

NO WAY OUT: VIOLENCE IN SELECTED AMERICAN EXPRESSIONIST PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the American expressionist plays of the 1920s and the acts of violence that occur in several of them. The expressionist plays of Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, Sophie Treadwell, and Susan Glaspell all feature some type of violent death. These types of violence can be seen in German expressionist plays, as well as in proto-expressionist plays. The acts of violence are a recurring motif of expressionism, and their importance cannot be ignored. This thesis seeks to analyze the text and the settings of the plays, and how they relate to expressionism. The violence in each play is explored, and is traced back to the origins of expressionism, particularly World War I. It is concluded that violent actions are an important motif to expressionism, and these acts should be acknowledged as a characteristic of the form.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “No Way Out: Violence in Selected American Expressionist Plays,” presented by Alexander Dalton Pierce, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dedicated to all the women in theatre who made me the scholar I am today.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Expressionist movement of the early twentieth century is noted for strong, jarring plays that assault the audience with intense acts of violence and class struggles. Many of the struggles reflect the workers movements of the previous century, with roots in Marx and Engels. Beginning in Germany, expressionism made its way through Europe, creating a small but notable movement in theatre history. Like so many of these avant-garde approach, this form of theatre eventually made its way to America where it would influence some of the most prominent names in early twentieth century American theatre. Inspired by the Europeans, playwrights and directors began employing expressionistic techniques in the 1920s, and it is in this decade that the greatest American expressionist plays were written.

Eugene O'Neill, the father of American drama, experimented with the aesthetic early in his career, and it earned him his first Broadway production. His colleague Susan Glaspell also experimented with expressionism, although her bout was significantly less successful. Elmer Rice and Sophie Treadwell both tried their hands at expressionism, to the point where they seem to influence each other. These four playwrights wrote expressionist plays in the 1920s, and their work remains a lasting legacy of the American expressionist movement. Despite covering a wide range of topics and characters, the plays might be characterized by expressions of violence, which usually result in someone's death. Each play either features a murder or some act of violence to or from the protagonist. These actions can be implied, as in Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), or it can be witnessed onstage, as in *The*

Hairy Ape (1921). This thesis seeks to answer why these plays seem drawn to violent outbursts and how some of them came about through short, intense periods of writing. Each of these playwrights would have been aware of the others (as is noted in Elmer Rice's autobiography *Minority Report*), so it should be no surprise that they share similar traits. Expressionist plays are drawn towards violence and chaos, and this can be seen in the proto-expressionist *Woyzeck* (1836), *Murderer, the Hope of Womankind* (1907) by Oscar Kokoschka, as well as in Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (1890) and Hasenclever's *The Son* (1914). I will attempt to outline how O'Neill, Rice, Treadwell, and Glaspell use violent actions, and how these themes can be connected.

First, one must define violence and specify the type of violent actions that occur in the dramas discussed. Violence is typically defined as deliberate, physical force against a person or property. This is the external, physical type of violence that is found in the plays of O'Neill. However, one should also consider internal, mental violence. Examples of this persist in the expressionist works of Treadwell and Rice, as the characters struggle with mental domestic abuse. Each of these types of violence causes harm to another character, and always results in death.

One should also take the time to define expressionism. In simplest terms, expressionism is an artistic technique that relies on the subjective experience being thrust outward, what the Germans refer to as *die Austrahlugen des Ich*. Since all art is largely subjective, it can be difficult to see the separation between expressionism and other forms of art. However, expressionist drama reflects the subjective experience of the characters in the play, to the point where the world is distorted due to the psychological state of the

character. A German example of this can be found in Georg Kaiser's play *From Morn to Midnight*, in which a clerk sees a tree transform into a skeleton. These types of images are part of what makes expressionism distinctive.

Mardi Valgemaie uses a quote by James Joyce, whose stream-of-conscious novels seem to mirror the form, to best describe expressionism, "To speak of [aesthetic matters] and to try to understand their nature and, having understood it, to try slowly and humbly and constantly to *express, to press out again*, from the gross earth or what it brings forth, from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand-that is art" (63). Expressionism presses outwards, to the point of distortion. One can observe Munch's painting "The Scream" (19??) to see the effects of this distortion. The bridge, the water, and even the sky swirl around the horrified figure. The world is shaping itself around the subject, and it transforms to fit around his point of view. This is the primary characteristic of expressionism. In the theatre, this trait usually manifests itself through the set design, though it can be written into the script as well. Both Eugene O'Neill and Sophie Treadwell write plays wherein the characters speak their thoughts aloud. This projection of the inner self is perfect for expressionism, and represents the concept of *die Austrahlugen des Ich*.

In her book *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre*, Julia A. Walker traces the development of American expressionism as a result of changing circumstances and technologies in America. Expressionism is usually tied to technology, with the result being the mechanization of humanity. Walker notes the typewriter as an example of the type of technology that affects the role of women in the workforce, and its influence over

other expressionist plays cannot be ignored. One can begin by looking at the so-called “typewriter speech” found in both German and American expressionist plays. This type of dialogue is characterized by short, fast bits of dialogue which mirror the sounds created by a typewriter. One can find this speech pattern in plays like *Machinal* (1928) and *The Adding Machine* (1923).

Several other traits of expressionist drama exist as well. Many of the plays are episodic, comprising of short scenes over a variety of locations. This type of structure can mirror the Stations of the Cross, although the protagonists of the dramas don’t typically get redeemed after death. Each of the plays discussed here has this exact type of structure, except for O’Neill’s *Dynamo* (1929). Another trait of expressionism is the concept of an everyman character. This character could be anyone, provided he or she fit into the same segment of the society as the character. This increases the social message of the play, and emphasizes the political issues beneath the text.

One of the first examples of violent expressionism is Georg Buchner’s *Woyzeck* (1836). This proto-expressionist play tells the story of a mentally disturbed soldier who believes his lover is having an affair. Whether she does or not is open to debate, but in Woyzeck’s mind there is no doubt. He confronts her and finally kills her, leaving behind a young child. Though this play precedes the German expressionist movement by nearly a century, it is clearly similar to the movement that would emerge in the early twentieth century. The protagonist is a disturbed man, and a modern psychoanalysis might classify him as schizophrenic, due to his hearing voices as well as having an elevated sense of paranoia. The world around Woyzeck seems to match his state of mind; that is, it is

fragmented and broken apart. The play is episodic and the order of the scenes is at the mercy of scholarly debate. Buchner did not finish the play, and died the year after he began writing it. The play would remain unpublished until 1879, and not performed until 1913.

Woyzeck himself is also similar to the expressionist protagonists featured in this thesis. He has difficulty in dealing with others, and this frustration leads to his act of violence later in the play. Woyzeck is an outsider, one who is driven to the point of murder through his superior officers, as well as the delusion that his lover Marie is engaging in an affair. Another trait of expressionism found in *Woyzeck* is the concept of an everyman character. One could see Woyzeck as representing the lowest tier of society. He is constantly mocked by his superior officers, who assert that Woyzeck must be dumb. They view Woyzeck as a lower being, one whom they can torment without repercussions. He is the victim of a class that uses and abuses him.

However, it should also be noted that Woyzeck has many traits that set him apart from his peers. First and foremost is his apparent mental illness. Woyzeck's delusions are limited to his realm of thought, making him hear voices coming from below the Earth. Many expressionist plays have mentally disturbed characters, which gives them latitude for more violent actions. Woyzeck is a fantastic example of this, and his mental state plays a key factor in the murder of Marie. This complex relationship between the sexes is shared by the American expressionists, who feature a complex web of gender relationships. It should also be worth noting that Büchner's play is still a product of its time. It contains elements of Romanticism, such as the return to nature and the emphasis on emotion and feeling. It is still decidedly different from the other plays of the movement, but one can see how

Büchner was influenced by the local theatre movement. Büchner's play is unfinished, though parts of the play can be strung together to create a cohesive work.

Another expressionist play that precedes the movement is Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (1890). This drama follows a group of adolescents as they battle through puberty. Over the course of the work, one character commits suicide, while another dies due to a botched abortion. Many scholars, including Walker and Valgema, assert that the play is expressionistic, despite not having overt distortions of reality. The expressionist techniques lie in the "two-dimensional characters" (Valgema 9) and in the variety of short episodic scenes. As this play is considered an ancestor of expressionism, one cannot ignore the death. Suicide occurs in many of the American expressionist plays, particularly in Rice's *The Subway* (1929). Violent expressions continue to occur in works that are labeled expressionist, to the point that it becomes a recurring motif.

In discussing antecedents to expressionism, one must also look at Oscar Kokoschka's short play, *Murderer, the Hope of Womankind* (1907). In this drama, a group of men and a group of women come to a confrontation, led by the leaders of their group. The women hide from the men, but their leader courageously breaks from the group. The leader of the men also steps forward, uniting the two forces. Unfortunately, this meeting ends in bloodshed, as the leader of the men kills everyone, including those from his own tribe. Thus, he is left alone onstage, the products of his foul deeds surrounding him. This play is significantly more abstract than *Woyzeck*, but still contains many of those same elements. There are disastrous interactions between the genders, one of the principal characters is left alone at the end of the play, and there is an emphasis on violence. Expressionist drama

seems to be highly connected with violence, and is the result of outsiders who seek to conform. These outsiders are rejected in their search, and their dissatisfaction often manifests itself in the form of violence.

Another important fact about Kokoschka's play is how it came together. Bettina Knapp notes that the play came about through an evening's rehearsal (181). This is extremely important, as it is similar to how Elmer Rice wrote *The Adding Machine*. Rice observed that the play came about after an intense period of writing. The resulting work was *The Adding Machine*. Both *Murderer* and *The Adding Machine* were the results of an artist's attempt to create a work over a short period. This tells us that expressionism can be a natural form of theatre. It takes the subjective experience of art and displays it prominently for everyone to see. The artists create a work wherein the audience is forced to examine the drama through the eyes of its protagonist. This creates a more sympathetic view of the character, and leads to a greater deal of understanding. Not all the expressionist plays were written in this manner, but it does reveal the nature of expressionism and how natural it seems to be.

Of course, violence is not limited to the ancestors of expressionism. It can be observed in Walter Hasenclever's *The Son* (1914). In this play, a man becomes a political revolutionary and kills his father. This act of patricide serves as one example of violence in German expressionism, but it is not the only one. Ernst Toller's *Man and the Masses* (1920) ends with the death of the protagonist, and the mysterious Nameless One is preoccupied with killing for their political cause. Georg Kaiser's *From Morn Til Midnight* ends with the

protagonist being killed by police. Time and time again, violent deaths occur in expressionist. The recurrence of these acts prompts discussion.

Expressionist drama is the art form that is most suited to creating a story in which an audience will most empathize with a character. It forces the audience to view the play from the point of view of one character, rather than an objective view of the world.

Expressionism puts the audience into the mind of the character. The concept of *die Austrahlugen des Ich* creates a different type of reality, one that is more subjective. Since the audience must see the play as the protagonist does, they should be more inclined to empathize with the character's plight. Hence, they would connect with someone who commits murder, despite its being a heinous crime. Sophie Treadwell was aware of this, and used expressionism to craft a new defense for Ruth Snyder in her play *Machinal* (1928). Treadwell gave new life to a woman who had been silenced. She knew the power of expressionism, and the effect it can have on audience perceptions.

One has to wonder why expressionist plays are so violent. The types of violence and the motivations are individualized, but the act occurs in nearly all of the expressionist plays. Furthermore, this motif is not limited to the American expressionists. Violence is seen in the works of Kaiser, Toller, and Kokoschka. This type of violence is not limited to theatre, and can be observed in the films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, M.*, and *Metropolis*. It is possible that these artists are looking towards each other, and there is sufficient evidence to prove that the American Expressionists read and performed the works of the Germans. However, this does not entirely explain *Man and the Masses* and *The Adding Machine*, which both

came about in short, intense periods of writing. There is a deeper layer to the art form, one tied to violence as a form of outward expression.

Expressionism is tied to the oppression of the human being by the machine. The fears brought about by the war machines of World War I caused an influx of expressionist works. There were experiments with expressionism prior to this, but they were few and far in-between. The war impacted the Germans, who tried to make sense of a conflict which left their country in tatters. The idea of people being killed on such a large scale came about as a result of World War I. Since this war was mired in death, it is only fitting that the art form that arises from its ashes should be tied to violence. The expressionist artists saw the violence as a product of the horrible machines created humanity. These machines were in turn used to kill large portions of humanity, on a scale that had not yet been imagined. Mustard gas, tanks, and airplanes were all products of the First World War

Since expressionism is connected to the death machines of World War I, it partly explains why violence is so prevalent. Artists of the period had to create a form to capture their feelings of dread and fear at what they had experienced. These themes were universal, and expressionism spread to the United States. The expressionist plays are undoubtedly frightening. They show the audience a world that has been altered by the fear of the protagonist. It is a fear of loneliness and loss. These fears drive the super objectives of the characters: Yank's fear of being less than human, Sophie's fear of being used, and Helen's fear of dying alone all drive their core actions. Fear is just as much a part of expressionism as violence. It motivates the protagonists, and leads them down the paths that end in violence.

The art of expressionism in the theatre is not limited to the writing of plays. There have been several productions of classic plays that have been presented in the expressionistic mode. The most well-known American example is the 1921 New York production of *Macbeth*, directed by Arthur Hopkins and designed by Robert Edmond Jones. The renderings created by Jones depict a dark, twisting castle, complete with slanted walls and ceilings. The witches become a series of masks, and the final moment of the drama place them above the stage. Violence is a key part of *Macbeth*, as it drives the plot and remains in the minds of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. There are several other notable expressionist productions of The Scottish Play, particularly in Germany. Leopold Jessner's 1921 production used expressionism in the set, lighting, and choreography. In his book *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, Dennis Kennedy mentions that Expressionist designs were a popular element of *Macbeth* productions in 1916 (83). Throughout this thesis, I will examine the role of sets in terms of expressionism, and how the sets reflect the psychology of the character. Expressionism as a design aesthetic creates a more subjective experience, and can completely change the meaning of a production.

Expressionism is an important part of American theatre history. Despite being limited to the 1920s, its effect on the modern stage can still be seen today. Mardi Valgema notes that the theatre scene of 1977 was rooted in expressionism, and can be seen in the works of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee (115). *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is highly reliant on expressionistic techniques. The memories of Willy Loman move through the walls, and he constantly shifts between states of reality and dreams. One

should not then be surprised that the play ends with a death. *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) uses more subtle techniques, but Blanche's projection of her inner self can be heard in the brief moments of music. Despite not having an onstage death, the play does have a quite violent action. Valgemae notes how expressionism influences the Off-Off-Broadway movement, and observes its influence on playwrights such as Jean-Claude Van Itallie.

There are several characteristics about American expressionism which seem to link the four playwrights discussed. They all primarily deal with issues between men and women, the exploitation of the working class, and the inability to connect with others. The latter of the points is perhaps the most important to understanding why so many of these plays seem tied to violence. The protagonists in the expressionist plays are loners who feel as if they do not belong. They are all outsiders who strive to find a purpose, though most are unsuccessful. The violence can occur early in the play, as in *The Adding Machine*, but is much more likely to occur at the end, making a final, climactic moment. Each of these acts of violence is typically precipitated by an outside force pushing against the protagonist's attempts at conformity. The protagonist commits this act of violence, and the result always leads to death.

I have limited my discussion on expressionism to the four most well-known American Expressionist playwrights. There are several other notable examples of violence in lesser-known plays, such as Kaufman and Connelly's *Beggar on Horseback* (1924), Marita Bonner's *The Purple Flower* (1928), e.e. cummings's *Him* (1928), Dawn Powell's *Women at Four O'clock* (1928), and Channing Pollock's *Mr. Moneypenny* (1928). Very few expressionist plays lack this type of violence, although exceptions do exist. John Howard Lawson's

Processional (1925) is a notable example. Although violent actions do occur, they do not result in someone's death. Death as a result of violence is one of the most recurring plot points in expressionism, and it speaks a larger truth about the goals and results of expressionism.

The plays discussed through this thesis are wonderful examples of the American expressionist scene. While there are several more expressionist plays from this time period, these are the works which stand out as key examples of the American expressionist movement. These plays incorporate a significant levels of violence, and death is usually tied to a key scene in each play. Violence adds to the impact of the expressionist drama, and it is through these works that the emerging American theatre scene began to form. It is important to study these plays to understand the modern theatre. Expressionism is extremely important to avant-garde theatre, and is still used as a conceptualized approach in modern plays. This theatre movement, though brief, is a part of American theatre history and is important for anyone who wishes to understand the development of theatre in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

EUGENE O'NEILL

Of all of the American playwrights who tried a hand at expressionism, it was Eugene O'Neill who experimented the most with the form. His plays *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1921), and *Dynamo* (1929) all use expressionistic elements. The protagonists of each of these works meet violent ends, all as a result of their own madness. They are driven by desires for identity, freedom, and sense of belonging. These protagonists are outsiders, each having difficulty in adapting to the section of society in which they live. This lack of conformity is what leads to the violence experienced by each of these three characters. This is a trait that connects many of the American expressionist plays of the 1920s. The protagonists of these plays take journeys that lead them to the realization that they do not belong. In the plays of O'Neill, this brings about their rage and sadness that leads to acts of violence.

Eugene O'Neill began his experimentation with expressionism by reading the plays of August Strindberg, whose works are often called expressionist. O'Neill read the works of August Strindberg while in a sanitarium and his early plays seem influenced by the aesthetic. O'Neill is also noted as saying he read, but did not like, the plays of Georg Kaiser. Despite not enjoying the works, O'Neill does establish that he had read the plays that fall into the form. O'Neill denies having been influenced by the Germans, despite his plays following the expressionist form. O'Neill was attempting to create legitimate, American drama, and it makes sense that he wished his plays to stand on their own, rather than as imitations.

O'Neill's experiment with expressionism earned him his first Broadway premiere. *The Emperor Jones* opened on Broadway in 1920, and helped to secure O'Neill's name in the American theatre scene. O'Neill's success with expressionism prompted him to create a second expressionist work a year later, *The Hairy Ape*, which also earned a run on Broadway. These two plays helped to elevate the American expressionist movement.

While not as well-known as the other two plays, *Dynamo* also falls under the category of Expressionist drama. This play follows a young man named Reuben Light, who is in love with his neighbor's daughter, Ada Fife. However, his strict, religious father hates the father of the Fife family, Ramsay, who owns the electricity plant. Ramsay values electricity above all else, and looks down on the Light family. After a cruel prank orchestrated by Ramsay and exacerbated by Reuben's father, Reuben is left feeling betrayed. He abandons his religion and his family, and decides to worship electricity and the machine. Reuben returns several months later, only to find that his mother has died from grief. The pain Reuben feels begins to swell, and bursts out in short, violent actions. Towards the end of the play, Reuben brings Ada to her father's plant to show her the glory of the machine. Ada is terrified of Reuben, and attempts to break free, but is shot instead. Filled with regret, Reuben grabs the electric dynamo of the plant, electrocuting himself. This horrifying play is another example of the way O'Neill uses expressionism to create thrilling drama. One of the key elements of *Dynamo* lies in the thoughts that are spoken aloud by the characters. This projection of the self is representative of the concept of *die Austrahlugen des Ich*.

Another manifestation of Expressionism lies in the sets for the plays. In *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus goes deeper and deeper into the forest, and the setting becomes wild and

unruly. The trees close in on Brutus, and reflect his level of panic. He feels trapped, as he cannot escape either the visions or the group of villagers that is chasing him. In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill describes the closeness of the stokehold, and how it keeps the workers bent over. This is meant to show how the workers are broken down, and also creates the effect of looking like apes. In the final scene Yank arrives at the zoo, where he encounters the gorilla that he has been searching for. The rest of the zoo lies in shadow, while the cage of the gorilla is lit by a single light. This shows the audience Yank's focus, and how it has cleared any other thoughts beyond that of identity. He has come to the zoo to find if he belongs with the apes, and his venture into the cage will ultimately spell out his death.

The Emperor Jones was O'Neill's first experiment with expressionism, and it shares many of the characteristics observed in his other works. Brutus Jones, the protagonist, is a self-proclaimed tyrant who has tricked the inhabitants of a small Caribbean island into believing he is a god-king who cannot be killed. His brutish control over his people leads to a revolt, and ultimately to his death. Brutus's history is marred by violence, both as receiver and as instigator. Scene four flashes back to Brutus's time with the chain gang, when he and the other convicts work mechanically, not unlike the workers of *The Hairy Ape*. His time within the penal system still haunts him, as he attempts to work again at the sound of the warden's whip. He collects himself, and upon being struck by the whip he lashes out at the warden. His reactions display a level of fear and aggression that arises in many of the protagonists of O'Neill's expressionist dramas. Brutus is known to have been a convict, though his exact crime is unknown. It can be reasonably assumed that it could have been due to an act of violence, however small.

Brutus's control over his people establishes him as an outsider, as it sets him up to a spiritual level, rather than a physical one. When he escapes from his conviction, he does not attempt to join with the West Indian community. Instead, he uses superstition to reinvent himself as a type of god, one who can be killed only by a silver bullet. He uses his position of power to steal from the community and to rule them as he was ruled in America. As Brutus states, "I cracks de whip and dey jumps through" (11). Brutus does not seem to realize that he has become like the men who exploited him back home. He abandons his past to create a new life for himself on the island. As the ruler of this island, Brutus is unable to adapt to their world. He separates himself by declaring himself Emperor, therefore relinquishing any chance he has to conform to the village. Brutus's role as an outsider leads him to the expressionist visions in the forest, as well his death.

In *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill explores class distinction and the dehumanization of the working class. Yank is an everyman, like many expressionist protagonists, and represents a larger group of people. He is a brutish character who has complete control over his world and asserts his dominance over others like him. James Robinson notes that Yank is the extreme version of the "masculine primitive" (102). He views this type of masculine ideal as a reaction to the rise of female empowerment in the early twentieth century. This is the first reason for Yank's difficulty in fitting into his world. He represents the old idea of masculinity, or at least what O'Neill believes to be that old ideal. Robinson observes, "O'Neill responds in the letter to an old photograph of the Barrett House (the hotel where he was born) with a drunk pictured loitering outside. 'You forget,' he writes Kennedy, 'that there were men in those days and when they decided it was fitting they should go on a

drunk, they went on a drunk! Not like the weaklings of today...In the old days when I was born, a man especially one from Kilkenny went on a five-year drunk and finished by licking four cops, and then went home to raise hell because dinner was late'" (99).

O'Neill imagines Yank in terms of that outdated concept of man, one who takes what he wants and lives his life as he sees fit. This is indicated by Yank's primal desire for destruction. As he declares to the secretary of the I.W.W. in scene seven, "Dat's what I'm after to blow up de steel, knock all de steel in de woild up to de moon. Dat'll fix tings" (192). Yank believes that the only way to fix society is to destroy it and start anew. He is willing to carry out this deed alone, so long as his goal is met. Yank's penchant for violence alienates him from the other members of the I.W.W., who forcibly remove him from the premises. This final act of rejection leads Yank towards the road to his death.

Reuben, the protagonist of *Dynamo*, begins the play as an insider, but due to the workings of the various parental figures, ends as an outsider. Reuben is conflicted, as his religious worldview slowly comes into question. It begins as Ramsay Fife, the father of the girl Reuben loves, tricks Reuben into thinking he is a murderer. Reuben brings the story to his father, who is eager to bring down Ramsay. However, it is revealed that the story Ramsay told to Reuben is simply taken out of the newspaper. This act of humiliation has a profound effect on Reuben. He is betrayed by Ada, Ramsay's daughter, who knew about her father's plan to trick Reuben, and by his mother, who reveals the secret to his father. Reuben feels as if he has been abandoned by everyone. He declares that he will break off his previously established worldviews, shouting "There is no God! No God but Electricity!" (*Dynamo* 80). Reuben breaks himself off from his world, and makes himself an outsider.

The deaths of each of these protagonists are all violent and brutal. Brutus is shot in the dark, Yank is crushed, and Reuben is electrocuted. Brutus is undone by the life he is trying to avoid, while Yank and Reuben are destroyed by that which they seek. Each of these men is searching for something, whether it's identity, escape, or religion. Yank's journey is one to find out where exactly he belongs. His inability to connect with the workers is only one example of his troubles with conformity. His primary problem lies in the insult he receives from Mildred, being referred to as a "hairy ape". This comparison stays with Yank and drives the action of the play. It is not until Yank meets Mildred that he begins to question his role in life. This comparison to a brute is not limited to Yank, and is used in O'Neill's stage directions, as he notes: "The men themselves should resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at" (141). This association with the stokehole workers is Yank's only connection with his peers. Before he becomes aware of his situation, he is happy to shovel coal. He takes pride in his work, and declaims "I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild moves! It—dat's me!—de new dat's moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel—steel—steel!" (151). Mildred's insult causes Yank to become self-aware, which leads to a break from with his past. Yank pushes himself away from anyone who might empathize with his plight. He berates Paddy, who shares his ape-like appearance, and abandons Long, who tries to bond with him over his hatred of the upper class. Yank is left alone at the end of the drama, when he confronts the object of his

insult. He meets his death with the one thing he believes he can relate to. He is undone by a power, which is more aggressive than Yank himself. His death is an attempt to find belonging, to find someone who is just like himself, and Yank's death does provide some type of connection, however brief.

It is important to note that Yank's death occurs only after he has ended his journey for belonging. This type of trajectory is a trait shared by many expressionist protagonists and often seems to be the cause of their death. Yank has difficulty fitting into the human world because he is brutish and violent. His urge for destruction alienates him from the I.W.W. and earns him a place in jail when he attempts to assault the man in Scene Five. These desires make Yank more relatable to beasts rather than to men. It is only fitting then that Yank should meet his end surrounded by those who are just like him. It is, as O'Neill states in the final stage direction, "perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs" (198).

The journey and death of Brutus Jones are very similar to Yank's. Emil Roy notes that "Brutus Jones and Yank Smith are not so much summoned to adventure as they are ejected from paradise into a fallen world, although neither Jones's throne room nor Yank's stokehold much resemble our conception of paradise" (24). One should note that Brutus is hunted down by the village he tormented and is on a psychological journey which uncovers his ancestral past. Brutus's death is not even witnessed onstage. The audience merely hears a series of gunshots, after which his body is dragged out from the woods. Brutus is killed by silver bullets, in part due to the myth he spread about himself. Brutus is undone by the torment he caused to the villages, and his final moment comes as a result of his lies about his immortality. His death is a result of his harsh choices, and his rejection of conformity.

Brutus chooses to not become a regular human like other villagers, and instead separates himself as a god. Once again, we see a protagonist whose inability to belong leads to his death.

Like Yank, Brutus goes on a journey of self-realization before his death. Each scene in the forest of *The Emperor Jones* dives deeper and deeper into the psychology of the titular character. He uncovers his own past, as well as the past of his ancestors. Abdo notes that “he is doomed to shed the trappings of white society and degenerate into his original form, falling into the abyss of his primitive” (29). Brutus’s journey leads him to encounter visions of a slave auction, a slave ship, and a primal witch doctor. Each of these memories leads Brutus further and further back toward his ancestral home. Brutus’s reaction to these ghosts is to fire his gun at them. The fear of being hunted down while encountering these visions causes distress and leads to the violence that ends each scene. He hopes he can destroy his past and abandon his culture. This rejection tells the audience that Brutus has completely given up on trying to adjust to his people. Brutus rejects the world he was born into, much as many of the protagonists discussed here do.

Reuben’s death in *Dynamo* is yet another example of the violence seen in the American expressionist plays. He begins his journey as a member of a group, but his clash with the parental figures in his life causes him to become an outsider, a pagan worshipper of the electric God. This God that Reuben worships causes his death by electrocution. His death comes after he shoots and kills Ada. This act of double violence ends the plays and leaves a profound impact on the audience. Thomas R. Dash of *Women’s Wear Daily* observed “Even the least sophisticated playgoer must have been a ferment of dizzying

thoughts hours after the final curtain was rung down on the tragedy” (Whir). It is also important to note that Reuben sees his electric God as a maternal figure, one that fills the void of the one he lost. Reuben’s mother dies as a result of Reuben’s absence, and the guilt of this combined with the worship of electricity causes Reuben to spiral into madness. In his final moments, he cries out “I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!” (158). This final moment shows the fear in Reuben’s heart. The rejection of his past causes him grief and leads to his touching of the dynamo, which electrocutes him. Reuben is a loner who is killed by that which he believed would save him. This is just one more case of a dead outsider in American expressionism.

There are several similarities between each of these protagonists. The most notable is each of the protagonists grows increasingly more violent until the point of his death. Yank and Brutus have a tendency for violence which is established before their deaths, while Reuben only grows violent after Act 1. Yank's violence is first seen in Scene 1 when he attempts to fight Paddy. This opening scene establishes the violent actions that the audience will see later. Yank continues to assault those around him, from his fellow stokehole workers, to a random man on the street. Yank's violent attacks on others increase until he reaches the I.W.W. in Scene seven, where he describes a desire for destruction on a large scale. Yank's desire is driving him further away from humanity and into the realm of beasts. It's only fitting that Yank's highest level of violence occurs in the scene prior to his death. Yank is killed before his actions can grow, by a creature believed to be as violent as him.

Brutus Jones's violence is executed through his paranoia as he is driven deeper and deeper into the psychological forest. Brutus's violence can be seen as a result of the fear he feels encountering his visions. He attempts to fire his revolver at nearly every specter he comes across, with few results. Brutus becomes increasingly more paranoid as his journey goes on, ending with his encounter with the alligator god. He has allowed himself to be enveloped by his fear, and he reacts in the only way he knows how. Violence had been both the solution and the cause of all of Brutus's problems prior to his death, so his attempt to shoot every enemy he sees falls into the character the audience has come to know. His acts of violence end with his death at the hands of the villagers. It is fitting that the instrument he used to control the people of the small, island village undoes Emperor Jones.

Reuben's violence may only begin to occur after Act 1, but the results are the same as with Yank and Brutus. Prior to the moment of his death, Reuben brings Ada to the dynamo, to see the powerful new mother-god he has come to worship. However, his frustration with his new belief causes him to shoot Ada, an act that he instantly regrets. Reuben's act of violence upsets him and causes him to electrocute himself. Unlike Yank and Jones, Reuben actually regrets his act of violence. Prior to his death, Reuben had restricted his acts of violence to his words. Once he puts those thoughts into actions however, he is unable to cope with the repercussions. Reuben appears to be the least violent of the protagonists mentioned, but his violent actions do cause the only death by a protagonist's own hand in the three plays discussed. In this sense, Reuben is the most violent one of all. It is important to understand how Reuben's act of violence is a result of his sense of losing his former religious identity.

The protagonists of the three plays discussed also share a clash of old world views with those of new world ones. In James Robinson's article "The Masculine Primitive and *The Hairy Ape*", he examines Yank's masculinity as reflective of the late 19th century. Yank represents the old values, which leads in part to his alienation. His overly masculine attitude allows him to control his fellow workers, and yet it also prevents him from fitting in. It's also important to note that Yank is a worker who is slowly being replaced by more efficient machine systems. The workers of the stokehole are valued only by the amount of work they can provide for the bourgeoisie. The political ramblings of Long illustrate the plight of the workers and the new mindset of unionization. Yank relies on the work that he controls, and he asserts that he is the reason the machines move. He is unaware that his work and lifestyle are tied to the machine. He relies just as much on the steamship as it relies on him for power. Yank needs the work to gain stability, and to give him the purpose to drive the workers and the boat forward.

Brutus's Jones is undone by his attempt to bring his old world into the new. He uses the technology of his home to terrorize the villagers. He conjures up new myths as he asserts himself as the god-emperor. Brutus wants to create a new world, one in which he will erase all signs of his past life. He seeks to do this by destroying and controlling the new world that already exists. This clash of cultures causes fear in the villagers, who seek to create silver bullets to kill their tyrannical ruler. This clash of worldviews is central to Brutus's journey, as it represents his failure to adapt to a new world. By trying to control the world rather than accept it, Brutus causes his own death.

Finally, there is the conflict in *Dynamo* between religion and technology. These two opposing forces are first illustrated in the two families of the play, the Lights (religion) and the Fifes (technology). The patriarchs of these families have an intense dislike for one another, which creates a *Romeo and Juliet*-type love in their children. Reuben Light is deeply tied to his religion, but his love for Ada Fife causes him to try to accept the technological point of view. Reuben's old world is his family, and his new world is the family of Ada. The conflicts between the two families are central to troubles and inner turmoil experienced by Reuben. Discovering both families are using him, Reuben rejects his upbringing, and blends the two differing views. He becomes a worshiper of technology, specifically electricity. This new worldview leads Reuben to bring Ada to the dynamo, and therefore to his death. Reuben's new religion is also what the Expressionist playwrights fear; technology, specifically people being killed and taken over by growing technologies.

In speaking of O'Neill's expressionist dramas, one must also examine two other works, *The Great God Brown* (1926) and *Strange Interlude* (1928), which carry elements of the aesthetic. The former is decidedly more expressionist, and gives personification to masks as a source of identity. The latter is much more realistic, yet it features the same dialogue style as *Dynamo*. The characters speak their thoughts aloud, and these brief monologues are characterized by short, choppy sentences. What makes these two plays different from the three that have been previously discussed is the level of violence. While *The Great God Brown* features some violent actions, it lacks the type of violence leading to someone's death. The same can be said of *Strange Interlude*, which includes violence in subtext, but not much in action. Violence is the one of the key factors to linking American

expressionism, but there are of course exceptions from the case. O'Neill's dance with expressionism was vast, and represents a variety of different approaches to expressionism.

Eugene O'Neill is the one American playwright who experimented the most with the form known as expressionism. His plays *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *Dynamo* all fall into this category, while his plays *Strange Interlude* and *The Great God Brown* have elements of expressionism. These plays are connected by a sense of violence and alienation, traits that are viewed in other expressionist dramas of the era. These types of dramas illustrate the theatrical scene of the 1920s, and the nature of expressionism itself.

CHAPTER 3

ELMER RICE

Despite having fewer expressionist works than O'Neill, Elmer Rice remains at the forefront of American expressionism. *The Adding Machine* (1923) and *The Subway* (1929) both serve as cases of the American variation on the German form. Both plays deal with the mechanization of society, and the consequences that come from a world of automation. These consequences manifest themselves in forms of violence, both against the protagonists and against the other characters. The violent acts caused by the characters in Rice's plays are the result of frustration with one's state of life. The protagonists of both plays lead cold, mechanical lives, but each long for something more meaningful. They both experience difficulty in communicating with the opposite sex, and their sexual frustration is what partly leads to their downfall.

Elmer Rice was no stranger to playwriting prior to *The Adding Machine*. His first play, *On Trial* (1914), was a great success, and earned Rice a place in the growing American theatre scene. In 1922, Elmer Rice experienced an intense desire to write a new play. Originally conceived as a marriage play (*Minority* 189), this piece of drama enveloped Rice as he wrote night and day. He finished his play in just under 17 days, and titled this piece *The Adding Machine*. This expressionist play portrays the dehumanization of the worker in a mechanized society and his inability to relate to others. Rice has stated that he never intended for the play to become expressionistic: it that was merely the style that emerged from his period of writing. As he puts it "this play came right out of the unconscious. It was not a deliberate, conscious thing of sitting down and thinking it out. It came right out of my

insides" (Elwood 7). Shortly after the play's release in 1923, Rice wrote another expressionist play titled *The Subway* (1929), which deals with what Rice referred to as "the maladjustments of a mechanized society" (*Minority* 203). Unfortunately, he was unable to get this play initially produced and would not see a production until 1929.

The various settings of the play help to define the work as expressionism, particularly the second scene, as well as the final scene. After Zero has been told he is being fired, the set slowly begins to turn, as music and various sound effects begin to play. The characters stand perfectly still, save for the mouth of the Boss, which continues to speak inaudibly. The music grows louder and more erratic as the set spins faster and faster. Zero's world is spiraling out of control, and the setting of the play reflects this. In the final scene of the play, Zero is seen typing away on an adding machine, as the room is filled with paper-tape. Zero has reached the zenith of what he is capable of, that is, adding facts and numbers. His mind is entirely devoted to numbers, and the final scene of the play displays exactly what he values himself as.

The protagonists of *The Adding Machine* (Mr. Zero) and *The Subway* (Sophie) both experience mechanical lives that lack substance. Mr. Zero is stuck in a loveless marriage, must work a job he hates, and keeps friendships with people who seem to only loosely care about him. Zero's job as an accountant has reduced everything in his life into numbers. He, his wife, and his friends are all labelled by numbers. This projection of the self is the key characteristic of expressionism. It represents the power that Zero's job has over him. His thoughts are cluttered with numbers, and this in turn leads to Zero's apathy. Dennis G. Jerz observes that "Zero does, in fact, think of himself as a machine, in that he values himself

only for his ability to work” (23). Since Zero is a machine, he would have no problem killing another human being. A machine has no consequences for killing a man. Even Zero’s final moment onstage has him working, punching numbers into a giant adding machine.

It is important to note that the violence that Mr. Zero enacts comes as a result of his work. When he is told that he is being laid off, Zero’s mind begins to spiral, as indicated by the rotating set and mechanized sounds at the end of scene two. The audience is told that this moment is what makes Zero lash out, though we never see the actual act of violence. It is established in the first two scenes that Zero is a man who lacks substance. He works a monotonous job and comes home to a wife who lacks any level of appreciation towards him. There is no indication that Zero is a violent man, or that he has anger issues. Therefore, the loss of his job triggers a brief change in character for Zero. Rather than apathetically accepting his situation, he lashes out. His work with numbers is central to who Zero is internally. Without his profession, he will be left without purpose. Even when he is reincarnated at the end of the play, Zero is drawn back to the world of numbers. They are a part of him and make up the man whom he believes himself to be.

Another reason Zero’s firing is so impactful is the importance of having a job among Zero’s family and coworkers. His wife constantly berates him for not making more money, and asserts that his job cannot be that difficult. She states “If you was any kind of a man you'd have a decent job by now an' I'd be gettin' some comfort out of life—instead of bein' just a slave, washin' pots an' standin' over the hot stove. I've stood it for twenty-five years an' I guess I'll have to stand it twenty-five more” (6). Zero is constantly reminded about his status at his job, to the point that he doesn’t even attempt to fight back. Mrs. Zero has

berated her husband to the point of defeat. He does make an attempt to gain a raise at work, but unfortunately is fired before he can move up in the world. One should also note that Mrs. Zero needs him to provide for her, to give her the money to see the films she raves about. When Zero is imprisoned for murder, one of the first things Mrs. Zero says to him in prison is how much her funerary dress, which she is wearing, cost her. Zero is reduced to a number by his wife as well as his boss. He has no identity outside of numbers. Zero's firing causes him to kill his boss, who tried to replace Zero with a more efficient machine. Zero's numerical identity removes his humanity, and his act of violence can only be seen as inevitable.

In *The Subway*, the protagonist Sophie experiences a great deal of sexual frustration, which builds until her suicide at the end of the drama. Sophie is the one expressionist protagonist who does not enact violence against someone or something else. Instead, her act of violence affects her, and only her, at least within the timeframe of the play. Her suicide is the result of feeling used by the men in her life. Her attitude towards sexuality seems to indicate some past trauma, as suggested by her demonization of pleasure. When Sophie is on the subway, she sees the men as wearing animal masks, an indicator of what she believes men to be. The first scene tells the audience that Sophie has had at least one failed relationship. The audience also learns that Sophie is considered attractive in the office, and is often reduced to a sexual object. One of the men Sophie works with, Hurst, comments "Nice pair of legs" (19) when Sophie must get up on a ladder. When she returns to her desk, she becomes aware of Hurst staring at her. As he does, the stage directions note "her dress becomes diaphanous, revealing the outline of her figure. She feels uneasy

and confused, writhing under Hurst's unremitting gaze" (20). She is kept in the office as a novelty, something to be looked at. This no doubt adds to the guilt that Sophie feels when she forms a relationship with Eugene (a new employee) and they become intimate. She begins to question her virtue, which ultimately leads to her suicide at the end. The workplace has taken away what made Sophie human, and like Zero, unable to make a legitimate connection.

It's worthwhile to note that, like Zero, Sophie's character is the result of what other people think of her, or at least what she believes others think of her. The audience knows that she feels guilty about being intimate with Eugene, as indicated by the voices she hears that create a mock trial. In this "trial", she is given a glimpse of a future wherein she becomes pregnant, has an abortion, and dies as a result of this. This indicates Sophie's troubles with becoming intimate. She feels guilty for giving herself to Eugene, despite the fact that she wanted a fulfilling, sexual relationship, as indicated by Scene five. One need only look at Sophie's commentary on Eugene's act of holding her hand at the movies. Despite watching the movie, Sophie utters "I oughtn't let him . . . What's the matter with me? I'm getting dizzy . . . Oh he's hurting me-he's hurting me! He'll break my fingers . . . I can feel his nails, they're digging into me. Go on! Hurt me some more . . . Let me go . . . Squeeze me tighter! . . . Tighter! Tighter! Why doesn't he squeeze me tighter!" (77-79). Her passionate connection with Eugene is unlike anything Sophie has ever experienced. This passion will lead to the guilt that Sophie experiences towards the end of the play.

Both of the protagonists in Rice's expressionist plays have difficulty in connecting with members of the opposite sex, which also partly leads to their violence. In *The Adding*

Machine, we are given two examples of this: Mrs. Zero and Daisy. It has already been established that the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Zero is toxic. Zero is not respected by his wife, and in turn has no love to give for the woman. Jerz observes that the first scene is “one brief sample of what is obviously the continuous non-communication in the marriage” (23). Zero does not speak for this entire scene, an indication of his acceptance of his loveless marriage. He is unable to speak, because he no longer cares about what his wife has to say, even after she begins to berate him. She is aware of all of his faults, from his voyeurism to his inability to succeed work. Both of these characters keep each other in a constant state of misery, as evidenced by Mr. Zero’s indifference and Mrs. Zero’s verbal tirade (Jerz 23). What makes the relationship even more toxic is that the Zeroes are aware of their failed ability to properly communicate, and they simply accept it. As stated by Mrs. Zero in Scene 1, “it’s my own fault I guess. I was a fool for marryin’ you. If I’d ‘a’ had any sense, I’d ‘a’ known what you were from the start. I wish I had to do it over again” (5). This unfulfilled marriage causes Zero to seek out love in other places, such as with his coworkers.

Zero engages in two semi-extramarital affairs, one with Judy (the woman he spies on) and one with Daisy (the woman with whom he works). Neither of these women actually has an affair with Mr. Zero, and yet the possibility of such an action continues to come across his mind. The relationships are a fantasy, much like the movies that Mrs. Zero and Daisy are obsessed with. The affair with Judy is completely one-sided, and relies on Zero’s act of voyeurism. Judy speaks of Zero in scene 6 “[Contemptuously]: Him? He was mama's white-haired boy. We lived in the same house. Across the airshaft, see? I used to see him lookin' in my window. I guess his wife musta seen him, too. Anyhow, they went and turned

the bulls on me. And now I'm out and he's in" (36). Zero's "affair" is ended by Mrs. Zero, who has Judy arrested. Zero's desire for another woman clearly illustrates his frustration with his marriage, and his position in life. The other affair in Zero's life is the one he attempts to engage in with Daisy. Despite never acting on it while they are alive, it is clearly understood that Zero and Daisy have feelings for each other. They admit to having near-personal moments, and yet their obligations in life keep them from actually interacting with each other. When given the opportunity to begin an affair with Daisy, Zero still manages to not go through with it. She remembers how his wife didn't come to a company picnic, and the two of them sat together. Zero again gets the opportunity to be with Daisy in Elysian Fields scene. He comes very close, resolving to stay with her in the afterlife. However, he becomes irritated when he learns that everyone can stay in the fields as long as they like. He refuses to accept this world, and decides he would rather move on. He leaves Daisy again, without a second thought. Zero ends the play without anyone to connect with. One can also view Daisy as a victim of the expressionist plays of Rice. Unable to connect with the one person she loves, Daisy feels as if she does not belong. Her frustration will eventually lead to her eventual suicide. Daisy's action illustrates the violence of expressionist plays on all the characters involved, not just on the protagonists.

In *The Subway*, Sophie is exposed to two different relationships. The first is with George, the man she is with at the start of the play. The drama opens with Sophie working in an office, while George brings her a flower. However, he didn't even go to the trouble of buying the flower, as it is a gift from his sister. It becomes clearly established that Sophie is an afterthought for George. He tells Sophie that the reason he hasn't come to see her lately

is because he is taking correspondence course in Automotive Mechanics in order to get a job out of town. He then tells her that he will be leaving in a week. In the course of a few short minutes, the audience learns that George doesn't care much about Sophie. Like the George of Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), he is only concerned with his own pleasure and happiness. Sophie simply accepts this choice, despite feeling betrayed. She, like the Zeros, accepts her fate, even at the cost of her own happiness. Her toxic relationship with George will help to fuel the passion of Sophie's next relationship, which partly leads to her eventual suicide.

Sophie's relationship with Eugene is significantly more sincere, at least on the surface. Sophie feels passionately about Eugene, and her repressed sexuality begins to blossom. Hence, Sophie begins a carnal affair with Eugene, one that dominates Sophie's thoughts. Unlike George, Eugene appears to be considerate, and seems to consider Sophie's feelings and emotions. However, he is no different from George, being a "conscience-less Lothario who uses women to gratify his libidinous desires" (Walker 183). His affair with Sophie is one of high energy and implied desires. This connection is deeply erotic, something Sophie both loves and hates. Much like Helen Jones's affair, Sophie's affair is passionate, as it is new love, and therefore in what some might call the "honeymoon phase". Her relationship becomes sexual very quickly, as evidenced by Scene five. Here, Sophie and Eugene go to a movie theatre, but as Judith A. Walker notes in her book *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre*, this scene is filled with strong, sexual overtones (184).

Sophie's break-up with Eugene is extremely significant, as it leads Sophie to the subway station, where she will kill herself. In scene seven Sophie learns that Eugene is taking a job out of town, and it is implied that their relationship will then end. This is not unlike the end of Sophie's relationship with George, who also leaves her for a better job in another town. Sophie is conflicted; she allowed herself to open up to another human being, and yet she meets the same results as before. Sophie believes that these people are using her body, as illustrated by her projections of what others think of her. In scene eight, Sophie is exposed to the voices that judge her for engaging in a sexual relationship with another man. It is worthwhile to note that this scene occurs after the affair has ended. The mock trial illustrates that pain and frustration that Sophie feels. Her mind is being torn apart, and she is riddled with guilt and remorse.

These feelings lead her to the subway station. Sophie associates the subway with two things: Eugene and lecherous men. In scene two, while Sophie is riding on the subway, she imagines that all of the men are staring at her. The lights go dark, and when they return all of the men have animal masks. She screams, and the scene ends. Sophie also associates the subway with Eugene, who constantly speaks of the power and beauty of the machine. When she comes to the station in the final scene, Sophie is clearly at her limit. She is in her nightgown, barefoot, and Rice writes that she "*Keeps looking back, nervous and frightened*" (139). Here she encounters Hurst, the man from her work who commented on the shape of her legs. Hurst attempts to get close to Sophie, to whom he is clearly sexually attracted. Sophie cannot handle it anymore. She throws herself in front of the subway, effectively ending her life and bringing her close to Eugene, one last time. Sophie's act of suicide comes

as a result of constantly being sexualized at work. She believes that all men who get close to her want one thing, and will do anything to get it. Sophie's preoccupation with sexual desire could be an indicator of sexual abuse. One can observe that Sophie's family is cold and emotionless, but the hints of sexual abuse would be difficult to find. However, 1920s audiences would have been familiar with Freud, and the concept of sexuality on the mind. Therefore, one could say that Sophie is a victim of abuse. Her violent reaction to Hurst's advances shows the audience the peak of the pain and hurt that Sophie has felt, both onstage and offstage.

The protagonists of both of these plays illustrate the violence that draws itself to expressionism. *The Adding Machine* came about as a result of an intense desire to write. Rice never attempted to create an expressionist play, and yet that is what came out of him. One can say that Rice's exposure to the German Expressionist plays fueled his writing, but Rice denies this claim. One must wonder why *The Adding Machine* came out expressionistic, and why it is tied to violence. One could guess that violence is the natural course of action in expressionism. The protagonists of these types of plays are often outsiders who face difficulty in adjusting to a changing worldview. This frustration causes the character to lash out against other characters, as well as themselves. Violence is the most extreme reaction the characters may have, and can be impactful on the weight of the play. Elmer Rice was drawn to this aesthetic movement, whether he was aware of it or not. His protagonists are lost in the world of the machines. They do not fit with the other cogs and pieces, instead being misshapen and unable to conform, their frustration and desire for connection with other pieces of the machine are what leads to their deaths. Zero wants to be a corporate

big wig, one who takes advantage of the system to gain wealth and power. Sophie wants to be loved sincerely, and not to be reduced to her sexuality. Both Zero and Sophie are unable to get what they want, and this leads to a murder and a suicide respectively.

CHAPTER 4

SOPHIE TREADWELL

In 1928, Sophie Treadwell created the play *Machinal*, which took inspiration from the Ruth Snyder murder trial and turned into a perfect example of the expressionistic form. From the dialogue to the length of the scenes, everything about this play breathes expressionism. The protagonist Helen Jones is a woman who is trapped. She is held back by her family, her job, and her “female obligation”. Once again, we become witness to a protagonist who has difficulty in conforming to the status quo. These expressionist characters are pushed to their breaking point, hence the broken-down worlds usually represented in the scenery. In *Machinal*, Treadwell uses the workplace, the marriage and affair, and the court system to illustrate the isolation and loneliness of Helen Jones. This type of loneliness causes Helen to lash out and murder her husband. The violence in this work is unseen, but it still represents a key part of the play.

In 1927, Ruth Snyder and her lover Judd Gray were put on trial for the murder of Snyder’s husband, and were subsequently executed in January of 1928. One of the reporters for the trial was Sophie Treadwell, who had received some initial success for her play *Gringo* (1922). Treadwell would have to work quickly, as her expressionist take on Snyder’s story, *Machinal* (1928), premiered nearly eight months later (Strand 163). Ginger Strand believes that one can read *Machinal* (1928) as a feminist revision of *The Adding Machine* (1923), and it is difficult to overlook the similarities (Neologism 163). Oddly enough, the play is also similar to *The Subway* (1929), despite the fact that Rice wrote the

play before the premiere of *Machinal* (1928). The success of *Street Scene* (1928) allowed Rice to finally produce his second expressionist work. Rice is aware of Treadwell as an expressionist playwright, and it is likely that he saw *Machinal* (1928), and saw traits of both of his expressionist plays, despite the failure of the second. The success of *Machinal* (1928) as an expressionist drama could very well have prompted Rice to attempt to release the play again, and it is difficult to overlook the main character's name, Sophie, and not see the similarities between this play and *Machinal* (1928).

Treadwell needed to create a play in which an audience could sympathize with a woman who murdered her husband, something which could not be achieved in the Snyder-Gray trial. She most likely had seen *The Adding Machine* (1923), and knew the characteristics of expressionism would provide the best tools for telling her story. This approach allows the audience to witness a story from the perspective of the main character, and thus provides the best medium for creating a character that an audience can truly empathize with. As stated by Elmer Rice "The author attempts not so much to depict events faithfully as to convey to the spectator what seems to him their inner significance...This, I suppose, is what is meant by expressionism" (Valgema 62). This is the expressionistic technique of *die Austrahlugen des Ich* in *Machinal*. The audience sees the events of the play through Helen's experience. They hear her thoughts spoken aloud, and live inside the head of this tortured woman. The world around is slightly distorted, and reflects how she sees the world. As she is an anxious and nervous young woman, the outside world appears frightening. The mechanical sounds are amplified, and pervade the

mind of Helen Jones. The aural distortion give the audience the most sympathetic portrayal of Snyder's story.

The murder of Snyder's husband is not the only connection of the cases to violence. The widely circulated picture of Snyder's moment of execution features a horrifying image. The execution is noted for being horrific, to the point that one man vomited immediately after leaving the execution room. The death of Snyder is just as horrific as that of her husband. Both of these acts of violence occur in the play, and serve as both the climax and the resolution.

One need only to look Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* to understand that Snyder's marital situation was not uncommon for women in early twentieth century. Glaspell's play was also inspired by a woman's murder of her husband, and serves a testimony for why she may have killed him. Women like this were trapped in loveless marriages. They were abused by their husbands either physically or emotionally. When a person is forced live and love someone who causes such pain, they have only one form of escape. They can either kill themselves, or kill the cause of their sadness. One must believe then that women like Helen did exist in America, and that she represents a certain type of everyman. She stands for all of the women who have been abused, and who feel as if they have no way out of their marriage.

The first factor indicating Helen Jones's isolation occurs at her workplace. Like Rice's handling of Act I in *The Adding Machine*, Treadwell represents work as a dehumanizing experience. Helen's coworkers are turned into finely-oiled machines who perform repetitive tasks in sync. The dehumanization in *Machinal* (1928) is represented through Helen, as well

as with her fellow coworkers. As Weiss observes, “When the Filing Clerk stumbles on Q, the audience is made to recognize that this office worker has become so completely absorbed by his work that he cannot comprehend that nothing is filed under Q; his imagination has been filed away. Later in the play, the relevance of Q becomes clear. Nothing can be filed under this letter because there is no peace and quiet, that which the young woman longs for, in the office” (7). The office functions as a large machine, with all of the employees acting as its individual parts, and being thrust into this machine, Helen cannot find a place to fit in. The other coworkers are aware of this, and note their various issues with Helen and her work. Her life becomes more chaotic as she learns that her boss wants to engage in a relationship with her. Treadwell is illustrating the marriage as a form of an escape from the machine. Only through marriage will Helen be able to escape from being crushed by the monotony of work. Her thoughts illustrate her conflicts, as she thinks “hurry-job-no job-no money-installments due-no money-money-George H. Jones-money” (11). It is important to note that Helen Jones does not create anything. Like the many of the other protagonists discussed in this thesis, she is a pawn for someone else’s creation. This forces her to become a part in the machine, working for the operator. Helen’s rejection of the workplace is a sign of her difficulty adjusting to the world she is forced into.

Helen Jones also experiences a one-sided love at her workplace, that of her boss and future husband. She knows she does not love him, but her difficulty fitting into her position at work prompts her to begin the relationship. Her relationship is also encouraged by her coworkers, who note

TELEPHONE GIRL: ...No! Tell him no!

STENOGRAPHER: If she doesn't she'll lose her job

ADDING CLERK: Fired.

FILING CLERK: The sack!

TELEPHONE GIRL: (*on the defensive*) And if she doesn't?

ADDING CLERK: Then she'll come to work in a taxi

TELEPHONE GIRL: Work?

FILING CLERK: No work.

She knows that if she turns down a date with George Jones that she will lose her job, and would thus be unable to support her mother. She needs to keep her job, as she is the sole source of income for her household. Again, Treadwell is making the audience see that Helen had no choice, and has to engage in a relationship with her boss, despite not actually loving him. Work has terrified her, and she does not want to lose her humanity. She has seen what the office has turned the others into: cogs who work together to power the needs of George Jones. Her escape is the exact opposite of Zero's, in that she goes to a husband to escape from work.

Like Mr. Zero, Helen eventually kills her boss, although they appear to be for different reasons. Zero kills because his role as a cog in the machine is taken away. Helen kills to free herself from a loveless marriage. Both characters seek to escape from their current situations. This manifests itself in the form of murder of those whom they see as destroying their worlds. Helen is forced into marrying George to provide for her mother, and her own happiness becomes second place to that of everyone else. She continues to deny her

emotions, causing her to reject the world around her. Helen is not allowed to search out her own happiness. Strand observes that Helen is alienated by the roles that others have given her (164). Helen is expected to fall for her boss, to become a mother, and to put the needs of others above her own. Those around her, from the coworkers to her mother, push the roles they believe Helen should play. She is denied the ability to choose. Strand also notes that *Machinal* is a play about the law of language, which “ultimately sentences the protagonist not only to death, but to silence” (163). Helen’s final moment, when she is cut off while crying out, becomes a poignant moment, one which rings out after the curtain has dropped.

Helen’s marriage is also a sign of her role as an outsider. Helen does not want to play the traditional female role, at least not with her husband. She is reluctant to get married, and she is afraid of having a baby. Once she performs the latter, she rejects her child, seeing it as an extension of her husband. The marriage of Helen Jones to George Jones in *Machinal* is similar to that of the Zeros in *The Adding Machine* (1923), but the misery here is more one-sided. George appears to be completely happy with the marriage. He amuses himself with his wife’s “quirks” and doesn’t think much of how she shrinks away from his very touch. He does not see what the audience sees. Her disgust with his touch is evidence of the lack of any real pleasure in their marriage. Helen doesn’t even want to spend the night with him on the wedding night, crying out for her mother before they copulate. This is a behavior that Treadwell pulled from the case of Ruth Snyder. In Judd Gray’s testimony, he stated “She said she had never really known what sexual pleasures were with her husband” (Jones 491). She cannot connect with George, either emotionally or sexually. She is unable to even

like him, let alone love him. Treadwell is making the audience understand why Helen would want to have an affair. She needed to illustrate a woman's lack of love, something which can be difficult to achieve in a realistic setting. These brief interactions with her husband also serve as reasons why Helen would kill her husband. She feels no love for her child, and one can assume that her dislike for her husband is even greater. He is the origin of all of her problems. Therefore, she believes she had no other choice but to murder him. The violent act in this play is centered on Helen's perspective. We see her justifications, her anxiety, and the life she could be having. Each of these moments is meant to make the audience empathize with Helen. By creating an expressionist play, Treadwell is able to create a character whom the audience feels for. They see and experience the world as Helen did, and therefore relate to her experience.

Part of what makes Helen's marriage so tragic is that she must have an affair to find real love. Helen Jones finds her happiness in the Lover, a traveling businessman whose worldly travels entice Helen. This relationship is passionate and intense, something not seen in Helen's marriage. Their affair is playful at times, and serves as a distraction for Helen. For once, Helen meets someone who actually cares for how she feels. This man isn't obligated to love her, nor she him, and yet they still manage to find a bit of happiness between them. Scene six best illustrates their relationship. Here they have become intimate, and as noted by Jennifer Jones "[Treadwell] emphasizes the importance of this scene by returning to a naturalistic style of dialogue, asserting that this 'illicit' love is more natural and necessary than the degrading sexual manipulation of the woman's marriage" (492).

Of course, this relationship is not without its faults. The Lover gives Helen the idea of how to murder her husband, and this ultimately leads to her downfall. Helen has had a taste of happiness, which makes her even more aware of the depression of her marital situation. She is ultimately abandoned by her lover, who flees to Mexico and names her as the culprit of the murder. This is contrasted by the actions of the actual Judd Gray, who was executed along with Ruth Snyder (Gewirtz 105). Treadwell makes the Lover leave in order to illicit sympathy in the audience. Helen is abandoned by the one person whom she thought loved her, and is thus devastated beyond the point of no return. She has reached out to find happiness wherever she could, and is turned down time and time again. It is her journey that makes the reader understand why she could kill her husband.

Since the inspiration for *Machinal* came from the trial of Ruth Snyder, it can be reasonably assumed that the trial sequence is crucially important for understanding the play. The trial of Helen Jones is considerably different from the trial of Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine*, as it becomes more like an actual trial rather than a gross exaggeration. Helen is placed on the witness stand, and is questioned by the lawyer until her story begins to falter. The trial in this play shows how the court twists Helen's narrative (Strand 163). The courts cross examination illustrates the holes in Helen's story and leads to her downfall. Of course, this scene is meant to mirror the courtroom of Ruth Snyder, at which Treadwell was present. She saw how Ruth Snyder was portrayed by the prosecution as being a manipulative woman, one who used her body to get rid of her husband (Strand 166). Jennifer Jones has noted that "*Machinal* is the testimony, disallowed by the court of law, that Treadwell wished to introduce into the court of public opinion" (*Defense* 486). The

people of the time clearly could not empathize with Snyder, as she was convicted and sentenced to death. Jennifer Jones quotes reporter Peggy Hopkins Joyce as writing “And so I say there is no excuse for Ruth Snyder. Maybe if I knew the woman intimately I could find something that would explain her kissing her lover and sash-weighting her husband to death almost simultaneously. But looking at her in court where she is on exhibition as a sort of blue-ribbon defendant and where she is supposed to be trying to impress a jury with her innocence, I shudder. How did she get that way?” (486). Treadwell wanted to go back, not to prove Snyder’s innocence, but to justify why she killed her husband. She believed that if she could show audiences the private life of a woman like Snyder, then they might begin to understand the plight of a woman in a loveless marriage.

As in the cases of the other expressionist protagonists, death becomes a form of escape for Helen. Helen Jones cannot love her husband or her daughter, and thus is unable to fit the role of wife or mother. She is incapable of engaging in the relationship that society has deemed normal, and thus finds an alternative form of love. This love shows her how infinitely worse her marital life is, and leads to her killing her husband. This act is meant to free Helen, to eliminate the source of pain and disgust that she had been burdened with. The audience has witnessed that she *had* to marry him, for they have seen the lack of love in her life. Furthermore, Helen’s plan for murder is not entirely her own. She is inspired to kill her husband from a story told by The Lover in Episode five, when he tells of attacking two bandits with a bottle of rocks in order to be free. In his own words “I had to get free, didn’t I?” (40). The bottle becomes a symbol of freedom for Helen, who uses this tool to kill her husband George. In Episode seven, Helen debates the act of killing George, and the

voice of her lover plays in her mind. He, along with others, chants “free” and “stones”, blending the two symbols into one. The voices build and build until Helen leaps out of her seat, ending the scene. The audience has witnessed her decision. The expressionist form projected Helen’s thoughts, and gave them her justification for murder.

Machinal serves as a textbook example of expressionism. The typewriter speech, distorted world, and short scenes are all signs of expressionist drama. Treadwell followed the form to create a sympathetic portrayal of woman who was prevented from finding her own happiness. Ruth Snyder was denied the right to fully explain her story, and this in part can explain why Treadwell created the play. Like Susan Glaspell in *Trifles*, Treadwell was trying to look at a murder from the perspective of a woman trapped in a loves marriage. Her success has earned her a place in the expressionist pantheon, making her one of the finest playwrights to experiment with expressionism.

CHAPTER 5

SUSAN GLASPELL

Finally, we come to Susan Glaspell, a contemporary of Eugene O'Neill and a fellow member of the Provincetown Players. Glaspell's foray into expressionism came in the form of a solitary play, *The Verge* (1921). This early feminist play tells the story of Claire, a female botanist who is attempting to create a new type of plant, called the Breath of Life. Claire is held back by her husband (Harry) and her daughter (Elizabeth), who both feel that Claire should assume the traditional role of wife and mother. Claire wishes only to bury herself in her work, though her reasons for her desire are broken and difficult to comprehend. This is one of the key factors that defines this play as expressionistic. Two of the most important characters that relate to Claire are Tom and Dick, the former being a past lover and the latter being her current lover. Claire hopes that Tom, who is going away to India, can take her away from her miserable existence, but he initially declines. When it becomes apparent that Harry wants to send Claire to a therapist, Tom offers to take Claire away. However, Claire realizes that Tom is just like everyone else in her life. He wants to control, and take her away on his terms. Claire's frustrations boils to the surface, and she strangles Tom, ending the play. The violent ending and sense of isolation connect this play with the others that have been discussed. This play executes its themes through Claire's lovers, her experiments, and her family. Each of these elements factors into Claire's descent, and gives a clear understanding of what separates her from those around her.

The Verge is significantly different from the previous works that have been mentioned. It is the most realistic of the plays discussed, and the form of expressionism

seems difficult to pin down. However, what makes the play expressionistic is the language and the sets. Claire's language throughout the play is rapid and confusing. It mirrors the typewriter style dialogue that can be found in expressionist plays, though it is limited to Claire. Early in the play, Claire speaks on the nature of madness, and states "Not the madness that—breaks through. And it was—a stunning chance! Mankind massed to kill. We have failed. We are through. We will destroy. Break this up—it can't go farther. In the air above—in the sea below—it is to kill!" (40). As the drama progresses, Claire begins to move further away from those around her. Her speech follows accordingly, and becomes more fragmented and poetic. In Act II, Claire learns that Harry wants to have her examined by a psychologist. Claire's inner turmoil breaks free, and affects her dialogue. She laments "Only a place to hide your head—what else is there to hope for? I can't stay with them—piling it up! Always—piling it up! I can't get through to—he won't let me through to—what I don't know is there!" (69). Claire's projection of her inner self affects her more than any other character onstage. Claire is the one who seems to become distorted, while the other characters onstage follow the typical realistic style.

The other part of the play that makes it expressionistic is the setting, which Valgemmae describes as "the most obvious expressionistic device in the play" (25). In Acts I and III, the set depicts the interior of a greenhouse, which serves as the base of Claire's experiments. In Act II, the setting changes, and goes against the realistic interior seen in the other acts. Glaspell describes the setting as "a tower which is thought to be round but does not complete the circle. The back is curved, then jagged lines break from that, and the front is a queer bulging window—in a curve that leans. The whole structure acts as if it is given a

twist by some terrific force—like something wrong. Claire has retreated away to her tower, which serves as Claire’s private place. It is lighted by an old-fashioned watchman's lantern hanging from the ceiling; the innumerable pricks and slits in the metal throw a marvelous pattern on the curved wall—like some masonry that hasn't been. There are no windows at back, and there is no door save an opening in the floor. The delicately distorted rail of a spiral staircase winds up from below. Claire is seen through the huge ominous window as if shut into the tower” (52). The tower is distorted, and appears as a twisting monument which is shut off from the rest of the world. Glaspell places Act II in this location because it illustrates Claire’s state of mind. Having felt pressured by her family and friends to conform to what they want her to be, Claire escapes into her own world. Here, she can close off any windows that might let someone see into her inner self. The only door is a trap door, one which she controls. None may enter without her permission. Both the tower and the dialogue give this play the traits needed to be labeled expressionistic.

The men in Claire’s life are the first characteristic one must analyze in *The Verge*. Before a proper analysis can begin, one has to understand that the portrayal of the men in the play is not entirely negative. True, they represent a system of patriarchy which alienates Claire, but the personalities of the characters are largely sympathetic. Cynthia Smith, in her article *Emasculating Tom, Dick, and Harry*, notes that the men in the play are victims of Claire’s wrath and self-centered actions (61). Claire pushes her frustrations on these men, whether they actually repress her or not. One can see the malice that the men might have, but it is equally justifiable that they are trying to help Claire. Her pattern of speech and her obsession with her work worry the people around her. Claire sees this worry as an attempt

to make her conform to the role of wife and mother. Understanding Claire's madness is vital to understanding Claire and how she fits into the world of expressionism.

Tom (the former lover), Dick (the new lover), and Harry (the husband) all play key roles in Claire's life. Tom is Claire's past love. He also represents the idea of a future love, one which will take Claire away from the life she does not want. He is both her past and her future. Of the three men in Claire's life, Tom is, according to Arthur Waterman, the "closest to Claire in vision and affection" (21). Tom shares Claire's ideas about creation and life, and is the most sympathetic toward her feminist ideals. Tom understands Claire on a deep, cerebral level. Her love for him stems from that apparent understanding that they both share. However, this relationship is challenged by the final moment of the play. Claire is lamenting her state, and how others believe she is mentally unstable. Tom tells her that he loves her, and unfortunately says the words which seal his fate "You are mine, and you will stay with me" (112). Claire realizes that Tom is just like Dick and Harry. He wants to control Claire, to keep her beauty for himself. She knows that he cannot offer her the freedom she desires.

Claire's frustrations with Tom end with her strangling him to death. Claire kills Tom because she realizes that not only can he not offer her real freedom, but he will stop her from escaping on her own. Claire chooses the most immediate form of freedom and kills her obstacle. Claire's murder of Tom is the key moment of the entire play. Claire's psyche had slowly become undone over the course of the play. The audience has watched how Claire is willing to destroy her creation, the *Breath of Life*, and knows that she assumes total control over whatever situation she finds herself in. Cynthia Smith notes that Claire's

physical relationship with Tom is seen by Claire as attempt to trap her and keep her stuck within in the norm (73). Claire clearly has no issue with doing what she wants, as indicated by her multiple affairs and pursuits in science. Therefore, her murder of Tom does fit within her character. Claire's act of violence is an attempt to not only free herself, but also to get revenge against a system which has given her no other way out. Claire, in her own mind, *must* murder Tom. This feeling of having no other option is shared by the other expressionist protagonists who kill. They have no other choice, and see violence as their way of getting back against the system which keeps them as outsiders.

The other important relationship in Claire's life is that of Dick, her current lover. Claire's relationship with Dick is mostly sexual, though Dick's role as an artist gives him the impression that he understands Claire. This feeling is one-sided, however, as Claire needs Dick only to satisfy her sexual needs, as well as to fight against her husband and his societal norms. Claire uses Dick to mock her husband, openly commenting on their adulterous actions. While in front of Harry, Claire says to Dick "Was I a fascinating hostess last night, Dick? (*softly sings*) 'Oh, night of love—'" (31). Once again, Claire breaks away from what is expected of her, and does the exact opposite. Unlike the other protagonists that have been discussed, Claire is one who does not want to belong to the majority. She wants someone to join her group, of which she believes that she is the only member. Claire rejects nearly anyone who tries to break into her world, even those who believe they are close. Though Dick may feel that he and Claire share a connection, it is not one that Claire feels as well. Claire needs Dick to satisfy a physical desire. Claire is the one who holds the power in their relationship, as can be seen in the way Glaspell seems to effeminize Dick.

Claire's relationship with Dick illustrates a reversal of traditional gender roles. Smith observes that Dick relies on their relationship to prove his masculinity (67). When Claire jokes about their affair in front of Harry, she is attempting to have both men assert themselves. She wants to see who the victor will be in the game of fragile masculinity. Dick lacks the heart to fight against Harry, and is forced to cower behind Claire when confronted by a gun-wielding Harry in Act III. Claire takes charge of the situation and grabs the gun, therefore saving Dick. It has been established that Claire rejects traditional roles. Her control over the affair conveys her deviation from the norm. She is the one who has power in the relationship, and she uses it to control Dick.

Finally, one should examine Harry, Claire's husband. Of all of Claire's lovers, Harry is the one who seems to differ from her the most. He is the typical male, one who believes that his wife should not be pursuing science, and instead should care for her home and husband. Harry's traditionalism can be observed as a key factor in Claire's loneliness. Claire and Harry are fundamentally different people. Claire looks toward the future, and accepts progressive ideas of femininity. Harry rejects these ideals, and belittles his wife's accomplishments as mere fantasies. Harry is very much like Yank in *The Hairy Ape* (1921). He is trying to revitalize an old-school masculinity, and feels that the growing role of women is counterproductive. Harry observes "I sometimes wonder if all this (*indicating the place around him*) is a good thing. It would be all right if she'd just do what she did in the beginning—make the flowers as good as possible of their kind. That's an awfully nice thing for a woman to do—raise flowers. But there's something about this—changing things into other things—putting things together and making queer new things—this—" (34-5). Harry

originally saw Claire's experiments as a way for her to amuse herself. However, once her work begins to be legitimized, Harry becomes wary. He does not enjoy how Claire creates and manipulates life. Harry needs control in his life, and Claire's experiments are a force that is out of his control. Claire loves her experiments, and they are important to the traits that define Claire.

Claire's experimentation is representative of her larger feeling of alienation. These experiments represent the way that Claire controls life, and how she can snuff it out in an instant. Claire's final moment of violence is the result of her alienation from the people around her, but it can be foreshadowed in the types of experiments that she is conducting. First, one should examine Claire's older experiment, the Edge Vine. Claire attempts to create a new type of plant, but it still attempts to retain the traits of its ancestor plant. Claire uses the Edge as a metaphor for what she fears most, as is seen in the following exchange between Dick, Claire, and her daughter Elizabeth:

CLAIRE. I should destroy the Edge Vine. It isn't—over the edge. It's running, back to—"all the girls". It's a little afraid of Miss Lane, *(looking somberly at it)* You are out, but you are not alive.

ELIZABETH. Why, it looks all right, mother.

CLAIRE. Didn't carry life with it from the life it left. Dick—you know what I mean. At least you ought to. *(her ruthless way of not letting anyone's feelings stand in the way of truth)* Then destroy it for me! It's hard to do it—with the hands that made it.

DICK. But what's the point in destroying it, Claire?

CLAIRE. *(impatiently)* I've told you. It cannot create.

DICK. But you say you can go on producing it, and it's interesting in form.

CLAIRE. And you think I'll stop with that? Be shut in—with different life—that can't creep on? (50)

Claire despises the Edge Vine's rejection of its new self. In a larger sense, the Edge Vine is like Claire's daughter, who shares her father's views. The product of her creation has rejected the new forms and ideas, and instead retreats back to the old ways of thinking. Following this exchange, Claire tries to destroy the Edge Vine. She does not want to acknowledge how the plant, her own creation, failed to change to what she wanted. Claire's frustration with the Edge Vine fuels her hope for her other experiment, the Breath of Life.

The Breath of Life is Claire's newest creation. As the play opens, she is still waiting to see it bloom. She describes the flower thusly: "Distilled from the most fragile flowers there are. It's only air—pausing—playing; except, far in, one stab of red, its quivering heart—that asks a question. But here's the trick—I bred the air-form to strength. The strength shut up behind us I've sent—far out"(62). Near the end of the play, the Breath of Life blooms, and is just as strong and fragile as Claire had hoped. Stacey Artman observes that Claire's conception of the Breath of Life gives her the role of Creator, and likens her power to a deity (109). This is part of what Harry fears most about Claire's experiments. He and the other men view Claire's creations as unnatural. She has taken the role of God and has formed a new type of life. Claire isolates herself once again, and she refuses to act in the way that others expect of her.

Finally, one must acknowledge the importance of the Claire's family. While the significance of Harry has been discussed, is equally vital to study the effect of Claire's sister

(Adelaide) and daughter (Elizabeth). Both of these women represent the different paths that Claire could have taken. Claire delegated the role of mother to Adelaide, and Claire spends a large part of her life under the care of her aunt. Adelaide is the one person who perhaps understands Claire the most. Having grown up with Claire, Adelaide understands where she came from, and how that factors into who she is at the start of the play. Adelaide points out the flaws in Claire's character, particularly how she rejects her daughter simply because she is different. Even with this level of awareness, Adelaide still conforms to the norms of her gender of the time. She is just like the others. She sees Claire's behavior as alien and sacrilegious, and begs her to just conform. She states "That's where I'm out of patience with you Claire. You are really a particularly intelligent, competent person, and it's time for you to call a halt to this nonsense and be the woman you were meant to be!" (53). Adelaide illustrates how Claire has moved away from her family, and how she refuses to accept the ideals of femininity from her upbringing. Claire grows increasingly more isolated, and her interactions with her sister separate Claire from the rest of humanity.

Claire's daughter, Elizabeth, represents perhaps the worst parts about Claire's character. It has been acknowledged that the Edge Vine is like Elizabeth in that it rejects what is new for what is familiar. Claire also abandons her daughter, as she believes that she is not fit to be a mother. Perhaps she is unfit to be a caretaker, but her ability to sustain her plant creations seems to refute this. Claire is rejecting her creation, but this one is more significant. Elizabeth is a human being, not a mere plant. Despite being birthed by a mother who rejects her, Elizabeth still retains a positive attitude, and appears to be excited at the thought of living with her mother again. Claire's paranoid obsession with control causes her

to reject any attempt Elizabeth makes to connect with her. Claire won't even acknowledge the fact that Elizabeth is her own daughter, referring to her as one of Adelaide's children. Claire's frustration with Elizabeth stems from her daughter's choice to accept her father's ideals rather than her own. Claire wants Elizabeth to think like her, or at least to think for herself. When Claire has failed to connect to her family and friends, her descent into violent madness becomes inevitable. She, like the other protagonists of expressionistic drama, has fallen into the category of outsider. In the world of these expressionistic plays, there is no place for those who do not fit the status quo. All those who fail to conform are killed, or are forced to the point of killing someone else.

The Verge is the least expressionistic play discussed here, and yet its expressionistic elements make it relevant. Glaspell created a work wherein a woman rejects the world around her, and isolates herself in a metaphorical tower. Her experiments serve as her outlet, and when they are complete she is left with a sense of loneliness. All it takes is one simple statement from Tom, and Claire is sent over the edge. This play serves as proof of the power that expressionism can bring to a play.

CHAPTER 6

CONNECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The American Expressionist scene is one that is connected by acts of violence. These acts primarily occur in the plays of O'Neill, Rice, Treadwell, and Glaspell, as well as several others. Each of these four playwrights created an expressionist work, and each of their plays has some type of violence. These acts of violence always result in death, be it against someone else, or themselves. These acts of violence are a result of isolation, clashes between genders, and dehumanization in the work place. These types of violence can be seen in proto-expressionist plays, as well as the German examples of expressionism. The plays often have settings that are distorted by the psychology of the protagonist, though some are more realistic than others. The protagonists of these works are rebels who do not follow the mainstream beliefs and ideals. They exist as outcasts, and their fate can only end in death.

Expressionism is an art form which has always kept a place on the American stage. While it is often seen as an imitation of a German movement, its role in the American theatre secures a place in the annals of history. Expressionism is tied to violence, due to its origins and the type of characters it creates. Expressionism serves to give empathy to places where it is normally lacking. Audiences are taken on a psychological expedition, which explores a path through the eyes of the beholder. It exists as a style of theatre, which can be applied to any play, provided it's justifiable. Expressionism can give a new meaning to old plays, and the message it creates is one that leaves a sense of fear and unease in its

audience. Whenever the artist need to create a nightmarish, yet empathetic story, they must turn to expressionism, the art for empathy.

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