes are fulfilled; she enjoys a more privileged lifestyle, a better financial security and a contented experience of motherhood, 'Released from that uncertain social position which had brought unhappiness from the time she was a little girl [...] Dan was sure enough of himself to give an assured place to her'.³⁰ She sees Dan as her gateway to a world she has previously wished to belong to but was prevented from joining because of her lower

²⁹ Veronica Makowsky, 'Forging a Woman's Identity in Susan Glaspell's Fiction', in *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, ed. by Linda Ben-Zvi (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 317-30 (p. 320).

³⁰ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 160.

social situation. However, after experiencing the life of the rich, Irma feels displaced and invisible in her husband's world as the people around him, whom she regards as superficial, 'resent her, perhaps [think] her absurd'.³¹ Aversive to mingling in a world occupied with phoney superficial people, Irma refuses to acquiesce to feeling an outsider. Instead of accepting other people's alienation of her, she alienates herself by finding refuge in Cape Cod, the same place Mrs. Paxton resorts to for seclusion in 'A Rose in the Sand'. There in Cape Cod she discovers a silent place of her own where she embraces speechlessness as a strategy of resistance. In Cape Cod, away from people, Irma protects herself from a lifestyle she cannot adapt to and develops an antisocial personality which rejects Dan and his circle for not sharing her values. The shift in the power dynamic here is evident as Irma rejects them rather than vice versa. Irma's marginality and alienation are conditions forced upon her. However, Glaspell ensures that Irma's silence, a result of her sidelining, is not perceived as weakness or absence but seen as strength in its quality of otherness. As she sees herself decentred from a social circle she does not belong to, Irma recognizes the 'other' within herself and embraces it. She sees her speech as disrupting the continuity of her resistance and realizes that silence vocalizes her stance of opposition.

Although Dan's society perceives Irma as an outsider, Glaspell does not depict her silence as a form of social alienation because Irma does not represent silence as the voice of the exploited or the dispossessed. Instead, Irma's silence exists as a decision as it becomes the defying weapon against a voice which she regards as powerless. It also allows her to listen to the voice of the 'other' present in her thoughts. Glaspell's creation of a situation where Irma is hauled into derogatory submission, a position of an 'other', because of a male figure demonstrates Irma's silent defiance in her refutation of a submissive position. From the moment they meet, Dan views Irma as an inaccessible object. He does not see her as an

³¹ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 5.

individual because, like the other men in his social circle, he reduces her to a model, an object for his sexual desire. Dan only notices Irma's sensuality; he finds her lustrous red hair sexually appealing, "'Whose hair is that?' [Dan] asked. 'That is Irma Lee's hair,'" Janet said. "'Then take me to Irma Lee'. To Dan, Irma is 'something to be reached. Something to be battered down'.³² Glaspell's use of pejorative words clarify her sense of the wider perception of women as sexual instruments perceived as existing for the sole purpose of pleasure. Irma discovers that the realm of wedlock, in Dan's world, is based on satisfying her husband's sexual appetites and her inability to satisfy Dan gives her a strong reason to become aloof and to seclude herself in a world of speechlessness.³³

In their marriage, Dan finds Irma's personality unsuitable to his liking because of her powerful sense of independence and detachment.³⁴ For instance, Irma hides her pregnancy from him and for that he attacks her, 'You move around in your little place, and you don't know anything else. You're perfectly in command because for you – that's all there is ... You don't need a husband. Anyway, you don't need me'.³⁵ The sense of movement felt in Dan's words is important to the understanding of Irma's inward agility. Irma moves freely in her 'little place', a creation of a private world which she constructs for herself as a way of living independently of him. She is 'perfectly in command' in her 'little place' because it is secluded from Dan's world, a place where she is just subjective to a stronger dominating

³² Ibid., p. 164.

³³ In Chapter One, I examine Glaspell's portrayal of sexual objectification as a recurrent theme in her works by referring to Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16 (1975), 6-18 (p. 10). Specifically, I discuss the male gaze through the objectification of Ann in *The Visioning*. Major Darrett, an important figure in the army, sexually objectifies Ann, a theatre performer, due to the nature of her profession and physical attire.

³⁴ Glaspell's portrayal of a lack of communication between couples is also present in the relationship between *The Verge's* (1921) Claire and her husband Harry. Claire's personality is more rigid and aggressive than that of Irma. She is conveyed as a selfish person who is unfaithful to her husband and unloving to her daughter. These characteristics, though different from Irma's traits, repel people and leave her in the same position as Irma, an alienated individual. Harry regards Claire as a passionless person due to her remote nature, 'I suppose a woman who lives a good deal in her mind never does have much – well, what you might call passion'. Similarly, Dan complains about Irma's lack of excitement which prevents them from experiencing a life filled with passion. Susan Glaspell, 'The Verge', in *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, ed. by and J. Ellen Gainor Linda Ben-Zvi (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc.), pp. 227-67 (p. 237).

³⁵ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, pp. 199-200. In the play *Bernice*, Glaspell portrays a similar scene projecting the independence of wives. Bernice's husband resorts to infidelity because of his belief that his wife is independent enough to survive without him.

social structure. As a result, Irma neglects her wifely role by abandoning and neglecting her social obligations to Dan. She focuses all her efforts on creating a better life for her daughter as she begins to see only one side of her role as a wife and that is to be a good mother to Dan's daughter.

According to C.W.E. Bigsby, Glaspell's 'own freedoms were circumscribed by a language which tied her to social and biological function. Her plays both placed this concern at their centre and constituted a statement of her own independence'.³⁶ Bigsby refers to the plays *The Verge* (1921), *Bernice* (1919) and *Inheritors* (1921) where Glaspell portrays women protagonists' dilemma with language as it confines them to 'social and biological function'. The characters resort to silence in order to avoid being contained by a language which they are suspicious of and which would restrain them into a social responsibility required and forced upon them. For example, in *The Verge* Glaspell personifies Claire's unconventional planting experiments as her means of expression. Claire refuses to acquiesce to the natural method of planting. Instead, she experiments with nature to produce new noncompliant organisms defying the norm and this metaphorically represents her voice of rebellion. Bigsby's observation on Glaspell's plays may be also applied to *Fugitive's Return* where Glaspell projects Irma as experiencing her husband's infidelity and daughter's death. Irma finds no comfort in using a language which she feels shapes her identity according to the hegemonic culture it represents. Similar to Claire, Irma is aware of the necessity of developing a mode of expression which can escape patriarchal dominance in order to preserve a female specificity. Instead of using a language which obliges her to appear in a fixed image, she uses silence in order to escape a moulded image constructed by language. She conjures up her own mental image when she observes herself in the mirror using thoughts which require no use of language to establish her social existence.

³⁶ C. W. E. Bigsby, 'Introduction', in *Plays by Susan Glaspell*, ed. by C. W. E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1-31 (p. 29).

Carpentier states that:

In Glaspell's novels, any time a woman's self-definition is derived solely from male desire, she is in trouble. Irma's entree into the bourgeoisie must be paid for by her conformity to gender and to a "formless" lifestyle of postwar boozing and sexual game playing in which she must be the visible accessory to her husband's wealth and ambition.³⁷

Some women characters in Glaspell's novels do fit Carpentier's above description. They accept their predestined role as a 'visible accessory'. However, adding to this insight, I observe that Irma renounces this derogatory role since she refuses to adhere to her husband's superficial social routine by rejecting the 'conformity [imposed on her] gender' and the "'formless" lifestyle' which is based on partying and heavy drinking. For example, after the birth of her daughter, Irma stops attending all the social parties her husband attends even though he asks her to go with him. Using Birdie as an excuse, Irma remains home while her husband continues to enjoy a social life without his wife.

A character who does fit Carpentier's description is Janet who, unlike Irma, acknowledges and accepts her role as a sexual object in order to protect her marriage. Aware that her husband is prone to fall for other women, Janet admits that 'the woods are full of grabbing females. A woman has to be up and doing, a heart of any fate, to keep her husband nowadays'.³⁸ What is interesting here is Glaspell's demonstration of the female as a predator and the man a victim, a neat reversal to the image she provides of Dan and Irma as discussed earlier. The female is given power and the role of the protector; she must protect her husband from the 'grabbing females' in the woods. Janet undertakes a male role; she exploits her

³⁷ Carpentier, 'Fugitive's Return: Part II: The Nostos of the Mother', in *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 89-107 (p. 94).

³⁸ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 178.

husband by using the same sexually abusive scheme against him. She declares that a wife must 'do a little paddling of her own' in order to keep her husband 'anew' and suspicious that he may lose her.³⁹ Janet is aware of this social reality which very much resembles Glaspell's own reality. Living in the bohemian Greenwich Village at the beginning of the twentieth century, Glaspell understood the consequences of living with radicals who regarded free love as a basic human right. She also knew that her husband, with his history of infidelities, was liable to stray.⁴⁰ By projecting Janet's attitude towards women predators, Glaspell somehow documents her own experience in *Fugitive's Return*.

Glaspell's juxtaposition of the female/male roles serves the author's purpose of emphasizing women's sexual objectification. Janet caters to her husband's sexual manipulation. In one of her conversations with Irma, she justifies men's treatment of their wives as courtesans. She comments, 'the wife who isn't something of a courtesan is something of a flop'.⁴¹ Irma, denying that the sacred institute of marriage allows men to treat their wives in a degraded manner, disagrees with Janet's way of thinking. She prefers to remain in her position as a 'flop' instead of engaging in a world that holds women prisoners to demeaning physical standards. Irma objects to the fact that Dan needs the stimulus of alcohol and women to desire her. Her thoughts express her feelings, 'usually the times of love between them came after the excitement, the drinks, of a party. This [...] humiliated her. Must he have the stimulus of drinking, of his dancing with other women, to desire her'.⁴² Irma clearly looks for a pure, spiritual and emotional love rather than mere physical and sexual affection. Here, Irma's preconceived and perhaps idealistic idea of matrimony clashes

³⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁰ Glaspell was constantly concerned about Cook's infidelities. For example, she was aware of his affair with Ida Rauh which took place in 1917, yet she was determined to save her marriage by ignoring his infidelity in the hope he would lose interest in his affair with the Jewish actress. See Brenda Murphy, 'Glaspell and O'Neill', in *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 160-216 (pp. 165-6); Ozieblo, 'Toying with Broadway', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 149-68 (p. 166).

⁴¹ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 182.

⁴² Ibid., p. 162.

with the reality of her life. And so with the break-up of her marriage, she goes into a phase of self-denial. Instead of expressing her hurt, she identifies with silence to reach a freedom from language. Irma's refusal to speak becomes an exertion of power, attempting to kick against an external force that perceives her as weak.

Diverting all her energy into raising Birdie, Irma's finds a deeper sense of life in a stronger and purer feeling than wifedom, that of motherhood (although arguably this is also a socially-defined role).⁴³ With the birth of Birdie, Irma cancels out Dan's existence from her life and allows the duty of motherhood to override her other marital roles.⁴⁴ However, Birdie's sudden death from 'infantile paralysis' pushes Irma into a traumatic freefall. Glaspell, using the idea of elective mutism, succeeds at showing the psychological trauma associated with the loss of a child and how Irma's unresolved feelings of grief lead her to speechlessness and suicide.⁴⁵ The hallucinatory state Irma falls into further explains her retreat into a world of silence, 'Did she hear something? A little voice – a silvery voice that had made her, though laughing at herself, call her child Birdie? Did she hear very lightly running footsteps?'⁴⁶ Clearly dominating the narrative, Irma's self-deceptive inner thoughts appear to be real as she refuses to let go of Birdie's memory. The emphasis, in this instance,

⁴³ In her lifetime, Glaspell suffered several times from the inability to conceive children which affected her greatly. In Cook's biography she describes the disappointment both she and her husband faced and their final decision to end their trials due to Glaspell's bad health conditions: 'There were other disappointments, [...] Jig and I did not have children'. Glaspell, 'Our House in Provincetown', in *The Road to the Temple*, pp.227-39 (p. 239). In addition, Linda Ben-Zvi and Barbara Ozieblo mention that Glaspell's 'failure to have children weighed more heavily, and she often discussed the subject with close friends' and 'that she refused to accept that her work could ever take the place of a baby'. Ozieblo, 'Escaping Main Street', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography*, pp. 35-61 (p. 54); Ben-Zvi, 'A Different War', in *Susan Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, pp. 371-384 (p. 376). Glaspell's unfulfilled hopes for motherhood are clearly relayed in *Fugitive's Return* as they parallel Irma's feelings of loss.

⁴⁴ It is important to note that during her pregnancy Irma had hoped for a son because 'Life seemed too complex for a girl; it seemed her own difficulties would be more likely to reappear in the life of a daughter, and that a son might free himself of them'. Irma refers to the binding strictures of society which demote women's roles and positions and uphold gender and class inequality. Irma's choice of the name Birdie recalls the canary Glaspell uses in *Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers'. Birdie, symbolizing freedom and voice, frees Irma from her obligations towards Dan and society. In Birdie, Irma finds her salvation and escape.

⁴⁵ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 223. Physicians define elective mutism as a type of social anxiety disorder. Individuals with this disorder refuse to speak in social situations in which speech is needed to facilitate understanding. However, it is important to note that elective mutism occurs as a result of the individual's free will and not due to his/her failure to speak.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

is on the voice and sounds which only Irma hears, what remains unsaid. Here, Glaspell proposes the power of silence to signify its presence through its description in the narrative. The written words allow space for Irma's unspoken words to emerge and for us to decipher the incoherent meaning of the gaps which Glaspell inserts in the novel. It is the voice which Irma hears in her thoughts that links her to her daughter and brings Birdie back to her, thereby again emphasizing the importance of voice and sound and the existence of sounds within the silence of death. The state of denial, and the repetition of auditory words relating to sounds such as 'hear', 'voice', laughing' and 'running footsteps' carry the echoed silence Irma hears and which come to engulf her, seemingly locking her within a mute inner world of mournful desolation.

Part III: The Transition to Greece

In *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell quotes Cook's idea on willpower, stating that in order to develop oneself and overcome one's lethargy one must 'learn to be silent. In the silence the dogged perseverance will grow, and the great purpose mature'.⁴⁷ Cook promotes the necessity of learning the value of silence as it facilitates the growth of inner power, determination and courage in the face of life's hardships. Consistently influenced by Cook's ideas Glaspell, an idealist herself and a believer that ideals can be reached through perseverance and silence, adopts this concept in *Fugitive's Return* in the part of the novel where Irma leaves for Greece and begins a voyage of self-identification. What seems to be at the heart of the novel is Irma's quest for some kind of ideal state of being – a purity or a cleanliness which will engender a kind of godliness, which is what Greece brings her.

Irma's journey east provides her with a kind of personal freedom as she transcends national borders. She moves from one continent to the other, across the sea, in order to escape

⁴⁷ Glaspell, 'Wordsworth on the Mississippi', in *The Road to the Temple*, pp. 39-45 (p. 43).

the entrapment of her reality.⁴⁸ As established in the previous chapter, Maeterlinck associates the absence of speech, silent movements and gestures with power.⁴⁹ He suggests that what is implied is more important than what is said and our awareness of implications allow us to give the details of our silent surroundings more thought. These specifics allow us to live and experience a more powerful and profound sense of our own reality. In a similar approach, Glaspell uses Irma's mute journey on the ship as a source of the protagonist's insight, wisdom and power rather than mere powerlessness. As soon as Irma sails to Greece, we witness an absorbed change in her thoughts:

When you are on land you live by time, and that is called life. But when you leave the land – the past – then you are in space; there is nothing then, only a ship that moves slowly through nothingness. But on it – and this is strange – on it people who still live by time, who still fight to be more than some one else, smile when they do not mean it, quarrel, want to be happy; not suspecting how strange their voices, their movements, in nothingness.⁵⁰

Broken into three sentences, the construction of the section quoted here is significant as the syntax and grammar seem to suggest the journey and movement forward. Glaspell shifts the narrative perspective from the third person form to the second person speech to emphasize Irma's interior dialogue between self and body. Speaking to her inner self, Irma attempts to make sense of the spatial and temporal dimensions which affect her perception of herself and her surroundings.

⁴⁸ The journey Irma takes through the sea echoes the opening scene of the novel where we witness Irma's rebirth. Since water symbolizes two opposing images, life and death, it can be interpreted that Irma's journey on the ship ends her past life and portrays her rebirth for a new awaiting life in Greece.

⁴⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck, 'The Tragical in Daily Life' ('Le Tragique Quotidien'), in *The Treasure of the Humble* (*Le Trésor des humbles*), trans. by George Brandt (Paris: Société du Mecure du France, 1898), pp. 97-119.

⁵⁰ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 26.

In the first sentence, Irma associates land with time. Representative of the society she leaves behind, the land entraps Irma in a past, a force that holds her back. Moving from a temporal place (land and life) to a spatial boundary (water), Irma is, in a sense, between spaces. This idea is emphasized in the second sentence where Glaspell's use of the dashes represents the past which Irma is imprisoned within. Linda Ben-Zvi gives another interpretation for Glaspell's uses of the dash. She observes:

The most common punctuation [Glaspell] uses is the dash. It is used when the character is unsure of the direction in which she is going, as yet unprepared to articulate consciously a new awareness or unwilling to put into words feelings and wishes which may collapse under the weight of words.⁵¹

Using the dash, Glaspell attributes to silence a role in the expression of Irma's inner reality. At this point in the story, Irma's thoughts are not voiced but her perception of her spatial and temporal positioning is revealed. Irma's silence (represented by the dashes) does not voice her uncertainty about her future, as Ben-Zvi claims, as she does not anticipate what will happen next in her life. She is entrapped in a space where the dashes remind her of the past, yet keep her aware of the present. The dashes also represent the unspoken words and the ambiguities associated with Irma's understanding of her existence. Irma is riddled with uncertainties which these gaps emphasize. She explains to herself that leaving land, which is associated with her past life and time, is a way of breaking free and achieving some kind of liberation.

Because Irma seems to undergo a kind of existential crisis, the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre are useful here. His philosophy about the theory of being explains the relation between

⁵¹ Linda Ben-Zvi, 'Susan Glaspell's Contribution to Contemporary Women Playwrights', in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 147-66 (p. 156).

the carrier (the ship) and what it carries (Irma and the other passengers on board). According to Sartre, there are two kinds of being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself.⁵² The ship, a being-in-itself, is concrete and lacking the ability to change itself because it is unaware of its existence. Rather than operating itself, it is operated by another dominating entity. Glaspell contrasts the ship to the people who, on it, are beings-for-themselves. They are conscious of their existence, and unlike the ship, they operate their lives yet choose to be incarcerated by time. What is striking here is not the contrast between the ship and the people on it. It is rather what these entities represent in relation to Irma's perception of them. To Irma, a being-for-herself, the ship, a symbolic vessel of safety, not only does it carry her forward to Greece, it cancels time as her temporal sense fades away and her awareness of her position in space, ungoverned by land, is epitomized. The craft takes her away from the experiences that leave her traumatized through a space she describes as 'nothingness'. Note here Glaspell's use of 'nothing' and 'nothingness'. The word 'nothingness' means either the termination or absence of life or worthlessness and insignificance. In Irma's case, 'nothingness' is connected to the silencing of her past life because on the ship she terminates her life on land (symbolized by time) in the middle of nowhere (symbolized by space). Irma's awareness of time and space becomes crucial because, on the ship, she begins to realize that the dominated entity becomes her carrier to liberation.

Like the ship, the people, though beings-for-themselves, are also governed by time as they allow conventions to intrude even in the space of 'nothingness'. These people force Irma back to the past life on land and away from her spatial dimension in the present. Though Glaspell does depict a strong magnetic force at either end, she portrays both dimensions to accentuate Irma's thoughts regarding the reality each constitutes. Irma witnesses the strangeness of people's actions, for instance those who 'fight to be more than some one else'

⁵² See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (*L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*), trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

or those who 'smile when they do not mean it'. These people on the boat are her link to the superficial society she once knew (specifically Dan's). Their voices and movements in 'nothingness' break the code of the spatial dimension which she embraces since they follow the laws of land which she negates. Glaspell uses Irma's silent meditation regarding the essence of humanity to bring her back to mundane reality. Though Irma is free of time and land, she is entrapped in the space of the ship and the journey forward because she is contained within a certain sphere occupied by people who are governed by time which holds them back by social mores. Irma does leave one space (Iowa) and moves into another (ship). This in-between space (water) is interesting because it makes Irma buoyant and unsettled where she is able to just 'be' in the presence of 'nothingness'.

As mentioned earlier, Irma's silence is associated with a psychological withdrawal from society brought on by the trauma of losing her daughter. On the ship, she is referred to as a 'ghost' by some travellers and as 'the woman who does not speak' by others.⁵³ Veronica Makowsky notes that 'as her double name suggests, Irma is a ghost hovering between two worlds'.⁵⁴ In the first instance, Irma's comparison to a ghost reinforces the idea of her entrapment in a traumatic past and her confusion about her identity in the present. Irma's past ebbs toward the present and haunts her. As Irma adopts a different name, Myra Freeman, her identity becomes vague and obscure like a ghost. Judith's words echo in Irma's memory, 'Remember! You are Myra Freeman'.⁵⁵ However, even though she is known by a different name on the ship, Irma feels that all pasts are the same, 'so the past of one person is as the past of another; it does not matter by what name a past is called. But the people on this ship – they did not know that. They were tormented by differences'.⁵⁶ Irma is not tormented by differences because she is aware that her new name does not cancel her past life or her

⁵³ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 19.

⁵⁴ Veronica Makowsky, 'Ghostly Revenants and Symbolic Sons: *Fugitive's Return*', in *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work*, pp. 101-16 (p. 107).

⁵⁵ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

reality. On the ship, she is in-between spaces, engulfed in the protection of the soundless room of her own mind where she blocks out unwanted thoughts and unwelcomed voices.

In the second instance, Irma is described as 'the woman who does not speak'. By remaining mute, Irma allows others to form different perceptions of her, thus allowing them to gain some sort of control over how they regard her, 'the people must make their story of why she was here, of why she did not speak'.⁵⁷ We are exposed to two opposing views. For example, Sam, a fellow traveller, sees that Irma is unable to speak due to some sort of disability, 'one presumes because she can't', while John Knight observes that it is a preference.⁵⁸ While Sam's opinion implies that Irma lacks control, John's remark, which is closer to the fact, establishes Irma's silence as an act of power. Susan Sontag, who has written on the various meanings of silence, states that by remaining silent, one becomes opaque for others as he/she 'opens up an array of possibilities for interpreting the silence'.⁵⁹ Irma is clearly on a symbolic journey of self-realization and it is likely that her utilization of silence allows her to preserve a sense of identity which exceeds Sam's and John's perceptions of her. However, she does nothing to contest the representations enforced upon her by others due to her experience of alienation in language. Irma breaks any form of verbal communication between her and her fellow travellers, thereby creating a substantial spatial distance that protects her from socializing with them. As previously mentioned, Irma's movement from one space to another allows her to 'be' in her unsettling present. Similarly, in creating a spatial distance from others, Irma is able to remain in control of the nature of her communication with people, in this case silence.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, 1969), pp. 3-34 (p. 16).

Part IV: Self-Identification through Silence in a Foreign Land

Moving from one space to another, Glaspell's shift in setting and events from the American Midwest to ancient Greece is interesting as it accentuates Irma's silent position.⁶⁰ Upon her arrival in Greece, Irma leaves 'nothingness' and is taken to a different land where she evolves and grows spiritually, 'this ship was all she knew ... When memory is left behind, when you have sailed from a nothingness, all things move in a thin clarity that outlines, defines'.⁶¹ This 'nothingness' is a space where Irma disables the memory of her trauma in order to observe the world around her objectively and regain her voice. Irma's retreat into an inner imaginative world where she enters her soundless room of thoughts enables her to reach a point of 'thin clarity', aided by her visionary capacity.

Again, Cage is useful here. He insists that 'there is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound. What [people thought] was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sound'.⁶² In Irma's case, she listens to the 'accidental sound' in her mind and this procedure of listening allows her consciousness to be present regardless of the absence of her voice. She engages in the fantasies of her own imagination by listening carefully to the voice of her mind allowing her thoughts to resound with what she perceives. In this way, Glaspell ensures that Irma's revealed thoughts, through narration, gain more power than her voice.

Glaspell's choice of Greece, the destination Irma reaches after her encounter with 'nothingness', is significant in its constitution of substantial interconnected characteristics

⁶⁰ In many of Glaspell's stories, running away is a recurrent pattern for all women protagonists who find difficulty in facing their present situations. Usually the problems they face are triggered by the constraints of social conventions they are forced to live by. For example, in *The Visioning*, Ann runs away to commit suicide after having been exploited by an upper class official. In *Fidelity* (1915), Ruth leaves her family and friends in Freeport with a married man to fulfil her heart's wishes. In 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927), Mrs. Paxton resorts to a secluded place to avoid human communication and society's condemnation of her as a divorced woman. In *Brook Evans* (1928), Naomi's mother marries her off to Caleb Evans and sends her away to another city to avoid the disgrace she brings upon them by getting pregnant with another man's child. Though Naomi herself does not initiate her escape to another place, she is forced to leave to avoid society's harsh treatment of her condition.

⁶¹ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 34.

⁶² Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 70.

which help the protagonist's dynamic vocal evolution. Greece is regarded as the birthplace of Western civilization, home to the foundational myths of Western literature and to a rich and compelling mythological culture. Its culture is steeped in a mythology of power and persecution where gods and monsters battle for power. In this land where myths of the past saturate everyday life, Irma finds herself entranced by Greek mythology, stories such as those of Apollo and Dionysus. Both sons of Zeus, Apollo and Dionysus do not stand in opposition of each other but rather represent different aspects of power. Apollo, for instance, is the god of music, healing and truth while Dionysus is the god of the grape harvest, winemaking and fertility. Built on two different forces, Apollo and Dionysus complete each other in the creation of art. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Frederick Nietzsche explains the dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian beliefs. The former is based on logical thinking and represents the individual as being distinct from others. In contrast, Dionysian belief appeals to emotions and instincts. The focus is not on the individual but rather on submerging beings into one whole.⁶³

Glaspell's use of the Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus, reminds us of Gerard Bach's explanation of the philosophies of the Provincetown Players who saw that the expression of life depends on 'an expression of the dualistic nature of man striving for unity. This aspect is strongly conditioned by Nietzsche's concept of the dichotomy of the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" element in artistic expression'.⁶⁴ In *The Road of the Temple*, Glaspell writes, 'even before temples, there were strange powers here'.⁶⁵ The powers Glaspell refers to are those of the Greek gods (Apollo and Dionysus) which she felt a deep connection with on her visit to Greece. Similarly, Irma's perception of life and her self is strengthened through the

⁶³ One might observe that the Dionysian element of the novel is embodied in Theodora's character as she is lively, always singing and cheerful. The Apollonian element is represented in Stamula's character where law and form are dominant.

⁶⁴ Gerhard Bach, 'Susan Glaspell - Provincetown Players', *The Great Lakes Review: A Journal of Midwestern Culture*, 4.2 (1978), 31-43 (p. 33).

⁶⁵ Glaspell, 'Delphi', in *The Road in th Temple*, pp. 325-333 (p. 331).

power she draws from the gods. Irma adopts many of the meanings which Apollonian and Dionysian beliefs embody. For instance, Dionysus is associated with the concept of rebirth after death and Apollo is connected with the concept of healing. Both key concepts are closely related to Glaspell's portrayal of Irma and very significant to Irma's search of her identity.

Coming to Greece from silence and seemingly without a history, Irma becomes identified as the Kyria who does not speak. As a foreign mute, she is situated in a place where the colloquial speech around her is one she *cannot* use or make sense of and so to her it does not exist in her world of understanding. Ironically though, her inability to speak the language divests her of the power she attains in choosing not to speak. The locals believe her to have mystical powers because of her silence, 'she belonged with that which had been long before, as if she alone were left. She was not only the Kyria now. She was the Kyria of the Archai'.⁶⁶ The word 'kyria' in Greek is defined as a noble woman, goddess or prophetess usually of a superior ranking. In the novel, Irma is referred to as the Kyria of Archai as the Greek civilians regard her as the goddess who has mystical powers to encounter patriarchal privilege with her silence.⁶⁷ Irma's new identity as the Kyria is wrapped up with power and this gives her a sense of female empowerment. The Greeks do not see her as a disabled woman due to her seeming inability to speak. They see her as a goddess whose power is derived from her silence rather than speech, which is precisely what Glaspell intends her to represent.

In becoming the Kyria, Irma overcomes the subordinate position which is linked to her old self. This new identity which is constructed for her, independent from all the other identities she has been identified with previously, enables her to feel a better proximity to herself. She is no longer Irma Lee Shraeder, an outsider in Midwest America, and she ceases

⁶⁶ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 50.

⁶⁷ See Carpentier, 'Greece/Greek as Mother's Body in *the Road to the Temple* (1927)', p. 27.

to be Myra Mead, an unreal ghostly personality from the ship.⁶⁸ Irma is encouraged to identify with her new identity, the superior Kyria, using the power of the gods. The impersonation of a mute goddess allows Irma to occupy a speaking position without breaking her silence or violating her confusion about her sense of self. She is conceived as culturally present in Greece where she is held in the highest regard.

Elias, the Kyria's caretaker, takes great pride in being Irma's spokesman. He informs the locals that 'the Kyria did not speak because she was all the time thinking about something, and to speak would trouble this of which she thought'.⁶⁹ This description goes back to Cage's observation of the soundless room where 'something [in it] is always happening that makes a sound', as noted earlier. Irma's thoughts, if articulated, would be broken. She must stay in her soundless room in order to reach her Ego and any form of interruption will prevent her from attaining this state of being. In this instance, Greece becomes the place where she is able to connect with her consciousness. Irma must unite her fragmented roles together into one whole harmonious being so that her perception of an ideal selfhood can be attained. Though still an 'other' in Greece, Irma's otherness is not negative anymore. Her otherness, considered exotic, empowers her sense of self and allows her to gain a respect she has not been given before. Irma's power of silence is further exemplified, 'Perhaps it was because the Kyria could not give her reprimands in speech that her presence could be made an inquiry, a disappointment, a withdrawal'.⁷⁰ The air of mystery that engulfs Irma forces other characters in Greece, both male and female, to treat her with high esteem. Silence is not only personified as Irma's protective shield but it acts as her strength. Glaspell presents silence as a very present entity. Irma's disengagement with her 'self' because of her

⁶⁸ Interestingly enough, there is an irony in Irma's original low social standing as her name, originated in Latin means, 'noble' – this of course, tallies perfectly with her elevated position in Greece.

⁶⁹ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, pp. 48-9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

past traumatic experiences and how often she dissociates from it strengthens her awareness of her surroundings.

Part V: Stamula: The Silent Female/Woman Companion

Having lived in Greece from 1922 till 1924, Glaspell gathered enough information to help her represent Greece's social system. For example, Glaspell was aware of the Greek hierarchal structure which relegated women to the *oikos* (home) and men to the *polis* (city state). Greece's hierarchal structure, culture, traditions and, most importantly, the lives of women allow Irma to perceive that her problems are very similar to those of Greek women. As Makowsky points out, '[Irma] may be in Greece, where the topography and language are different, but the oppressive patriarchy remains the same'.⁷¹ The Greek society she encounters characterizes its women as obliging and their chief role in operating the house and rearing their children.⁷² In *Fugitive's Return*, this image of submissiveness is present in characters such as Stamula, Theodora, Vascelo and Constantina. None of them are independent individuals as they are subservient in different ways; they are unable to voice their own opinions freely. Irma silently observes the differences and similarities of ordinary Greek peasant women's lives to her own by living amongst them, finding meaning in her life and learning to draw upon the strength of these women to find power in her existence. For instance, she learns the art of weaving from Stamula, experiences the rage of a widowed mother through Vascelo, is exposed to the liveliness of a woman in love via Theodora, and shares the feelings of alienation and displacement with Constantina. My main focus in this section is to explore the silent relationship between Stamula and Irma as they share a powerful non-verbal bond. With the use of sign language, Stamula and Irma's communicative congress is entirely without words.

⁷¹ Makowsky, 'Ghostly Revenants and Symbolic Sons: *Fugitive's Return*', pp. 108-9.

⁷² Marina Angel, 'A Classical Greek Influences - an American Feminist: Susan Glaspell's Debt to Aristophanes', *Syracuse Law Review*, 52 (2002), 81-104 (p. 84).

Carpentier observes the deployment of silence in Glaspell's works as a revelatory language:

Glaspell is so artful [...] in making muteness the psychosomatic expression of Irma's alienation. In Greece she will learn to speak the body, to weave, the semiotic rhythms of a new language, a women's language, and the story she will share tells of rape and of saving strength and joy of female bonds.⁷³

Irma's mutism is a result of the various traumas she has experienced and her resulting alienation from her immediate community. Yet, her elected medium of silence facilitates the development of a new language, or what Carpentier calls 'a women's language' within which Irma finds a kind of freedom of articulation. Liberated from words and the rules of language, Irma is finally able to communicate with Stamula at a level she has hitherto not experienced. The women share a relationship of friendship, empathy and education. In Stamula's house, a women's sphere, Irma and Stamula communicate through their weaving and through gestures where movement cancels speech and becomes articulate: 'A thing said by acting seemed to mean, not only the thing said, but something of which it was a part of, something underneath'.⁷⁴ Glaspell shows the women's silent communication to operate on a level where rhythm of the loom replaces the articulation of words. The women seem to eliminate language and are able to access reality and understanding without it. This notion of Glaspell's writing as offering a new women's writing is apposite in considering the scope of this entire project – for at the heart of all of her fiction, as well as *Fugitive's Return*, is the project of illuminating and consolidating a medium where the realities of women's lives can be adequately explored.

⁷³ Carpentier, 'Fugitive's Return (1929) Part I: Flight to the Past', in *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*, pp. 65-88 (p. 70).

⁷⁴ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 65.

In their book on nonverbal communication, Judee K. Burgoon and Thomas Saine note that 'nonverbal messages are generally more powerful than verbal ones'.⁷⁵ Certainly Glaspell understands this and she uses movement, echoing Maeterlinck's formulation on the power of gestures and actions superseding words, as a form of nonverbal communication between Irma and Stamula:

Though the Kyria did not speak, and understood but little Greek, she and Stamula would communicate with each other at the loom. These difficulties had made them companions, sharing, not only the difficulty, but pleasure when the handicap was overcome and communication flowed between them.⁷⁶

Glaspell cancels out the use of speech as a form of communication between the women to stress the importance of sign language as a substitution for verbal utterances: 'A thing said by acting seemed to mean, not only the thing said, but something of which it was a part of, something underneath'.⁷⁷ The speechless interaction between Stamula and Irma helps form a bond between the women, opens a new dimension of expression for Irma and happens, as narrated above, 'at the loom'.⁷⁸ The sisterhood bond they create allows Irma to enjoy a moment of self-realization where she is able to free herself from any forced cultural attachments.

The relationship between the women brings to mind the story of Philomela and Procne, in which Philomela is raped by Tereus, King of Thrace and Procne's husband. Tereus cuts off Philomela's tongue to prevent her from telling the truth and kidnaps her. Philomela,

⁷⁵ Thomas P. Saine and Judee K. Burgoon, *The Unspoken Dialogue: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin School 1978), p. 22.

⁷⁶ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 64.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁸ It is important to note that Stamula's loom is situated in the Temple of Apollo under the Dionysian stage, where the Dionysian passion combines with the Apollonian rational wisdom and justice. At the loom with Stamula, Irma longs for the inner peace provided by the semiotic rhythm of the loom.

now mute, tries to reconnect with her sister and so weaves a tapestry depicting her untold silenced story.⁷⁹ The loom becomes her medium of communication, just as it does for Irma. For Irma, the loom allows her to work through her grief and disappointment; for Stamula, it gives her a sense of stability and harmony. Through silence, Irma experiences the 'semiotic rhythm' of the loom and is able to share her unspoken experiences with another woman. In Stamula's home of silent communication and female harmony, Irma finds a place to belong. For Stamula, the loom is a familiar object; she uses it efficiently because it is part of her daily routine, 'the distaff and the loom were happy with Stamula. In her calm fingers thread did not break or tangle'.⁸⁰ Figuratively, the loom brings order and form to Stamula's world and the thread represents Stamula's life which runs smoothly because of her relative contentment with the patriarchal conventions of society. Living in a patriarchal-oriented community, Stamula is an obedient and domestically driven woman; she is a mother, a wife and a peasant who weaves for a living to financially support her husband and children. It is worth considering Glaspell's linkage between Stamula and Penelope's character in *The Odyssey* (675-725 BC). Penelope is in many respects an obedient housewife, a weaver, a woman locked in a solitary world awaiting the return of her husband. Similarly, Stamula represents a kind of wisdom in her patient endurance as a housewife and weaver. What Irma finds intriguing in Stamula's character is her harmony with the rhythm of loom. Irma longs to have the same rhythm as Stamula's life as she finds comfort in the process of weaving.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Also see Carpentier, 'Fugitive's Return (1929) Part I: Flight to the Past', pp. 65-88.

⁸⁰ Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 54.

⁸¹ The process of weaving, quilting or sewing for women has a metaphorical significance since it represents a women's sphere where space is dominated by silence. Stamula's weaving echoes Minnie Wright's sewn quilt in Glaspell's *Trifles* and 'A Jury of her Peers'. Glaspell uses women's sewn quilts and weaved fabrics as an alternative narrative structure to convey women's culture, experiences and perhaps untold stories. The fragments of fabric sewn together to form one unified quilt act as powerful metaphors for women's silenced experiences. In *Trifles* and 'A Jury of her Peers', Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters attempt to analyse Minnie's stitch work to understand her psychological state. They deduce that Minnie experienced a rough time in her marriage to John Wright due to the uneven sewn stitches on the quilt. Similarly, in *Fugitive's Return*, Glaspell uses a similar approach to represent women's mental state through Stamula's weaving. Under the masculine influences women seek alternative models for expression such as the sewing of the patchwork quilt. Lucy R. Lippard states that 'the quilt has become the prime visual metaphor for women's lives, for women's culture' as it unveils

At the loom, Irma's life is magnified. She starts placing her past life into perspective and starts to associate herself with her body, 'in working with Stamula, and it was as if in learning to work at the loom she had found how to let her hands, her body, do other things for her'.⁸² This idea of corporeal discovery and harmony recalls my earlier discussion of Lacan's mirror stage theory. At the beginning of the story, we witness Irma as she disassociated from her 'self' both physically and psychologically. However, at this point of the novel, Irma's dislocated self begins to dissolve in the solitude and silence of working with the loom as we find her connecting with her mind with her body. Irma is able to associate with her different fragmented images and harmonize them into one whole identity:

She could see herself as if she were outside herself. There was that which looked on. This which looked on – was it indeed herself, watching something walking through a life arranged for it? This much she knew – that which looked on must never interfere, must not control, for then she would be back in her life – immunity gone [...] she must not direct.⁸³

Different to her experience at the opening of the novel, here Irma experiences an 'out of body' experience where she does not see a reflection of herself in a reflecting object such as the mirror or the water. She is projected as an outsider looking in trying to set her 'self' free from a life arranged for her. The literal meaning of the phrase 'she could see herself as if she were outside herself' clearly depicts the self observing and watching the other, perhaps spirit.

'uniformity and disjunction' in addition to the diversity within monotony of women's routine'. Lucy R. Lippard, 'Up, Down, and Across: A New Frame for Quilts', in *The Artist and the Quilt*, ed. by Charlotte Robinson (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 32-43 (p. 32). In addition, Elaine Showalter dedicates a whole chapter titled 'Common Threads' on the history of quilting in America and how it is related to women's writing and literature. She notes that quilting is a figure of speech for the bonding between women where they complete each other's experiences by adding stitches, stories, to the a unified quilt, female discourse, they attempt to form. Elaine Showalter, 'Common Threads', in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 145-75 (pp. 145-7).

⁸² Glaspell, *Fugitive's Return*, p. 65.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Irma tries to make sense of who she really is. She loses touch with reality at that moment, her existence in Greece, as her mental state, created by her memories and imagination, permits her to experience moments of self-understanding. Irma sees her self as an object, 'watching something walking through a life arranged for it'. The 'something' is her and the 'life arranged for it' is the kind of life that is controlled by socio-cultural conventions which she escaped by fleeing Iowa. Away from what restricts her, Irma knows that in order to reach full independence and control over her own life, she 'must never interfere, must never control'. To transform herself completely into an independent woman without the confinements of her biological self as she was portrayed in Iowa, she must overcome her traumatic experiences by uniting her inner self and her corporeal self. In the narration of her thoughts, Irma tries to define herself through silence in order to understand her own reality.

Part VI: Irma's Silence Breaks

The reason words do not exist for Irma is because of their inability to express and support her beliefs, 'words ... sometimes came to her, now that she had no use for them'.⁸⁴ Instead, Irma connects with her inner thoughts as her unspoken words hold more value and significance, 'I who have been long silent, here try to speak. Only with my mind have I spoken – my voice [... is] still inept'.⁸⁵ Here, Glaspell reinforces the importance of silence as opposed to voice. Silence in Irma's case weighs more than her voice because it possesses its own identity. It situates her in a position of power, gives her strength to endure her traumatic experiences which are inexpressible through the sounds and words expressed in her thoughts.

However, Irma breaks her silence when she sees a stray dog being ruthlessly attacked by the village, 'then it happened. The Kyria spoke. In their own tongue she spoke. Each word was spoken with care, and it was as the voice of heaven speaking the language of earth. "Was

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

it for this Jesus died?'"⁸⁶ In breaking her silence, Irma draws attention to the Christian belief of self-sacrifice. She sacrifices her silence to save the life of an unwanted animal. It may be possible to see a connection which between the dog and Irma insofar as both are considered outsiders or even 'strays'. Irma mistreated clearly sees something of herself in the dog as she sees it 'tied' and abused as she has been mistreated by members of her own society back in her hometown.⁸⁷ Identifying herself with the dog allows Irma to see her own reality reflected before her. Irma breaks her silence for the dog because she, possessing the power of the Kyria, is able to voice her contempt at the cruel act to be done to it.

By breaking her silence, Irma resolves her identity confusion. She realizes that just as silence has given her a medium to express and communicate in her own language, her voice, too, can be an articulate tool. After saving the dog, Irma decides to save the unfortunate Constantina who is hunted down for killing Andreas, Theodora's lover and husband-to-be. Caught in a moral dilemma, Irma relates to Theodora, a woman suffering the loss of her lover, because Irma has lost Dan to another woman in the past.⁸⁸ However, Irma also sympathizes with the motherless Constantina who has been unwanted by her father Demetrius since birth for not being a son, 'You are not a boy, but you are not a girl. You are a feet – and a voice!'⁸⁹ Interestingly, Constantina is still attributed a voice, 'you are a feet – and a voice', though her father does not consider her human. Through Constantina, Glaspell not only depicts the oppressed socio-cultural position of women in Greece but reinforces the idea of the unheard female voice. According to her father's description, Constantina is reduced to

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 88-9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

⁸⁸ Irma relates to Theodora because of her social status. She knows the hardships faced because of low standards of living having lived her life wanting to belong to the privileged classes of society which her cousin Janet belonged to. Having lost all her family and position because of the Turks, Theodora's position is reduced to that of a refugee from Minor Asia. She says, 'it was not meant that I be a servant'. Ibid., p. 260.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 59, 57. Here, the similarity between the child figure in 'A Rose in the Sand' and *Fugitive's Return* is worth mentioning. In the first work, Esther, an illegitimate orphan who Mrs. Paxton decides to adopt, is one of the primary elements that helps Mrs. Paxton regain her voice. In *Fugitive's Return*, Birdie's death causes Irma's complete silencing. However, Irma's grief over Birdie's loss is resolved once she decides to adopt the oppressed and abandoned Constantina.

a creature with an unspecified gender yet described as 'a voice'. Without a gender, Constantina is displaced and cast outside her society, reflecting Irma's own alienation and reminding us of the mute outsiders in *The Outside*. And though she is described as 'a voice' by her father, Constantina possesses a voice that is inaudible to society. Like Irma, Constantina is voiceless; unlike Irma, her silence is powerless.⁹⁰ In saving and adopting Constantina, Irma re-identifies with her own reality as a mother and re-accesses her inner self. Constantina helps Irma fully recover from the traumatic disorder of having lost a child.

As Janis Stout states, *women* writers are silenced because they are 'members of a victimized class [and]– "victimization incurs voicelessness." And as women *writers* specifically, being positioned as the Other to men's subjectivity means being made outsiders to a masculine literary hegemony'.⁹¹ While this may be true of many American female writers, Glaspell tries to prove the opposite with her depictions of silent characters. Glaspell's characters go through phases of silence in order to get in touch with their inner selves and resolve inner complexes which affect their perception of themselves. One may argue that Glaspell engraves her voice in the silence found in her works in order to reflect her own position as a writer and as a social outsider. In this chapter, I have shown that Glaspell succeeds at drawing attention to the empowerment of the female experience presented through the mute character Irma. Though Irma has the facility to speak, she chooses not to in order to understand differently and more profoundly the interior monologue occurring inside her 'soundless room'. Her muteness becomes a form of power extracted from her silence.

Glaspell uses silence to communicate how voiceless gestures and movements presented in the form of narration, gaps and dashes are themselves articulate. Irma in *Fugitive's Return* is not a weak mute. She is an empowered silent woman who resorts to the

⁹⁰ See Carpentier, '*Fugitive's Return* (1929) Part I: Flight to the Past', pp. 73-4.

⁹¹ Stout, 'Introduction: Silence, the Critic, and the Good Little Girl', p. 13.

'soundless room' of her inner thoughts to harmonize between her different roles and identities. Irma does escape from a language that stifles her voice. She remains mute until her sense of self is strengthened through a phase of self-discovery. Her self-identification occurs only through her silent stance and her story is presented in a journey she takes to reach her individuality. In *Fugitive's Return*, Glaspell offers silence as a tool to elucidate the limitations of language as well as illuminate the power of the unsaid.

Conclusion

We like to think we have done something that remains behind us, that is not just a question of writing one book and then another, but a cumulative body of work. It is my belief that some of these novels of mine are one expression of American life in the period just behind us; and that with the changes that are imminent there may be 'Use' for certain books that give the picture of the life we had so long and loved so well.

~ Susan Glaspell, Letter to George Stevens (7 September 1942).

In 1942, Glaspell wrote the above excerpt as part of her letter to George Stevens of Lippincott in an attempt to save her metal plates from being lost completely to the war effort. It encapsulates Glaspell's feelings about the nature of her work. Unfortunately, ignoring her protests, Lippincott kept only two of Glaspell's works, *The Road to the Temple* (1941) and *The Morning is Near Us* (1939).

Glaspell's struggle to become an acknowledged writer is a fact evident in the events of her life. The decline in her family's status, the poverty she experienced, the difficulties she faced in pursuing an education, and the success she achieved in her professions as a journalist, dramatist and prose writer are all factors she used to shape the themes of her literary oeuvre. Glaspell used the events in her life as the basic source for her works because it provided an example of the problems women faced at the turn of the century; she used stories she reported on as a journalist, specifically women's stories such as the Margaret Hossack case in *Trifles* (1916) and 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917).

After having examined a number of Glaspell's short stories and novels in this thesis, I believe I have refuted Waterman's claim of Glaspell's lack of literary merit. In his book, Waterman states:

However popular these stories might have been with the readers of the time, Susan Glaspell's local-color stories seem today quite shallow and ephemeral. Narrow in scope, they lack any rich, imaginative vision, or any symbolic extension that could

make them mean more than the immediate plot situation. They are, with few exceptions, simply entertainments that reflect a practice still current in stories being written for today's popular women's magazines: a time-worn and time-honored tradition.¹

Waterman's remarks are questionable on a number of levels. In the first instance, he seems to dismiss writing for women as mere shallow entertainment, writing which I have proven through my excerpts from Glaspell's journalistic and fictional pieces offers insights into real and undeniable social problems. Indeed, the ephemeral writing of women's magazines that Waterman so derides offers us glimpses into the often publically untold social realities of women's lives. They also provided a space for women's writing and gave Glaspell the initial space for her creative output. Waterman also assumes some kind of superior distance between his 'now' and Glaspell's 'then' in his assertion that her 'local-color stories seem today quite shallow and ephemeral'. This kind of backward-looking finger-wagging seems rather unscholarly and unaware of the contexts and constraints in which writers of the past composed their works. As well as this, his repudiation of the 'local-color' movement implies that the regional is somehow unimportant, a notion which scholars have since refuted.²

Feeling the necessity to create a world identifiably different to the world of men, a world she felt had been overlooked and misrepresented, Glaspell created stories drawn from the lives of real women amidst the socio-cultural changes of the early twentieth century. She set her sights on particular aims and objectives directed towards social change. Driven by the

¹ Arthur Waterman, 'From Reporter to Local Colorist', in *Susan Glaspell* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp.17-31 (pp. 23-4).

² See Amy Kaplan, 'Nation, Region, and Empire', in *The Columbia History of American Novel*, ed. by Emory Elliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 240-66; Guy Reynolds, 'Introduction', in *Willa Cather: Progress, Race, Empire* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp. 1-25; Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Catherine Morley, 'Regional American Modernism: Willa Cather', in *Modern American Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 113-9.

possibility of a more equal society, Glaspell presented narrative situations in which women were sometimes socially elevated, sometimes not, but always emphasized the consequences of disparity. Her constant demand for justice for those on either margins of society, for poor and rich to have equal rights and opportunities, points to what she saw as the problems arising from class differences and she offered solutions to eradicate social and gender inequality in order to achieve social justice.

Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, Glaspell was a seeker of self-knowledge and truth. She believed that the reformation of society occurs with the reformation of individuals. Through the promotion of social change in her works, Glaspell developed her sense of self and her connection with her home. She remained a Midwestern idealist through her entire literary career and life. Her roots, her family and birthplace, are pervasive within her fiction, even when she showed the faults of her society, ‘her concern with the Midwest – its lands, its people, its heritage – and her own fundamental Midwestern attitude unify all her work, including her periods of experimentation and reevaluation.’³ By focusing upon regional, marginal lives, the stories of outsiders, social misfits and working class women, Glaspell used her fiction democratically, giving a voice to those she sees as having been previously voiceless. Even when she was far away from her home, writing for her New York audiences, her stories and, especially her characters reflect the life she knew, loved and hated back in the Midwest. Arthur Waterman claims that Glaspell ‘took the pulse of her region, probed its past, brought it to life, and gave it significance for contemporary America. From first to last she sought to remind the new age of the meaning of the past.’⁴ Indeed Glaspell brought to a life a part of America she knew well. She focused on women who are considered inferior and cast out from society because of their rejection of conventionality.

³ Waterman, ‘Summary and Evaluation’, in *Susan Glaspell*, pp. 117-21 (p. 117).

⁴ Ibid.

Glaspell challenged the stifling inequality of Midwestern society on individuals, revealing that experiences of inequality are not only diverse but relational. Unlike other writers such as Willa Cather and Sarah Orne Jewett who have also been described as regionalists, Glaspell is highly critical of her Midwest. While Cather sees the space as facilitating the dynamic interplay of immigrant communities, Glaspell sees the region as stymieing such dynamism. She sees only social stasis and the demise of working class cultures. Barbara Ozieblo states that Glaspell 'had always been aware of the conflict between the individual's needs and the social good, and much of her writing questions whether individuals should sacrifice themselves to the good of others, to the imperatives of society, art, literature, politics, and convention'.⁵ Glaspell's awareness of this inner conflict is only natural considering her own decisions in life, for instance her affair with George Cram Cook while he was married to Mollie Price and her decision to pursue an education and career despite her father's objections. Surely, as portrayed in her writings both fiction and nonfiction, Glaspell opted for choosing to be true to her own individuality. She felt an outsider while growing up, yet did not reject such a position but rather embraced it. This attitude towards outsiders became an important feature in her works where she portrays women who are cast aside and strongly encourages their progression through defiance of other individuals and social convention.

Glaspell addressed both the elite intellectual reader and literary artists like herself who were aware of and exposed to the current happenings in the modern age and the common reader, simple Midwestern housewives who struggle in the mundane events of their daily routines. Her portrayal of women's life is distinguishable because she managed to depict women protagonists belonging to different social castes and backgrounds all similarly experiencing subordination, restricted participation in social institutions, and structural

⁵ Bárbara Ozieblo, 'Escaping Main Street', in *Susan Glaspell: A Critical Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000) pp. 35-61 (p. 50).

placement in roles with limited opportunities. Some are deprived of their family's support like Ruth Holland in *Fidelity* (1915) and Naomi Kellogg in *Brook Evans* (1928), others are rejected by society like Ann Forrest in *The Visioning* (1911) and Mary Graham in 'The Rules of the Institution' (1914), all due to the respective woman's inability to conform to Midwestern norms and regulations. When faced with society's restrictions, Glaspell showed these women as surviving and resisting with oppressive structures through inner strength, defiance and, most importantly, through silence as shown in *Fugitive's Return* (1929) and 'A Rose in the Sand' (1927).

Waterman claims, 'there's no critical canon for Miss Glaspell's works'.⁶ Opposing such a claim, I assert that Waterman's statement is erroneous as there *is* a critical canon for Susan Glaspell. There is undoubtedly a vast shortage in research into Glaspell's works. Unfortunately, it is because Glaspell's novels and short stories are difficult to obtain, are labelled regional, that her place in the canon has not yet been fully defined or inscribed. Glaspell may have been sidelined for different reasons, for instance the constant suggestion that her fiction was second rate in comparison to her plays or the unfortunate destruction of her metal plates. In 1970, a feminist literary critical trend occurred for unearthing women writings in the late twentieth century. Though Glaspell's name was revived then in relation to one work only, 'A Jury of Her Peers', the remaining of her fictional works continue to be under-researched.

In one of my email correspondences with Martha C. Carpentier, I enquired as to why Susan Glaspell, a journalist, a writer for two genres of extensive literary oeuvres, is still sidelined? Carpentier states, it is due to 'Glaspell's own modesty and self-deprecation' and 'the fact that her politics retained a leftist commitment when the country went markedly to

⁶ Waterman, 'Summary and Evaluation', p. 119.

the right after the Progressive era and into the Second World War'.⁷ Carpentier also points out the difficulty of getting Glaspell's works published; publishing houses such as the Feminist Press and University of Iowa Press are not interested in reprinting any of Glaspell's novels as 'they see it as an investment with no real return. Ironically, Persephone Press in the U.K. has two or three of Glaspell's novels in print, but nowhere in the U.S.'. ⁸ Veronica Makowsky also asserts that Glaspell's reputation as a writer is devalued due to the personal and cultural obstacles the author had to face.⁹

As previously established, to this day Glaspell's plays are what scholars focus upon, they remain the most popular aspect of her literary oeuvre. Perhaps because of the experimental qualities of her theatrical works, perhaps because of the New Critical influence upon American scholarship, Glaspell critics have largely overlooked the more personal, more issues-driven fiction. I hope my research will lead the way for other researchers to recognize and acknowledge Glaspell as a prominent twentieth century novelist and to re-evaluate and reassess her fiction works so they can be reintroduced into the American literary canon. My work attends to only a few of Glaspell's novels and short stories. There are still many of Glaspell's works that need to be examined, researched and revived. The role of male characters, women's false identities, metaphorical imageries are examples of the topics that should be explored in Glaspell's fiction. It is only logical that Glaspellian scholars' efforts be diverted to unearthing and finding Glaspell's unpublished short stories and novels and researching them to produce a better understanding of Glaspell's literary oeuvre altogether.

As Marcia Noe sums up, 'it is [Glaspell's] fidelity to her own vision, the integrity of her determination to write only what to her seemed important, that sets her apart from many

⁷ Martha C. Carpentier (Martha.Carpentier@shu.edu) email to Rasha Gazzaz (rashagazzaz@hotmail.com), Subject: Research Student – Susan Glaspell, 29 May 2012, 15:29:48 PM.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Veronica Makowsky, 'Introduction', in *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women: A Critical Interpretation of Her Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 3-11 (p. 4).

writers whose works were once read and are now forgotten'.¹⁰ Unless Glaspellian researchers continue to 'bang the drum', the academic world will lose an important author like Susan Glaspell who has been wiped out merely because of chance, or I might say bad luck.

¹⁰ Marcia Noe, 'A Critical Biography of Susan Glaspell', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Iowa, 1976), p. 8.

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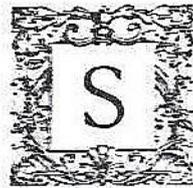
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The Rules of the Institution

BY SUSAN GLASPELL



HE could not decide what to wear. Never having known such an occasion, or any one who had known a like occasion, how could she tell? She decided against the gown she was wearing, in which she had poured at her sister-in-law's tea that afternoon, as possibly seeming to suggest her own blessings. But after she was dressed in plain shirt-waist and skirt as most in keeping, she took them off as too significant in their plainness. She hated the way she had grown self-conscious about it, and saying to herself, "I'll wear just what I would if going to spend the evening with any of the girls I know," put on a simple blue silk frock of which she herself was particularly fond.

Her mother came in and looked her over doubtfully. "Going to wear that? Well, I don't know; I was thinking something plain—not to make her feel the difference. And still, as some one was saying the other day, perhaps the poor need to see the nice things we have. I suppose it is one way of giving them pleasure."

Judith had flushed. "Mother, don't look at it that way! I don't want to get it in my mind that way. I'm simply going to make a call—going to see a girl and have a little talk with her."

"Well, that's very nice of you. That is the democratic way, I suppose. And still, when you know what's underneath it—"

"But I'm trying to forget what's underneath it," answered Judith, brightly.

The brightness was not convincing, for her mother remonstrated: "I don't think they should have asked you to do it. I just hate to have you go—a young girl like you, and all alone."

"But that was the point," said Judith, with deft little twists at the blue dress—"my being near this girl's age. Mrs.

Emmons proposed it—though it was her husband's idea, she said. That surprised me. I didn't suppose he had any ideas."

"Well, really, my dear," retorted Mrs. Brunswick with that asperity which edges the defense of a contemporary to a critical younger generation. "I don't know why you should say that. I went all through the high school with Charlie Emmons, and I can assure you he had a great many ideas."

"Did he? He seems such a—booster," laughed Judith.

"Well, he wasn't born a booster. And, for that matter, he didn't want to go into business. His folks forced that on him—and mighty disappointed he was for a while. Probably he's all over it now; people do get over things," was her comfortable conclusion.

"What did he want to be?" inquired Judith, not that she cared particularly about knowing, but that she might hold her mind from the thing before her.

"Oh, I don't know exactly; go on studying, I believe. Write, maybe. Anyway, he loved books."

Judith was silent for a moment. Then, "I hadn't known that," she said, simply, as if wanting to do justice where she had been doing injustice. Something about it was holding her mind, for her mother had to ask twice,

"Going to wear your black hat?"

Mrs. Brunswick followed her daughter down-stairs, continuing to deplore her errand. "Now my dear,"—voice and manner curiously sharpened in saying it—"if she says anything horrid to you, just get right up and leave!"

"Oh no, mother," laughed the girl. "That isn't the idea."

"Judith," her mother commanded. "I forbid you to stay there if she is—unpleasant to you. Simply tell her that she must keep the rules of the institution, or leave. It's simple enough, I'm sure."

THE RULES OF THE INSTITUTION

less respect to the lower class

class difference economic difference

not working girls

Her brother sauntered out from the living-room. "Off to see the (errand) daughter?"

She turned sharply. "Fred, I don't think that's a very nice way to speak of a girl."

"No, Fred," admonished his mother. "It was not respectful."

"You would have put it stronger than that if it had been one of the girls of our crowd, mother," said Judith, abruptly turning away.

Her mother followed to the door, patting her arm. "There, there, dear, you're a little upset, and no wonder. Well, Henry's here with the car."

Judith drew back. "Mother! I don't want the car. I don't want to go there in an automobile!"

"Nonsense! Why, what nonsense! She probably knows you have an automobile. Don't get silly notions. Henry, you are to take Miss Judith to Severns Hall. The home for working-girls on High Street," she added, as light did not break over Henry's face. After the motor had started down the driveway she called: "Just tell her she's got to keep the rules!"

The thing had grown intolerable to Judith: her brother's (flippant) phrase, her mother's attitude, forced it upon her in the very way she had tried not to think of it. Reprimanding a girl for staying out late at night! She stayed out late at night herself. How utterly foolish she would feel, sitting there talking goody-goody talk to that other girl. Drawing up before this "working-girls' home" in an automobile, and tripping in and laying down the law to a girl who worked for her living!

"Henry," she suddenly called, "let me out here. Yes, right here. And you needn't come for me. I have another arrangement for getting home." As she slammed the door of the car she took a vicious satisfaction in the consciousness that certainly Henry would think it queer.

She gained a measure of composure in walking slowly through the soft April night. There was no use fussing about it now: she would be as pleasant as she could with this girl—just as natural and nice about it as she knew how to be. She would simply speak of how, in a

place like that, there had to be rules: how, if one broke them, another would; of how life had to be arranged for the greatest good to the greatest number. She took heart in repeating "the greatest good to the greatest number."

But her few minutes in the reception-room with the matron disheartened her again. The woman's official motherliness irritated her. She was too self-conscious in the delicacy with which she spoke of the errand on which Miss Branswick had come. Judith hated the atmosphere of conspiracy, the assumption of superiority, into which she was taken.

"I do hope," Mrs. Hughes murmured, as Judith rose to go to the girls' room, "that you will not find her disagreeable."

"Why, that hardly seems likely," was Judith's rather cool response.

The matron shook her head. "I think I should warn you that you may find it harder than you think. I have tried to get Mary's confidence, but—" She paused, shaking her head. "I am very much afraid there is something in her life that I do not understand. There's something queer about her."

With this, after she had been in the girl's room five minutes, Judith was in private agreement. And it was true that it was harder than she had thought. The moment the girl looked at her she wanted to run away: that was not because of rudeness, or any tangible offense, but because something in this girl made her own nicely laid little plans fall back as inadequate. She tried to be pleasant: she was conscious of being very pleasant indeed, and of being at the same time rather futile and absurd as she talked, for example, of spring's having come.

It became the more difficult to go on because a gleam in Mary Graham's black eyes suggested an amused understanding of her visitor's predicament, a vexing appreciation of the situation.

"I came to talk with you about something, Miss Graham," she said, with dignity.

The girl nodded—for all the world as if discreetly amused.

Judith, doing her best to rise out of her ruffled feelings, stated the case with gentleness. In a place of that sort there must be rules. One of the rules—and considering the greatest good to the great-

institution rules-made repetitive The U

3

→ who

queer

different class life-style behavior accepted + unaccepted language

that's the rules

(she called, "Just tell her she's got to keep the rules!")

est number it seemed a wise one—was that the girls living in the house must be in at nine o'clock at night—unless they had stated in advance that they would be out beyond that hour, telling why. To be sure—she hastened to add, Mary Graham having raised her eyes from the tassel on her visitor's dress to her face and then lowered them again—sometimes things arose one had not known of in advance: certainly that might happen, and, if explained, would be met with understanding, she was certain. But where it happened continuously, and was not explained, even when explanation was requested, it seemed a wilful violation of the regulations.

She paused, but the girl to whom she had been speaking did not reply. As if there was nothing to reply to! She did not know why she, who had come with the kindest intentions in the world, should in some intangible way—there was the grievance—be made to feel on the defensive and ridiculous. Her voice was less gentle as she said,

"If one lives in an institution one must expect to keep its rules."

Mary Graham looked at her then as if that were something really to meet. Her interested gaze was a penetrating one. "I suppose so," she said, as if weighing it. "Well"—her eyes left Judith and wandered around the room—a plain but attractive room. Her glance lingered for an instant on the white bed. Then she said, quietly, "I'll leave."

It startled from Judith a quick, "Oh, not that!"

The girl's eyes were lowered again and she did not raise them as she repeated, "I'll leave." After a moment she looked up at Judith with a glance that seemed to be inquiring why she remained.

"Why, not that," faltered Judith, but did not know how to go on. It was not easy to talk when one had the sense of talking only to the outside of a person. Yet she could not bear to go. Nor was it her pride alone which rose against her going like that. Something in the girl strangely drew her. She wanted to reach the things locked in.

"You haven't liked it here?" she asked, timidly.

Again the girl raised her eyes, and, as if sensitive to change, did not immedi-

ately lower them. "Why, yes, I've liked it here—in most ways," she said. She appeared to forget Judith and to be brooding over her own situation: the heavy brows drawn, her face was almost menacingly somber. After a moment there escaped from her a violent, "I hate it down-town!"

Immediately she drew back into her retreat, so far within it that Judith could sit watching her, fascinated by that smoldering quality, drawn by something that in a rude sense seemed power. She observed details about her—those little things that often point the way. There was no working-girl's finery, but neither was there anything that seemed contrived in her plainness: cheap white shirt-waist, black serge skirt—evidently her interest was not in clothes. She had a great deal of black hair which was done low and uncaringly. Her color was not good and her features were too heavy for beauty. Judith felt that she would be quite different if what smoldered within blazed through. She wanted to know more of her—more than there seemed any chance of her knowing. She was about twenty, Mrs. Emmons had said, and worked in the corset-factory, where she was skilful and had a good position—as those positions went, she had hazily added. Yet she was not a success as a worker, Judith had been told; she had lost several positions through what seemed shiftlessness—staying away and being late. "There seems something unruly about her," Mrs. Emmons had said; "not," she had charitably added, "that you can put your finger on anything wrong."

"But if you like it here better than down-town," Judith ventured after a moment, "why do you change?"

The girl raised sullen eyes and replied with a short, disagreeable laugh. "Forgot what you just said?"

Judith flushed, but replied, quietly: "I didn't say leave. I meant stay here and keep the rules."

"Oh yes, stay here and keep the rules!" she mocked. "It's easy enough, isn't it?"

"The others do," said Judith.

"The others!" she scoffed, adding, under her breath, "Don't talk to me about the 'others.'"

Rules of confinement
(restriction)

(prison)

debt

map

THE RULES OF THE INSTITUTION

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There was a pause, and then Judith, nervously, somehow feeling herself to be speaking as a child speaks, began to say how Mrs. Hughes was reasonable, and if once in a while something came up one had not known of in advance—

"You always know, when you start out anywhere, how long you're going to be gone?" came the savage interruption.

"No," honestly replied Judith. After a minute she forced herself to say, "And yet, if there are, as you implied, advantages in living here, might it not be worth while to give in on that point and—"

Again she was interrupted; not at first by words, but by the blaze of passion in the girl's eyes.

"Give in!" she cried. "Give in!—that's just it. That's all there is to life—this 'give in' and 'give in' and 'give in.' *What's left?* That's what I'd like you to tell me! That's what I want to know before I 'give in' any more!"

Judith, staggered, could not reply, and the girl, powerless to hold back what had been loosened, broke out again: "I tell you I'm tired of giving in! It's nothing but 'give in.' Why"—her eyes narrowed as she shot this through the tumult of her feeling—"the whole *thing's* an institution, and you're to keep the rules of that institution, and to do that you give in, till after a while you aren't *there*. I tell you I know! You go!"

A little cry escaped from Judith Brunswick, sitting far forward in her chair. "Why—I know that," she gasped. "Why—I know that!"

"I'll tell you where I go at night sometimes." The other girl tossed her head, as if defending her inmost stronghold. "I'll tell you where I was the other

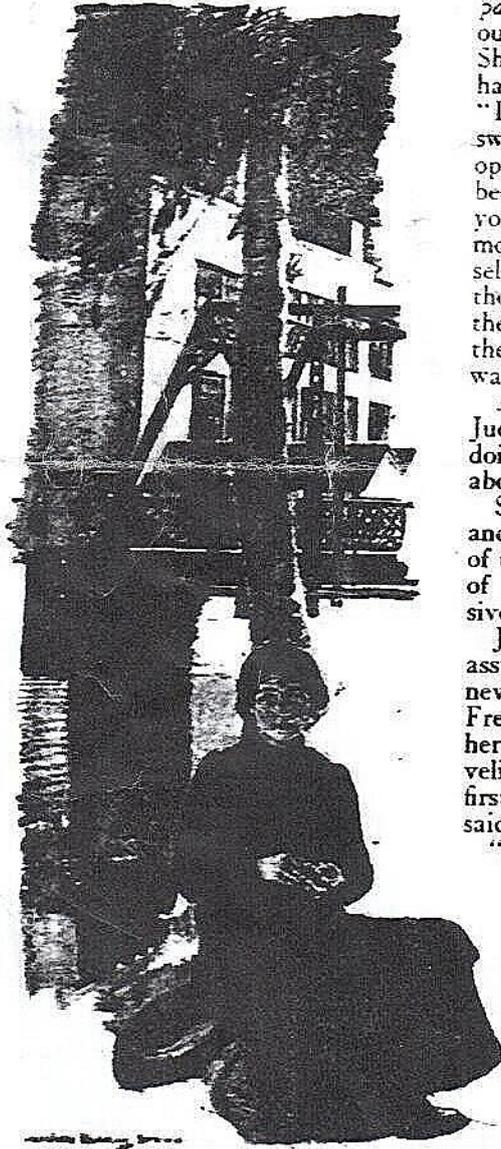


"GIVE IN," SHE CRIED. "THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO LIFE."

night when I came in after eleven and Mrs. Hughes said she would have to 'speak to the ladies.' I wasn't at a dance-hall"; she laughed, mockingly. "Though I would have been," she threw in darkly, "if I'd wanted to be. I wasn't with a man at all. I—" she halted, then said, so simply that it was moving, "I don't know any man I'd care about being

with. I was by myself. I took a walk. I was trying—the denance had fallen from her, leaving her quite exposed—“trying to get back to myself; back—” There was a break in her voice, but her eyes went on.

“I walked a long way up the river; up to a place I know, where you can see far things. It was moonlight. I sat on



“I SAT A LONG TIME—WONDERING”

a hill a long time, not thinking about what time it was. I was—” Again she broke off, shook herself as if in disgust at her poor powers, then demanded, with a little laugh at once wistful and hard, “When you’re educated, can you tell things?”

—But Judith’s reply was checked by the new feeling that flamed in the girl’s face. “Do you ever feel it?” she cried. “That life’s rushing past you?—rushing right past you? Do you ever want to reach out with your two hands and ~~take~~ it?” She was leaning forward, clenching her hands as if seizing upon something. “Do you ever feel that something’s swinging shut? Something that won’t open again? Like something in you had been beaten back?—something really you, beaten back till it doesn’t often move any more? Oh, I try to make myself a wooden thing! But there come those times when you ~~enter~~—and then—then—” She came to a stop. “Then the wooden thing gets smashed a little,” was all she could say, and tried to laugh.

After a moment she looked up at Judith to say, “I’ll tell you what I was doing the other night. I was thinking about God.”

She laughed, partly in embarrassment, and sat there tilting one foot on the tip of the other. Then, as if not quite sure of Judith, after all, she added, defensively, “Not like church.”

Judith only nodded, but her eyes reassured that in Mary Graham which had never before ventured from its fastness. Freed now, it swept up and possessed her; hushed before it, she sat there marveling. Then, not wanting to lose this first touch with another human soul, she said, timidly,

“The other night—up the river there, I—I was wondering.”

She was as if bathed in mystery when she slowly repeated, in a voice touched at once with the pain and the glory, “I was wondering.”

At three o’clock that next afternoon Judith Brunswick was to report to the house committee of the Woman’s Club on the case of Mary Graham—what she had been able

THE RULES OF THE INSTITUTION

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to "do" with her. What had she been able to "do"? It was not until after she had said good night to the matron, whose deference did not conceal her disappointment in not being confided in, had closed the door of Severns Hall behind her, and was out in the fragrant night that she thought of the house committee and how she had failed it.

When she got home she had been relieved to find that her mother was at a neighbor's. She could put off her brother, who teasingly inquired, "Find out all you wanted to know about the unfortunate sister?" She went up to her room, wanting to be alone with what she had found out about Judith Brunswick. A whole new world was opening from the fact that the very thing that pressed against the surface of her own life was there—more powerful, more passionate in the life of Mary Graham. It was the same revolt against the eating in of custom, against the closing down of routine around one; the same outreaching from grooves of living one had been forced into, that same flutter of the soul against the "giving in."

For two years Judith Brunswick had been home from college; they were two years of giving in. This was what Mary Graham shot home to her now: "Give in—give in—give in! *What's left?*"

She stood before the bookcase, running her hand across the backs of the books. They were the books she had brought home from school. She had liked having them in her room; often before going to bed she would take one of them and read awhile, perhaps less for the things read than for the moment's

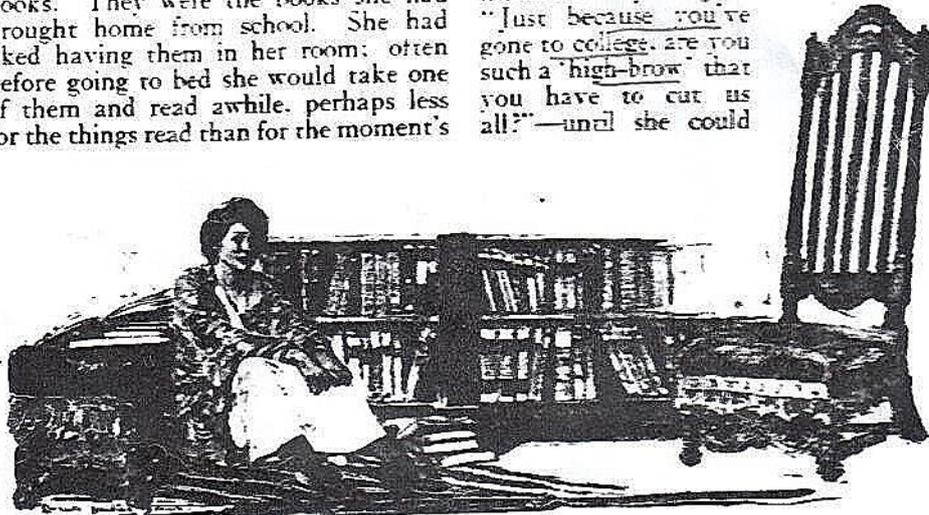
touch with things that seemed slipping from her. Sipping to the low chair before the shelves, she sat there for a long time.

She had come home from school with that fine sense of life as not a fixed thing, but a thing of continuously unfolding possibilities; conscious of herself as alive and the world as wonderful, eager to be a living part of the fecund age she had a sense of living in. Life was a thing to do with to one's utmost. She was going to "do something."

Then she got home, where things were all shaped ahead and she was expected to form herself into a pattern that had been made for her. She was the daughter of a well-to-do man of a middle-Western town. It was no part of her plan to shut herself in with the money her father had made. That money might express her father; it in no sense expressed her. She would form her own place, and in her own way.

Looking back to it now, it was both interesting and terrible to her to see how one little thread and then another had been thrown around her, drawing her into the pattern formed for Judith Brunswick, "society girl" in that town. Her married sister was deep in society; so was her sister-in-law, and so were all the girls she knew. It had been: "But of course you're coming to my tea!"

"But, Judith, why wouldn't you go?"
"Just because you've gone to college, are you such a 'high-brow' that you have to cut us all?"—until she could



THE OLD SENSE OF THE WONDER AND IMPERATIVENESS OF LIFE BROKE THROUGH

fairly feel herself fitting into the pattern formed for her. She had wondered at times, longingly thinking of her college friends, if it was because all of them had been out of the places formed for them that they had seemed so much more individual and alive than girls she knew in this other way. Mary Graham had said it: something had been swinging shut, something that might not open again; life was going past her; she was not reaching out and taking it. She had made poor little attempts—such as joining the Woman's Club. Even that laid her open to the taunt "high-brow"—the way her young social set dismissed all things it had neither brain to cope with nor spirit to aspire to. She grew more and more sensitive about revealing her dissatisfaction when it seemed she could not even define, much less attain, the things she did want, until at last, unable to see the path, she grew timid in asserting her wish to get there. She had no sense of movement now, only a going round and round in one small place. And that place claimed a toll from her spirit: powers unused becoming enfeebled, enthusiasms unclaimed growing dimmed, things unattained becoming less real. The very doing of things gave them a hold on her. She grew disgusted with herself, and that sullen her spirit; distrustful of herself, and that was weakening. It seemed she had not been worth anything else, after all, or she would not have been caught like that. She saw the absurd side of her predicament, and that was quenching. "Poor girl—her family don't understand her! A prisoner in one of the finest houses in town! Forced to wear strutting clothes and spend her time enjoying herself!"—so would go the town's laugh for it.

And now this Mary Graham had brought things to life again! The old sense of the wonder and the imperative-ness of life broke through. Once more life challenged her and the old sense of power surged up to meet the challenge. She had known there was a fight; through Mary Graham it was made real to her that it was a fight for freeing life. She laughed at herself for having felt "sensitive" about her dissatisfaction with life gone stale. Not ridiculous because wanting something she did not

have, but ridiculous because not getting that something! Her mind shot out into this plan and that: she would go to the city—study, work, look up some of the girls who had gone on, get her bearings. She would find her own. Well, Mary Graham was her own. She would reach her—would break through the separate crusts place and custom had formed about them. And Mary Graham must find her own; Mary Graham must find her place. She glowed with thoughts of what the girl might come to mean if her passion were directed to that new feeling in the world that would free life from the rules of the institution.

The next afternoon, while getting ready for the meeting, she realized that the things she had been feeling would not be easy to put into a report to the house committee. And when finally sitting with the four women who, with herself, comprised that committee, she was newly and horribly conscious of how hard it would be to say the only things she had to offer. Perhaps it was just part of what she scornfully called her spinelessness (her friends would call it her sweet nature)—but other people did complicate things so! It was so much easier to be fine and fearless by yourself than with people who assumed you were like them. If only one could be at all sure of "putting it over"—not having one's feelings go sprawling about in ridiculous forms of expression. The very cut of Mrs. Emmons's new spring suit seemed to seal one in—so confident and serene it was. And the aigrettes on Mrs. Van Camp's hat and the way that appallingly efficient little lady held her hand-bag beat back all things one could not put into exact terms. Then there was Miss Hewitt, who worked with her mother in the church guild and whom her mother called a "lovely woman." And the fourth member, Mrs. Stephens, made it no easier, for Judith had been assured Mrs. Stephens had a delicious sense of humor, and what she knew of her made her feel it was not the humor to break out into understanding, but the kind that stays within and settles to self-satisfaction. They were not women to whom it would be easy to talk of Mary Graham—or Judith Brunswick.

As she listened to other reports about



"MARY GRAHAM CAN'T VERY WELL KEEP THAT RULE," SHE SAID

the Home their complacency became an irritant to her own uncertainty. *They* did not find life complex—perplexing. They seemed so sure of themselves; an assumption of their own superiority was apparently the groundwork of their endeavors. There shot into her mind a wicked little desire to see that groundwork shaken. She had not known what she was going to say, and now, as she listened to Mrs. Van Camp's perfect little plan for making something move on in just the way it should go, she saw that she could "give them a jolt."

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Mrs. Emmons said Miss Brunswick would tell them of the girl at the Home who had been so unruly.

Judith leaned forward in her most engaging manner. "Mary Graham can't very well keep that rule," she said. "You see, when she goes out she can't tell just when she may care to come in. After all," she added in a warm, cordial voice, "how can one?"

Mrs. Emmons dropped her handkerchief; Judith stooped and returned it to her with a smiling nod. All were staring at her. Mrs. Van Camp's mouth



SHE COULD SEE THE FACTORY
WHERE MARY GRAHAM WORKED

had fallen a little open. Then it shut up tight and she straightened.

"But—but, my dear Miss Judith," Mrs. Emmons finally gasped; "but—when—"

"When one lives in an institution," cut in the incisive voice of Mrs. Van Camp, "one must keep the rules of that institution."

Judith turned to her, sweetly earnest. "That's just what I thought before I talked with her. But you see I came to see it was not good for her soul to keep the rules of the institution." She leaned back in her chair, nodding a little, as if she had cleared that up.

"Well, we can't help it about her soul," sharply began Mrs. Van Camp, but, at a movement from the chairman, stopped.

"Her soul," gently corrected Mrs. Emmons, "is just what we care most about. But will you please make clear to us,

dear Miss Judith, how there can possibly be any harm to her soul in keeping the rules of that institution?"

"She takes walks at night," said Judith, and saying it swept her back to her deep feeling for the thing itself until she forgot her use of it as a spiritual bomb.

"She does this that she may find herself; that life may not completely shut her in. It is the life in her breaking through. The other night she walked a long way up the river and sat where she could see far things." She hesitated, then finished, even more quietly, "She was thinking about God."

"I don't believe it!" came the quick retort from Mrs. Van Camp.

Mrs. Emmons cleared her throat. "We shouldn't say that we do not believe it, perhaps," she began, uncertainly. She looked at Judith, helplessly and in appeal. "It does seem—most unusual."

Mrs. Stephens's sense of humor was not illumining to the discussion that followed, satisfying itself in amusement at the humorlessness of her fellow-members. Miss Hewitt looked frightened and pained; and yet there was one moment when Judith looked at her, as she was looking out of the window, which made her suspect that something buried under the years that made her a "lovely woman" stirred. Nothing remained buried, however, in the breast of Mrs. Van Camp. In the first place, she briskly and capably attacked it; it was

not safe. Why, the girl might be arrested! It would give the Hall a queer name. Even if she did go out to think about God the rules could not be suspended. It would just make an opening for other girls to get out to a dance-hall. Why couldn't she think about God in the house? Or there was the yard—a nice yard. Where did she go to church? Her minister should look into it. She should not be encouraged in such queer things—it would take her mind from her work. Mrs. Emmons was more mild, but no less perturbed. It was deeply disconcerting not to be able to condemn a thing that led to the breaking of a rule.

Judith felt her antagonism against them rising. They stood for the things holding her in things that held every one in. They arranged an order; that order must be subscribed to. They made rules; those rules must be kept. There was no sympathy with a thing that broke into things as they had planned them. Why should one wish to do a thing that was not customary?

"You think it altogether absurd?" Judith asked, her voice sharp-edged. "Quite absurd, you think, that she should not find her life satisfying?—should want more from it than she is getting?"

Mrs. Emmons murmured something about pleasures and classes for the working-girls.

Judith shook her head; she knew that she could not make it plain; she was not considering that, but was being drawn back to Mary Graham—a living soul beating against the things that shut her in. Sitting here with these women she had a sharpened sense of what those things were. It was as if there was

represented here the whole order that locked one away from life. And with that came anew the sense of the wonder and the preciousness of life—life that could persist through so much, bear so much, and go on wanting. She spoke from out this feeling when she murmured, "The other night—up the river there—she was wondering."

Her face was so puzzling, her voice so strange, that there was a moment's silence before Mrs. Van Camp demanded, "What about?"

Judith was to have gone to a tea after the committee meeting. She did not want to go; neither did she want to go home. She took a car to the outskirts of town and walked a long way up the river road, climbing a hill. She was sure this was the hill from which Mary Graham had seen far things.

But she kept turning from the far things of that open country to the town that also was there. She could see the house she lived in; she could see the factory where Mary Graham worked. Those things were there. They

were. A long time she sat looking back at that town, and something in its fixity was quelling. It seemed that she, and Mary Graham, and all the other people there, had been caught by that town. It made her wonder if she hadn't been unfair to those club women. What, after all, did she expect them to do? That was the way things were. Things were already built up, just as that town was built up—fixed. Precious life had been caught in that building, but was there escape from things so powerful in their fixity? As she continued to look, there forced itself upon her a sense of how all things



SOMETHING IN HER LEAPED UP AND MADE HER STRONG

were related. That relation of things was what towns expressed. It was no small thing, after all, to disturb the lives of a number of other people, people who loved her and whom she loved. It seemed that affection and obligation were agents holding one to one's place, as if they had some subtle cohesive power that interlay and held together the material things making that town. It was not so simple. It was not simple at all. Walking slowly back down the river road, it was hard to put down the questioning whether she was not held by things stronger than herself.

She stepped aside for an automobile to pass. Realizing that she knew the man rushing by in it, she bowed, but it was not until after he was past that she wondered if it was not Mrs. Emmons's husband. The car had come to a crunching stop and there were hurrying footsteps. She was considering whether to turn, when her name was called and she looked back to see that it was indeed Charlie Emmons, as her mother called him—he who had suggested that Judith be sent to see Mary Graham.

"I beg pardon, Miss Brunswick," he was saying. "Hope I didn't startle you, but I was so interested in that meeting of yours this afternoon—about that girl. I met my wife and took her home in the car; she was telling me about it—some of the things the girl said to you. I don't know why I should be so interested," he laughed, after an instant's pause in which Judith had not known just what to say. "but something about it does interest me. Maybe because I used to have somewhat the same feeling myself—when I was young."

He laughed, embarrassed at the confession, and some quality in that embarrassment made it easy for Judith, once into it, to tell of Mary Graham. He kept nodding, as if understanding. His face looked as though he did understand. "Well," he said, "it's a feeling that comes to some of us—when we are young." He laughed again, and was looking off at the river.

"But we get over it," he said, coming back, and speaking in a voice nearer his usual brisk businesslike tone. "We have to play the game, you know—and, yes, we do have to keep the rules."

As much as anything else it was the change in him in saying it that summoned everything in her to resist it now—that same thing to which she herself had been close just a little while before.

"Even though it might be the finest thing in us tried to break through?" she asked, the fighting edge to her voice.

"Oh—the finest thing in us. . . ." he muttered, and was again looking off at the river.

She watched him. Here was one who had given in, overcome by things that were fixed; held, perhaps, in the mesh of affection. And now he was something different; something made by the things he had given in to.

Sharply it came to her that that was the price paid for the giving in. One changed; some things died down, other things developed, until the balance was different. One's quality changed. She knew that, for she had begun to change in just two years. One settled down into the feeling that one couldn't do any differently and wrested a certain mournful satisfaction from the sadness of surrender. She straightened for combat, throwing off the drugging effect of those false satisfactions.

"No," he came back to her again, "we have to play the game, and to play the game we have to keep the rules."

As he said it she knew with simple certitude that it was not so. She knew it for the great human error and weakness; knew that it was wickedly wasteful, fairly unholy in its blundering tampering with life. It took life. Was that not enough to say against it? And life was more valuable than anything that would shut life in—yes, and stronger than built-up things that held it in! Why, she owed no allegiance to an order that held life in chains! As she saw the live things falling back in this man, and the things of custom once more shutting down around him, she knew her own way out. In the fight for freeing Mary Graham she would free herself.

He said again, putting down something stubbornly insurgent in himself, "You see, we do have to keep the rules."

And something in her, freed by saying it, leaped up and made her strong as she looked at him and triumphantly answered, "I don't have to!"