

ON SUSAN GLASPELL'S TRIFLES AND "A
JURY OF HER PEERS:" CENTENNIAL ESSAYS,
INTERVIEWS AND ADAPTATIONS.

MARTHA C. CARPENTIER AND EMELINE JOUVE,
EDITORS.

Mcfarland, 2015, Pp. 229. ISBN: 978-1-4766-6211-4.

ROVIE HERRERA MEDALLE
Universidad de Málaga
rovie@uma.es

Received 31 July 2018

Accepted 22 October 2018

The American dramatist Susan Glaspell had a prolific career with groundbreaking plays such as *The Verge* (1921), *Inheritors* (1921), or her one-act play *The Outside* (1917), just to name a few. These three plays, together with *Trifles* (1916), are part of the renowned collection *Plays by Susan Glaspell* (1987) by C.W.E Bigsby, which remains a primary source of Glaspell's works. Despite Glaspell's extensive writing and production of plays, she is still widely known as the author of *Trifles* and her short story adaptation "A Jury of Her Peers" (1917). Nowadays, Glaspell's plays are present in most university theater departments. However, Glaspell's works were neglected until the 1970s, when some feminist critics rediscovered her plays and claimed them as palimpsests of women's struggle in patriarchal society. Dealing with the isolation of rural life, abuse, and the power of women bonding, *Trifles* is a referent of early twentieth-century issues that are still relevant for contemporary society. Glaspell laid the foundations of modern American theater as a reaction against the disappointing mass-marketed theatrical scene of the time.

The editors of *On Susan Glaspell's Trifles and "A Jury of Her Peers:" Centennial Essays, Interviews and Adaptations* (2015), Martha C. Carpentier and Emeline Jouve, are experts in this field and have conducted extensive research on Glaspell's theater. Carpentier is a professor of 20th century literature at Sexton Hall University in New Jersey. She has published major works on the dramatist such as *Susan Glaspell: New Directions in Critical Inquiry*

(2008) and *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell* (2001). She co-edited with Patricia L. Bryan *Her America: "A Jury of Her Peers" and Other Stories by Susan Glaspell* (2010), and with Barbara Ozieblo *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell* (2006). Carpentier is a co-founder of the International Susan Glaspell Society. Jouve is an assistant professor of American literature and culture at Champollion University and Toulouse Jean-Jaurès University in France. She is the Vice-President of the International Susan Glaspell Society and editor of "Ariel's Corner: Theatre" for the journal *Miranda*. She co-edited with Aurélie Guillain and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas the collection *Unspeakable Acts: Murder by Women/L'acte inqualifiable ou le meurtre au féminin* (2016) and recently published *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion* (2017).

Carpentier and Jouve compile in this book a comprehensive collection of essays, interviews, and adaptations to celebrate the centennial anniversaries of *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers." Reviewing aspects of both the play and the short story, *On Susan Glaspell's Trifles and "A Jury of Her Peers: Centennial Essays, Interviews and Adaptations* studies the relevance of these works and how they have evolved as a dialogue for new generations of practitioners, scholars, and writers who research Glaspell's intricate drama. *Trifles* was inspired on a real event, the murder of John Hossak by his wife Margaret Hossak; the dramatist covered the news as a reporter for *Des Moines Daily News* in 1900. The editors of this collection provide different sections giving an insightful view on Glaspell's play and short story. The collection is divided into three sections, an Introduction by the editors, "Part I: Scholars' Voices," which comprises six essays by international scholars, and "Part II: Practitioner's Voices," constituted by two sub-sections: "Interviews" and "Adaptations/Creations."

In the introduction, the editors discuss the background of the centennial works and review the major academic publications on Glaspell since the 1960s. They also present the sections of the book and the relevance of the works compiled in this collection. The first section, "Part I: Scholars' Voices," opens with an arresting essay by Catherine Q. Forsa, "Forensic Science and the Aesthetics of Affect in 'A Jury of Her Peers'," where she tackles the scientific analysis of the characters in terms of gender. As she explains, the female characters are at the forefront of the case and forensic analysis thanks to their capability to empathize with Mrs. Wright. After this essay, Marie-

Pierre Maechling-Mournie also emphasizes the male characters' blindness in the investigation, in both the play and the short story, in her essay "Seeing, Looking, Pointing: A Linguistic Reading of *Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers'" through a compelling linguistic analysis of Glaspell's use of the terms "look", "see", and "point." In the next essay, "Silent Partners: The 'Trifling' Nature of Language in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell and Samuel Beckett," Linda Ben-Zvi focuses on the absence of speech: the use of the characters' silences and gestures, the inarticulate female protagonists, and also the use of self-addressed monologues, which serve to establish an interesting parallelism between Glaspell's and Beckett's theater. With their essay "Susan Glaspell's Radicalization of Women's Crime Fiction: Female Reading Strategies from Anna Katharine Green to Sara Paretsky," Ilka Saal and Mareike Dolata tackle crime fiction and Glaspell's subversion of the Victorian domestic sphere, which enables the female characters to fight patriarchy from their unprivileged position. This unprivileged position is also studied in the subsequent essay, where Noelia Hernando-Real studies women's position as objects of scopophilia. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's theories, Hernando-Real compares in "Powerful Gazes: The Right to Look in Film Adaptations of *Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers,'" Robert Florey's adaptation of "A Jury of Her Peers" with Sally Heckel's and Pamela Gaye's film adaptations of *Trifles*. Her analysis is particularly revealing, since it unearths the dominant gaze and how Florey's adaptation is created for a mass-marketed audience, which is completely opposed not only to the essence of Glaspell's play but also to her drama. Drew Eisenhauer also deals with film adaptation to close this first section of the collection with the essay "Susan Glaspell's Gendered Detectives: Suspense and the Threat to Masculine Identity in Radio and Screen Adaptations from 1930 to 1961." Eisenhauer includes a detailed film/audiography of both *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers" and analyses the differences of some of the versions, concluding that Glaspell's drama is still subversive and inspires female detecting.

The second section of the collection, "Part II: Practitioner's Voices," begins with the "Interviews" subsection, which opens with Sharon Friedman's interview "*Trifles* and 'A Jury of Her Peers' on Film: Interview with Filmmakers Sally Heckel and Pamela Gaye Walker." Friedman explores with the filmmakers several aspects of their screen adaptations, such as the use of music, mise en scène, and their vision of how to portray Glaspell's works on camera. The second interview, by Barbara Ozieblo, entitled "Producing Susan

Glaspell's Plays: Interview with Founders of the Orange Tree Theatre, Sam Walters and Auriol Smith," brings us back to the theatrical sphere. Ozieblo discusses with the interviewees their different productions of Glaspell's plays and their enthusiasm in staging her plays. Also by Ozieblo, the last interview of the section, "*Trifles* in Production at the Orange Tree Theatre, 2008: Interview with Director Helen Leblique," reviews, among many appealing topics, the new generation of Glaspell scholars, feminist criticism, and audience reception. After the interviews, the editors include in the collection the "Adaptations/Creations". This second sub-section of the "Practitioner's Voices" focuses on the works of Milbre Burch and John F. McGrew, who both give an introduction to their works and also contribute to the collection the original play, "*Sometimes I Sing: An Original Dramatic Monologue Inspired by Trifles*," and libretto, "*Trifles: An Original Operatic Libretto*." Milbre Burch unpacks in "*Sometimes I Sing: Freeing the Voice of Minnie Wright in Trifles*," her inspiration to create a sequel of *Trifles*; the author provides details of her personal experience and her fascination for Glaspell's play. John F. McGrew and John G. Bilotta explain, in "From Dramatic Time to Operatic Time: Creating an Opera Libretto from the Play *Trifles*," the process of adapting *Trifles* into an opera, taking into account aspects such as differences in time, musical components, and the structure of the piece. The collection finishes with the discussed creations, a moving and passionate monologue by Milbre Burch, "*Sometimes I Sing: An Original Dramatic Monologue Inspired by Trifles*," and the challenging adaptation to opera by John F. McGrew, "*Trifles: An Original Operatic Libretto*."

To conclude, this collection is a must for those scholars conducting research on Glaspell, although I believe that it can also serve as a perfect starting point to familiarize readers with Glaspell's oeuvre, since it deals not only with the centennial works but also tackles other plays by the mother of Modern American Theater. Perhaps a section with some writings by the author would have served to complete an overall effect, but I consider the editors offer a complete vision of Glaspell's theater not only through the diverse approaches and different essays, but also through the practitioners' experiences, as shared in the interviews, adaptations, and creations.

WORKS CITED

- BIGSBY, C.W.E. *Plays by Susan Glaspell*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- BRYAN, Patricia L. and Martha C. Carpentier, editors. *Her America: "A Jury of Her Peers" and Other Stories by Susan Glaspell*. University Of Iowa Press, 2010.
- CARPENTIER, Martha C. and Barbara Ozieblo, editors. *Disclosing Intertextualities: The Stories, Plays, and Novels of Susan Glaspell*. Rodopi, 2006.
- . *The Major Novels of Susan Glaspell*. University Press of Florida, 2001.
- , editor. *Susan Glaspell: New Directions in Critical Inquiry*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.
- JOUVE, Emeline, Aurélie Guillain and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, editors. *Unspeakable Acts: Murder by Women/L'acte inqualifiable ou le meurtre au féminin*. Peter Lang, 2016.
- . *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion*. University Of Iowa Press, 2017.