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Women Staging War:

Female Dramatists and the Discourses of War and Peace in the United States of America, 1913-1947

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Women Staging War:
Female Dramatists and the Discourses of War and Peace in the United States of America, 1913-1947

by

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Dissertation

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This dissertation is dedicated to:

My parents,

Sharon Mary Bailey Beach and

Robert Thomas Beach, Sr.

and

To the memory of my best friend and soul mate,

Amy Vaughan Weems (1966-1998)

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Female Dramatists and the Discourses of War and Peace in the United States of America, 1913-1947

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During the World Wars, few women held political offices or fought in combat, so they were largely excluded from the decision-making and fighting associated with waging war. Some women, however, chose staging war as a way to present their opinions in a public forum, engage critics and audiences in debates about political issues, and inspire spectators to action. This dissertation examines women's war plays in the United States from 1913-1947 and how they may be considered part of a national

discourse on war and peace and/or illustrative of women's concerns. These plays were performances of patriotism, dissent, grief, and the desire for social change. To study these plays, their production histories, their engagement with contemporary causes, and their critical receptions is to understand how some women used playwriting as a public practice and a political platform during tumultuous times.

The first half of the dissertation examines World War I plays and the second is concerned with World War II. Each chapter is anchored by in-depth case studies of plays, consisting of discussions of selected scripts, their production histories, and their critical receptions. One principal argument is that these plays are important as public expressions of women's political opinions about a topic usually regarded as a male concern, not that these plays necessarily should be included in a mainstream literary canon or revived onstage today. Particular attention is paid to the ways women's war plays generated discourse—about political and social issues, about gender, about national identity, and about theatre's relationship to society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Prologue

JOAN: Was I outside of it? I don't want to be—not so far. This is my city, too. I can't just watch it on TV. I want to do something. But this is all I know how to do. Words. I can't think of anything else.

NICK: (*Wonderingly*) That's okay. They're your tools.[1]

On December 4, 2001, exactly twelve weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the first play about the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers opened in New York. Anne Nelson, a first-time playwright and faculty member of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, was commissioned by the Flea Theatre to write a play based on her experiences helping a fire captain compose eulogies for his fallen men. Her play, The Guys, was a fictionalized

[1] Anne Nelson, The Guys (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002) 45. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

account of this work, with the character of Joan roughly based on Nelson, and Nick modeled after the captain. The speech cited above expresses Joan's need to be an active participant in the events surrounding her, and her use of writing to fulfill that desire. For Joan, writing provides a generative outlet for her need to be useful. For Nelson, writing The Guys became a form of activism, helping a struggling off-off Broadway theatre near Ground Zero stay open by presenting a play the theatre and the community found relevant (xxi-xxii, xxix-xxx). The Flea Theatre also reserved a block of seats for firefighters and Port Authority police officers and gave free neighborhood performances as community outreach (62,65). Nelson observes "the comment I heard most often from New Yorkers [who attended the production] was 'You put what I was feeling into words'"(62). Just as Nick says of Joan's words, Nelson's eulogies and play were her tools she used to "do something" to help her community in a time of crisis.

In the fall of 2003, I decided to assign The Guys to my Introduction to Theatre classes. Early in the semester I teach a unit on Theatre and Society, and I try to make the case for the importance of theatre, arguing that performance has the ability to illuminate the human

condition and comment upon pressing social issues and political events. In the past I suspected that I was losing the battle; my most ardent Why Art Matters speeches seemed to fail to move most of my students, particularly if we read a classic text as our first play. I chose The Guys for its topicality rather than its literary sophistication and was astonished at its reception in my classes. Discussing the play on and around the second anniversary of 9/11, students were eager to share their observations and opinions. Most were engaged, even excited by what they had read, and it was accessible to the sizable number of class members who had never read a play before this assignment. Students related concepts like empathy and catharsis to their own reading experiences with a level of understanding I had never seen when I had assigned Oedipus Rex as a starting point. This script spoke to my students because many found it close to their own experiences, memories, and feelings. I doubt I will teach The Guys ten years from now, but at this particular time, this play is meaningful to my students because it is rooted in an historical event that they regard as a watershed moment in their own consciousness of national and international affairs. Some students told me that the experience of reading this play caused them to

initiate conversations with friends, roommates, and family members about both the text and the ways September 11 had affected them as individuals and the United States as a whole. One woman even told me that she gave her script to her father, who works as a firefighter, and that he in turn passed the script along to other men in his company to read.

I begin this study with Nelson's play, its original production history, and my own experiences using it as a pedagogical tool because this contemporary example parallels key ideas relevant to a study of past plays written in times of historical crisis. First of all, the topicality of The Guys, the enthusiasm it generates now in my classroom, and the acknowledgment that it probably will not merit inclusion on my syllabi in a few years are similar to audience interest in plays written during other conflicts like the World Wars and the obscurity of most such plays today.[2] Many war plays are greeted with interest when the events that inspire them are current or part of the recent past and fall out of favor with

[2] The Guys, strictly speaking, is not a war play since the September 11 attacks were initiated by a terrorist organization rather than another nation, but subsequent events such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were acts of war in response to or conflated with 9/11, and so the play can be considered as part of the discourse surrounding these wars.

audiences when the events that inspired them pass or are distant memories.

Scholars have neglected many war plays since traditionally most theatre historians and critics of dramatic literature focus on “canonical” plays and ignore trends in dramatic writing and play production which do not produce such works. To scholars interested in the theatre as a reflexive and vital part of social and cultural history, such an approach is myopic because it overlooks plays and productions that can illuminate popular opinions and concerns during an historical era. For example, the World War I dramas by American authors which are most often considered to be works of lasting literary import are both post-war pieces: Edna St. Vincent Millay’s Aria da Capo (1919) and What Price Glory (1924) by Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings. Yet there were many more war plays written and produced prior to and during the United States’ involvement in World War I. As Ronald H. Wainscott notes, “Traditional analysis of postwar American drama assumes the war was all but ignored until What Price Glory,” yet he counts twenty-eight plays which were professionally produced in New York between the start of the “European War” and the United States’ entry into the fray and an additional thirty-four mounted during

the time the United States was at war. Along with postwar dramas, Wainscott accounts for at least 112 professionally produced plays and revues about World War I from 1914-1929—in New York alone.[3] Clearly, such a large number of war plays indicate contemporary audiences were interested in plays about the subject even if most of the works are not well-known today. The handful of familiar plays from World War I like Aria da Capo and What Price Glory may arguably be the best dramatic *literature* of their era, but they only represent a fraction of the theatrical representations the war engendered and only address a few of the issues and ideas that mattered to contemporary audiences.

I chose the quotation for the epigraph of this chapter because it also evokes two other themes central to this study. When Joan, who is neither a World Trade Center survivor nor an official part of the rescue and recovery efforts, asks if she is "outside of it," she is articulating a question often asked regarding women and armed conflicts. As discussed in the following section, women as a group have been cast as "outside of" war regardless of the roles they actually play in wartime and

[3] Ronald H. Wainscott, The Emergence of Modern American Theater 1914-1929 (New Haven and London, Yale UP, 1997) 8.

subsequently presumed to lack the authority to write about war and peace. In spite of this, some women *have* claimed the right to write about war. The second idea in the opening quotation is Joan's desire to "do something," to make a real contribution to society in a time of crisis, and Nick's assurance that her words are her tools. I believe most women who wrote plays about the World Wars with production in mind were also using their words to "do something," as activist tools. At a time when few women held political offices or fought in combat, they were largely excluded from the decision-making and fighting associated with waging war, but some chose staging war as a way to present their opinions in a public forum, engage critics and audiences in debates about political issues, and inspire spectators to action. These plays were performances of patriotism, dissent, grief, and the desire for social change. To study these plays, their production histories, their engagement with contemporary causes, and their critical receptions is to understand how some women used playwriting as a public practice and a political platform during tumultuous times.

On Canons and Cannons: The Exclusion of Women's Voices on War

As Lynne Hanley observes, "Canons and cannons have more in common than the accident of sounding alike."[4] Hanley draws upon Carol Gruber's Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of Higher Learning in America (1975) to argue that the formation of a modern literary canon in US colleges was linked to World War I efforts to train male students for war. Part of this training included using "the liberal arts to instill in American young men a conviction of their cultural superiority over the enemies of the state" by elevating Anglo-American literature and philosophy over the cultural products of belligerent countries considered US enemies.[5] When wartime jingoism faded, the preference for Anglo-American literature remained entrenched. Although Hanley believes that ideas about literary canons in general were reexamined and expanded during the 1970s and 1980s, war literature was usually not part of such reevaluations. Writing in 1991, she found the "literature that creates America's memories

[4] Lynne Hanley, Writing War: Fiction, Gender, and Memory (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1991) 18.

[5] Hanley 18-19. Hanley cites Carol S. Gruber, Mars and Minerva: World War II and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1975) 238-239.

of its wars is, like the literature that girded American young men for World War I, almost exclusively the product of white English and American men."[6] Over the last ten to fifteen years an increasing number of feminist scholars like Hanley have challenged the exclusion of working-class men, men of color, and virtually all women from collections of war literature. The following section highlights the work of some of these feminist scholars, emphasizing the ways they have theorized the exclusion of most women's war literature from traditional scholarship and argued for more inclusive approaches. The authors I have selected for discussion are the ones I believe offer the most compelling arguments, and their ideas provide a foundation for my own theories about women's war plays and why they matter.

Some critics justify the marginalization of women's writings about war by maintaining those who man the cannons, so to speak, are the only ones whose experience of war matters. In her 1995 essay, "Another Record: A Different War," Margaret R. Higonnet describes her efforts to find international women's writings about World War I for an anthology and her discovery of "gatekeeping

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[6] Hanley 20.

mechanisms that have excluded women from the record kept by historians and literary critics."[7] Higonnet found that the "doctrine of separate spheres and an essentialist view of women" along with a tendency by critics to conflate *war* and *combat* led to a privileging of male combatants' experiences of war and the removal "to the background of the broad social and economic mechanisms and heavy long-term costs of war."[8] She sees male wartime experiences as crucial to many critics' definitions of high modernism—experiences that women cannot lay claim to due to a "schematic view of the battlefront as a place where women and other civilians are not."[9] Although part of Higonnet's argument that women often experienced the death, violence, and privations of war first-hand as the demarcations of front lines and home fronts shifted and blurred in occupied or contested countries is not particularly applicable to the United States (which fought very few battles within its own borders during the twentieth century),[10] her identification of the privileging

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[7] Margaret Higonnet, "Another Record: A Different War," Women's Studies Quarterly : 3 & 4 (1995): 94.

[8] Higonnet 86-7.

[9] Higonnet 87.

of combat experience over all other types of war knowledge is pertinent to any discussion of war writing.

When feminist literary critics confront the Anglo-American canon(s) of war literature, one of the most prominent books they critique is Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory (1975). This book starts with the premise that "the current idea of 'the Great War' derives primarily from images of the trenches in France and Belgium," so he limits his consideration of World War I to the activities of the British infantry on the Western Front.[11] Hanley observes, "Fussell and the critics and anthologists he draws on stake out a territory for war literature that excludes every account but that of the literate, British or American soldier," and that "[w]omen are nowhere to be seen."[12] Hanley believes the deliberate erasure of women in Fussell's work is necessary if one seeks to mythologize "soldiers as the tragic victims of war" as Fussell does; he calls his work an "elegiac

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[10] Hawaii was a territory when the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred in 1941. The only example of an invasion of the continental United States in the twentieth century by a foreign army which caused civilian deaths on US soil was in 1916, when Francisco (Pancho) Villa and about 500 men raided Columbus, New Mexico, killing 10 civilians and 14 American soldiers, according to R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3800 to Present (NY: Harper and Row, 1977) 1012.

[11] Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (1975; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) xi.

[12] Hanley 30-31.

commentary" rather than a history.[13] While Fussell laments the senseless slaughter of young infantrymen, Hanley argues such an approach "ignore[s] the devastation wreaked by war on women, children, civilians, the land, buildings, bridges, communications, the entire fabric of family, social and civilized life."[14] I believe that wars can be remembered in such a way that avoids an either/or dichotomy, that it is possible to feel sympathy for common soldiers killed or wounded in combat as well as to insist that the grave impact of war upon others not be dismissed as mere "collateral damage" or accorded a secondary status in public discourse.

Another feminist scholar who critiques Fussell's project is Claire M. Tylee. In her article, "'The Great War in Modern Memory': What Is Being Repressed?," Tylee, like Hanley, argues that Fussell excludes the experiences of women and non-white soldiers.[15] Tylee also objects to Fussell's concentration on memoirists and "poets of very high literary consciousness" since these men are usually part of an educated elite and because memoirs and poems

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[13] Hanley 31 and Fussell 338.

[14] Hanley 31.

[15] Claire M. Tylee, "'The Great War in Modern Memory': What is Being Repressed? " Women's Studies Quarterly : 3 & 4 (1995): 66-67.

are not “cultural forms that involve a group rather than an individual and which may articulate several points of view.”[16] Tylee advocates studying songs, plays, and films to see “what is being repressed” and also because these forms ask the audience “to engage rather than contemplate.” Tylee ends her piece with a short examination of three plays by African American women about the experiences of black soldiers in World War I (plays that I will discuss in Chapter 3, as well) to demonstrate what Fussell’s text suppresses.

The Great War and Modern Memory still matters as a subject of feminist literary criticism over a quarter-century after its publication because it is a “seminal” work that has inspired other literary critics writing about war. My use of the over-used and abused term “seminal” is deliberate here because of its connotation of male reproduction. Other male critics and scholars have used Fussell’s ideas and methodology for their own inquiries into war and literature without examining his biases regarding gender. Also, as mentioned in my discussion of Higgonet’s article, women’s writings about

[16] Tylee 68. The phrase “poets of very high literary consciousness” is qtd. from Fussell’s Preface, ix. Ironically, Fussell devotes a chapter of his book to “Theater of War,” but it shows how the language of the theatre may be applied to war and how some British participants in WWI saw themselves as actors in a play rather than considering how the war inspired playwriting.

war are often overlooked due to a privileging of combat experience. Among the existing books on theatre and war, the most obvious articulation of this prejudice occurs in J.W Fenn's 1992 Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era when Fenn affirms the value of plays written by and about male soldiers by stating that the "significant dramas" about Vietnam "were written by playwrights who had some firsthand experience of the war, either the ex-combatants themselves, or those who had personal or professional associations with them." He believes these "dramatists offer the most profound insights concerning the ordeal and its consequences for both the veterans and their society."[17] Interestingly enough, Fenn never questions his assertion that veteran/playwrights are best qualified to assess the consequences of the war for the "society" or the "home community" that the soldiers face when they return from the war, nor does he look for patterns in plays that are not about the men who fought—presumably because they are not among "the significant dramas." Although I am ending my study before the Vietnam War era, Fenn's book serves as

[17] Jeffrey W. Fenn, Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992): 12.

a reminder of the privileging of combat experience that so many writers, editors, and critics take for granted.

Project Overview and Review of Literature

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, theatre historians and critics of dramatic literature have traditionally ignored war plays due to their topicality. There is a recent trend towards studying war in theatre scholarship, but even so, when war plays are studied or collected in anthologies, plays by female dramatists are often excluded or underrepresented (the 1999 anthology War Plays by Women: An International Anthology is a notable exception). Therefore, a study of women's war plays will add to the small but growing body of theatre scholarship on war as well as add to the work of feminist scholars like Hanley and Higgonet who are recovering women's war writings but who do not devote much attention to theatre and dramatic literature. While most of the plays I include in this work have largely been forgotten, many of them received substantial critical or popular attention when they opened, and others are valuable as part of a cultural history of women and war.

If knowledge of war is expanded to include more than combat experience, then how might war plays by women be defined? Based upon my readings, I have formulated a

working definition for women's war plays. They include any play written or co-written by a female dramatist that falls into one or more of the following four categories. First, war plays may advocate participation in an armed conflict, promote patriotism to a nation in wartime, or denounce the policies or tactics of a military foe. A second category is the opposite of the first: antiwar plays that protest specific armed conflicts between nations or decry war in general. A third category of war plays consists of works that take as their subject women's roles in wartime—whether on the front lines or the home front. The final category of war plays focuses on war's effects on individuals or society as a whole, including soldiers' experiences during or after military service and/or the effects of their participation on their families or communities; the experiences of civilians imprisoned, killed, injured, forced to leave their homes, or otherwise altered by war; and the aftereffects of a conflict on subsequent generations.

This definition of "war" is comprehensive enough to account for a broad spectrum of responses to armed conflicts and acknowledges that wars involve whole societies. However, I am excluding from my definition commonplace uses of the word "war" and other military

terms if they are not linked to armed hostile conflicts between nations or civil wars—subjects such as class or gang warfare, the "War on Poverty," the "War on Drugs," or the so-called Battle Between the Sexes—as the inclusion of all possible struggles between opposing forces would dilute the meaning of "war" beyond usefulness. Therefore, while I *do* consider pacifist dramas, Holocaust plays, and plays about nuclear destruction to be "war plays," many plays about violence, political struggles, or conflicts between demographic groups are not within the scope of my definition.

Since most wars pit *nations* against each other, war is usually an international phenomenon as well as an occasion for stressing national identity. One fundamental consideration for a study of war-related subject matter is whether such a project should be national or international in scope. Looking at existing books on theatre and war can reveal how other scholars have decided to frame their studies. Some topics, such as the Holocaust, seem to argue inherently for an international treatment, as religious/ethnic identity—not national citizenship or political affiliation—was a defining characteristic that marked most Jewish victims, and the event itself sparked a global Diaspora. Therefore, it is unsurprising that

Elinor Fuch's 1987 Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology, as well as two historical/critical studies of Holocaust drama, Robert Skloot's The Darkness We Carry: The Drama of the Holocaust (1988) and Edward R. Isser's Stages of Annihilation: Theatrical Representations of the Holocaust (1997), are all concerned with worldwide theatrical responses to the Holocaust.[18]

Some authors writing about other conflicts choose to limit their works to one nation, or to foreground one country's experiences against a survey of other nation's responses to a war. For example, the 1985 drama anthology Coming to Terms: American Plays and the Vietnam War, introduced by James Reston, Jr., and Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era (1992), a historical/critical book by J.W. Fenn both define their subjects as US theatrical representations of the Vietnam War.[19] Furthermore, both Reston and Fenn indicate in their introductions that the

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[18] Elinor Fuch, Plays of the Holocaust: An International Anthology (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987); Robert Skloot, The Darkness We Carry: The Drama of the Holocaust (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1988); and Edward R. Isser, Stages of Annihilation: Theatrical Representations of the Holocaust (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1997).

[19] James Reston, Jr., Introduction, Coming to Terms: American Plays & The Vietnam War (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).

divisiveness in United States society caused (or exacerbated) by Vietnam made the theatre an excellent site for exploring issues of "American" identity and cultural upheaval. Nora M. Alter's Vietnam Protest Theatre: The Television War On Stage (1996) is especially concerned with Vietnam protest theatre in the United States, but she writes,

> A main argument of this book is comparative: namely, that in order to grasp the American theatrical response to "its" war critically and in its full complexity one must step outside the national and linguistic borders of the United States and look at the response that came from the rest of the world.[20]

Alter's premise is compelling, as her approach argues that "artists and intellectuals . . . have the capacity to forge a *community* of response, a resistance to war across national and linguistic borders. . . ."[21] However, Alter carefully limits her topic to only "Vietnam *Protest* Theatre, as opposed to other types of narrative (e.g., those involving the returning Vietnam vet, or various

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[20] Nora M. Alter, Vietnam Protest Plays: The Television War on Stage (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) xxii.

[21] Alter xx.

apologia for the war) [her emphasis]" and "Vietnam Protest Theatre *written and performed while the war was still being waged* [her emphasis]." By narrowing her subject and time span, Alter is able to widen her geographic scope without sacrificing depth of analysis. In contrast, the critical anthology Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television Since 1945 (1996), includes a wide range of essays concerning war and performance over more than a half-century.[22] To balance the book's broad topic and time-frame, editors Tony Howard and John Stokes limited their anthology to only British works and even defined "British" as exclusive of North Ireland and its persistent conflicts. Although some of these books are organized around national responses to war in performance and dramatic literature while others select an international perspective, all of them highlight some commonality of identity or experience, even if critiquing the constructedness of a category such as "American."

My first decision about this project was to determine if I was going to focus on national or international

[22] Tony Howard and John Stokes, eds., Acts of War: The Representation of Military Conflict on the British Stage and Television Since 1945 (Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar, 1996). Despite the book's title, some of the essays include discussions of plays written or performed before 1945.

responses to war. I decided to limit this project to the United States for several reasons. First, wars tend to inspire discussion about national identity and values, and even if such characteristics are more mythic than material, their political value should not be underestimated. Therefore, looking at ways national identities are performed on stage in wartime can illuminate how a society tries to define itself. Additionally, the United States had a different experience of war in the twentieth century than most other countries involved in the same conflicts, since its battles were fought “over there” rather than within the continental United States. Finally, the diversity of ideological convictions, ethnicities, class affiliations, and aesthetic sensibilities represented by women who have written war plays in the United States argues that this subject matter is already complex and multi-faceted even if it is limited to a single country. I would find it impossible to call any one of these playwrights “representative” of American women dramatists in an international study.

I have chosen as my time frame 1913-1947 since these years correspond to most war plays written and performed in the United States before, during, after, and between

World War I and World War II. Additionally, this time span allows for two breaks in American women's twentieth-century war plays: 1) relatively few war plays were written by US women from 1948 until the 1960s Vietnam War made war and peace urgent issues again, and 2) war plays written during and immediately after the World Wars were contemporary with or just after first wave feminism, while later, Vietnam-era plays coincided with feminism's second wave. Therefore, the thirty-four year time frame I have chosen includes contemporary responses to the World Wars and also encompasses a time of intense change for American women, as they won the right to vote, worked outside their homes in large numbers, and experienced a regressive post-WWII backlash against female independence.

I intend to examine women's war plays from 1913-1947 and the ways they might be considered part of a national discourse on war and peace and/or illustrative of women's concerns. In order to do this, I am using a combination of chronology and thematic considerations to organize my work. Chapters will situate the dramas of particular periods into sociohistorical contexts that foreground women's historical experiences of war (or antiwar activities).

Each chapter will be anchored by in-depth case studies of plays, consisting of discussions of selected scripts and their production histories and critical receptions. This structure is modeled to some extent on Nora M. Alter's Vietnam Protest Theatre, and her caveat that

> No claim is made . . . that Vietnam Protest Theatre was great or even *good* theatre, nor even that it was politically *effective*. But, like all *interesting* art, it does provide eye-opening glimpses into the relationship between culture and politics, theory and practice,"[23]

provided me with a way to begin thinking about the qualities to consider as I evaluated which plays made the best candidates for case studies. While there are some women's war plays that I *do* think are "good" from a literary standpoint, and some may have had some real political effect—Lillian Hellman's anti-fascist play Watch on the Rhine, for example, is often credited with making Americans more inclined to support American entry into World War II—I am more interested in these plays as public expressions of women's political opinions about a topic usually regarded as a male concern than as candidates for

[23] Alter xx.

inclusion in a mainstream literary canon or as “proof” that art can alter history.

I am especially interested in the ways women’s war plays generated discourse—about political and social issues, about gender, about national identity, and about theatre’s relationship to society. Criticism provides much of the primary written evidence of the plays’ relationship to and engagement with broader discourses about war, peace, and other issues, and so I devote considerable attention to published reviews and other critical writings in most case studies. There is an irony to this, however, since most mainstream critics were well-educated white males and their evaluations of women’s war plays reflect their own positionalites and preconceptions. Whenever I have found alternate sites of criticism, like fan mail, letters to editors, or articles in non-mainstream publications I have tried to include them. In a few cases I have found little or no criticism about a play and its production; in those cases I emphasize instead how the war play dramatized political current events.

My selection of plays for my case studies depended in part on what sort of production histories I uncovered. However, selection of plays as case studies was not

automatically determined by which plays have the most extant criticism or enjoyed the longest runs. Within each section as well as throughout the dissertation as a whole, I hope to balance recovering plays about which little is known with adding to the existing scholarship on better-known plays, to select plays whose authors and/or subjects represent the experiences of different races and classes, and to pick plays with outstanding literary or feminist merits. This emphasis on race, class, and gender (and other identity markers) is associated with material feminism, and is the theoretical lens I bring to my work; however, I want to acknowledge that women from 1913-1947 were not working within this particular feminist tradition, and indeed, not all the dramatists nor all of the plays are even feminist at all.

The methodology I have followed could be termed "dramaturgical" because it is similar to many of the processes I employ in my work as a dramaturg. Finding appropriate scripts and winnowing them down to a manageable number is not unlike the work of a literary manager. Of course, in this case my goal was not to actually produce the scripts, and the works I gathered had to meet certain criteria (female authored, American war plays written between 1913-1947) to even be included for

consideration. But like a literary manager trying to shape a season, I wanted to pick plays that were of different genres, illuminated different ideas (albeit all generally about war, peace, and society), presented different ideological points of view, represented diversity (at least as far as ethnicity, region, and class, since all of the playwrights are women), and seemed worthwhile. The last criterion is of course the most subjective.

Once I selected my case studies, I approached them in a way that was rather like production dramaturgy: I read the plays carefully and closely, making notes about issues, ideas, and images that seemed to be interesting, characteristic, or even problematic; researched their production histories, with an emphasis on the plays' original productions; read critical evaluations of the plays and productions; and performed background research to illuminate issues and gain a deeper historical understanding of the world of the play and the author's world.

Oscar Brockett says one of dramaturgy's goals:

> is to promote integration of the knowledge and perception learned from theatre history, dramatic literature, and theory with the skills

> and expertise needed to realize the potential of a particular script in a particular production in a particular time and place for a particular audience.[24]

Brockett's discussion of the ways theatre history, theory, and dramatic literature may integrated in dramaturgical practice may also be applied to my research and working methods on this dissertation. The difference, of course, is that my dramaturgy is not applied to the staging of a particular production here (although I did perform dramaturgical work on a theatrical production of Watch on the Rhine a few years ago, and many of the ideas found in my case study on Lillian Hellman were also expressed in different ways in my lobby displays, program notes, and conversations with the cast and director for that show). Instead, I imagine as my audience readers interested in theatre history, dramatic literature, women's literature, war, peace, and cultural history. It is my hope that this work might provide my "audience members" with historical examples of theatre as activist engagement with political and social issues that may be applied to their own intellectual and creative work as scholars, teachers,

[24] Oscar Brockett, "Dramaturgy in Education," Dramaturgy in American Theatre: A Sourcebook, ed. Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu (New York: Harcourt, 1997) 42.

writers, artists, or activists in their own particular times and places. In this way, dramaturgical scholarship might be applied in a straightforward fashion towards a production of one of the plays discussed in this text, but could also inform productive work in the classroom, in scholarly and creative writing, or in new political works of art.

Most books that address theatre and war are recent works. There are only a few sources specifically about theatre, women, and war, particularly during the World Wars. War Plays by Women: An International Anthology, edited by Claire M. Tylee with Elaine Turner and Agnès Cardinal, (1999) is closest in subject matter to my project, and has good introductions to the plays contained in the volume and a checklist of published plays by women relevant to World War I. This work's international scope and its emphasis on how war plays can be used for social change are interesting and useful. However, it is primarily an anthology of plays, not a critical and historical work, and there are quite a few omissions in the checklist.

Two articles which are very similar to the type of project I am undertaking in my World War I chapters are Frances Diodato Bzowski's related articles on women and

war pageantry, "'Torchbearers of the Earth': Women, Pageantry, and World War I," (1995) and "'Torchbearers of the Earth': Women and Pageantry Between the World Wars"(1995).[25] Bzowski argues that "pageantry, unlike the theatre, was accepted as a proper endeavor for respectable middle- and upper-class women" and that as women dominated this genre of community performance during the teens and twenties in the United States, they used it "to illustrate their own specific gender concerns about militarism and patriarchy."[26] Although I do not generally include pageants as "plays" in my study (and the idea that theatre was not "a proper endeavor" for women in WWI makes me *more* interested in the work of female dramatists), these articles are still valuable as models because they are concerned with American women's uses of performance to express antiwar or patriotic sentiments. Furthermore, part of Bzowski's methodology is to provide a brief cultural history that helps to contextualize women's war pageants and women's war work within the discourses of war

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[25] Frances Diodato Bzowski, "'Torchbearers of the Earth': Women, Pageantry, and World War I." Journal of American Drama and Theatre 7 (Spring 1995) 88-111; and "'Torchbearers of the Earth': Women and Pageantry Between the World Wars." Journal of American Drama and Theatre 7 (Fall 1995) 58-78.

[26] Bzowski, "Women and Pageantry Between the World Wars" 88.

and peace in the United States during the teens and twenties. Her discussions of specific pageants are situated within larger considerations of both pageantry and politics before, during, and after World War I. This is similar to the way I discuss women's war plays within the contexts of their historical/political moments. Also, Bzowski's observations that most women's pageants were about peace until the sinking of the Lusitania (when most women began to stage patriotic pageants instead) and that after the war women renewed their efforts to prevent war are similar to trends I have noticed in women's World War I era playwriting. Bzowski's articles are unlike my own work in one major way: she scarcely mentions the *reception* of women's peace pageants, which I believe is crucial—if pageants (or in my case plays) are assumed to have pedagogical and political value (as Bzowski argues), then I believe the critical or popular responses such performances generated needs to be considered.

A sophisticated discussion of feminism and the Holocaust is found in Vivian M. Patraka's Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust (1999).[27] Patraka's book is a complex consideration of what

[27] Vivian M. Patraka, Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust (Bloomington: Indiana UP,1999).

constitutes a "Holocaust performative" through looking at divers representations from plays and solo performance pieces to Holocaust museums. In one chapter she interrogates the ways feminist critiques are problematized but not rendered extinct by the enormity of the "goneness" of the Holocaust. Of more immediate use to my project is her chapter "Realism, Gender, and Historical Crisis," which offers an excellent analysis of the gender relationships at work in Lillian Hellman's Watch on the Rhine. Although much of Patraka's book is outside my era, I was inspired by the way Patraka allowed both her passion for feminist theory and her compassion for all Holocaust victims and survivors to inform her smart and savvy work.

Two recent books were models for my case studies. Nora M. Alter's Vietnam Protest Plays: The Television War on Stage (1997) and J. Ellen Gainor's Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theatre, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48 (2001).[28] Alter's basic methodology for her case studies is to combine her own interpretation of plays with numerous references to contemporary reviews, and she also provides some information on the dramas' production histories. She

[28] J. Ellen Gainor: Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theatre, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48 (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001).

carefully considers how subject positions such as race and gender operate in the plays she examines; for instance, she writes about the way the soldiers in Viet Rock are "gendered" as female during basic training in order to break them down as individual "men," and in her conclusion she devotes nearly three pages to a discussion of race in Adrienne Kennedy's An Evening with Dead Essex (1973). Although I am not examining Vietnam plays in this work, Alter provided me with an excellent working model. J. Ellen Gainor's book covers all of Susan Glaspell's plays, not only those directly concerned with war, and I read her book considerably after I started this project, but I was excited by her work because it is an excellent example of the ways literary criticism, theatre history, and a deep knowledge of a time period can be combined into a satisfying examination of plays and their productions. Gainor offers close readings of Glaspell's plays woven together with rich historical context that enlivens her analysis of the literature and considerations of reviewers' evaluations of the works. Her analysis of Glaspell's play Inheritors is particularly relevant to my work, and is discussed in Chapter Three.

Charles M. Carpenter's book Playwrights Confront the Nuclear Age, 1945-1964 surveys a number of plays about

nuclear weapons, but he seems dismissive of plays that are neither modernist nor realistic, such as E=mc^2, a Living Newspaper.[29] His book's chief strength is its description and discussion of so many plays on the same theme, but most of them are much later than the plays I examine, and some of his case studies are not, in my opinion, very insightful.

Two dissertations have been particularly useful to my project. Valerie Beth Mangnum's "American Attitudes Towards War as Reflected in American Drama, 1773-1946" (1947) surveys war plays from Revolutionary times through 1945-46, and is a good summary of plays (mostly in New York or on Broadway) by both male and female authors. Her discussion of theatre in her own time is the most valuable part of this work for me. Robert David Hostetter's "The American Nuclear Theatre, 1946-1984" is principally concerned with nuclear plays from the 1980s, but he includes a thoughtful analysis of Hallie Flanagan's 1946 E=mc^2, too.

There is a growing body of work in other disciplines like history and literature that considers women's

[29] Carpenter, Charles A. Dramatists and the Bomb: American and British Playwrights Confront the Nuclear Age, 1945-1964. Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies 91. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1999).

contributions to war and peace. While such sources are not directly related to theatre, they helped me connect women's war plays with other ways women participated in war and antiwar activities. One book which was useful to me is Harriet Hyman Alonso's Peace as a Woman's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights (1993), because it makes explicit connections between women's issues and pacifism throughout American history, with an emphasis on suffrage-pacifists and feminist-peace activists.[30] While not all women dramatists who wrote about war were feminists or pacifists, many embraced one or both of these identities. A historical understanding of the connections between women's issues and peace movements is crucial for contextualizing much of this drama, and Peace as a Women's Issue provides a good survey of this material. Other books written about women's peace organizations in the US include Carrie A. Foster's The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-

[30] Harriet Hyman Alonso, Peace as a Woman's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights, (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1993).

1946 (1995),[31] and Amy Swerdlow's Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s (1993).[32] Although these three books only address some of the dozens of women's peace organizations in the United States throughout the twentieth century, together they document some of the most significant groups, and all are written in a scholarly fashion.

Another work that caused me to think about women and activism is Barbara J. Steinson's American Women's Activism in World War I. Steinson's book documents women's war related activities—both in peace organizations and in war preparedness and relief work—and shows how *both* types of activists often used traditional conceptions of women as maternal and nurturing to claim a "special relationship to war" and further their own causes.[33] What impresses me about Steinson's book is that it acknowledges different sorts of women's wartime efforts and does not limit itself to the works of pacifists alone. Some of the plays I have included in the World War II chapters are not particularly

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[31] Carrie A. Foster, The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946 (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995).

[32] Amy Swerdlow, Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993).

[33] Barbara J. Steinson, American Women's Activism in World War I (New York:Garland, 1982) i.

appealing to me, as they are pro-war and/or anti-feminist, but I think it is important for feminist scholars to grapple with women's works that are not in accordance with our own times and viewpoints if those texts can help illuminate the ways gender was constructed or construed in earlier eras.

Finally, there are many books that help to illuminate the issues or background ideas found in one particular case study. My final case study on $E=mc^2$, for instance, is indebted to two cultural histories of nuclear war and its attendant anxieties: Paul S. Boyer's By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age (1985) and Spencer R. Weart's Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (1988).[34] Boyer's book is a rich analysis of the atomic bomb's impact on American consciousness 1945-50, and Weart's traces cultural constructions of the atom, nuclear energy, and existential fears over several decades. While it would be impractical to list here all of the sources that were useful for one case study or chapter, there are many works that are not

[34] Paul S. Boyer, By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age (New York: Pantheon, 1985). Spencer R. Weart, Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1988).

specifically about war and theatre, but help flesh out the context for an era or issue.

The next four chapters in this dissertation each address plays of a particular era and are also somewhat linked by their themes or political objectives. Chapter Two, Pacifist Plays of the Isolationist Era, contains two cases studies: an examination of several antiwar plays by Beulah Marie Dix and War Brides by Marion Craig Wentworth. These plays argued against war and most deployed idealistic notions of motherhood and womanhood in support of peace during the period just before the United States entered World War I. Chapter Three, "What 'twas all for?": Plays for Postwar Social Change, contains three case studies: a consideration of three short plays about African American soldiers, two plays by female members of the Provincetown Players, and a folk play, Sun-Up. These plays, written and/or performed between 1918 and 1923, were all performed in little theatres or schools and argued for peace, racial equality, freedom of expression, and other progressive post-World War I social changes.

Chapters Four and Five are concerned with World War II plays. Chapter Four, "Shaken Out of the Magnolias": Plays to Mobilize America, contains two case studies. The first addresses Lillian Hellman's anti-fascist dramas, and

the second looks at two comedies that encouraged enlistment: of men to fight and of women to work at new occupations. These plays are from 1941-1944, before and during US participation in World War II, and are plays that support the war effort. Chapter Five, “A Period of Retrogression”: Plays to Reconvert and Reconstruct Postwar Society, has three case studies. The first addresses two plays about returning soldiers and their wives or sweethearts; these plays argue for a return to traditional roles for women in light of their partners’ urgent readjustment needs. The second case study examines the postwar housing crunch and the difficulties facing returning African American soldiers, and the third is about a Living Newspaper on the issue of atomic energy. These plays from 1944-47 address the fears and anxieties many people experienced about change and post-World War II society. As a whole, the chapters in this study cover major trends in society and playwriting, but the specific issues covered are the ones found in the plays themselves. Some aspects of the American experience of the World Wars (like women serving in the military as WACs and WAVES, or the detainment of German and Japanese Americans as “enemy aliens,” for instance) are therefore not addressed if they were not dramatized in the plays of the period.

I believe my project can be a useful addition to twentieth century American theatre history and criticism. Since most sources on theatre and war were published within the last ten years, theatre and war seems to be an emerging field (or sub-field) of theatre scholarship and a consideration of women's war plays will dovetail with this work as well as complement recent scholarship emerging from fields like English, literature, and history that center around women's war writings or wartime activities. Women have successfully used theatre to give voice to their political convictions in a discourse dominated by men. While during the World Wars few women were engaged in waging war in a traditional sense, some were staging their ideas about war and peace on a variety of different fronts. These playwrights were concerned with big issues, and their plays are the tools they used to try to make people think, make people act, and make a difference in their communities and their world.

Chapter Two:

Pacifist Plays of the Isolationist Era

> HOFFMAN: We are going away—the best of us—to be shot, most likely. Don't you suppose we want to send some parts of ourselves into the future since we can't live ourselves? . . .
>
> HEDWIG [aka Joan] (*Nodding slowly.*) "What. . . to breed a soldier for the Empire, to restock the land? [*Fiercely.*] And for what? For food for the next generation's cannon? Oh, it is an insult to our womanhood! You violate all that makes marriage sacred![1]

Marion Craig Wentworth's phenomenally popular 1915 vaudeville playlet War Brides electrified audiences across the United States by debunking the romantic notion of "war brides" and exposing the suffering and hardships many women experience during wartime. Hedwig (her name was changed to the more neutral-sounding "Joan" when the script was produced) is a plucky peasant woman and Hoffman is a lieutenant who scolds her for discouraging other

[1] Marion Craig Wentworth, War Brides (New York: Century, 1915) 32-33. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

young women from marrying for patriotism rather than love. Hedwig/Joan rejects his arguments by invoking the sanctity of marriage, a socially endorsed notion (although her mentions of breeding and stocking are blunt comparisons of motherhood with animal husbandry). But the rest of the speech reveals more revolutionary sentiments:

> Are we women never to get up out of the dust? You never asked us if we wanted this war: yet you ask us to gather in the crops, cut the wood, keep the world going, drudge and slave, and wait and agonize, lose our all, and go on bearing more men—and more—to be shot down! If we breed the men for you, why don't you let us say what is to become of them? (33)

The second part of the speech also exhibits concern for the value of women's labor and a desire for political efficacy. Like many war plays, Wentworth's drama links issues of war and peace to other political and social concerns. Along with many other plays of this era, War Brides argues against war—and by extension, against American involvement in World War I.

Opposition to war generally or for the United States specifically were widely held views in 1915, and these convictions underscore the plays discussed in this

chapter. In War Brides, Marion Craig Wentworth also deploys gender to make her arguments, depicting the effects of militarism on mothers and their children. This shrewd strategy appeals to conservative tastes and provides a cover for her more controversial contentions. As Harriet Hyman Alonso observes, appeals to motherhood have permeated feminist peace activists' discourse throughout the twentieth century because it provides an "acceptable context" and grants women "a unique position that men cannot share and therefore cannot really argue against."[2] Like other progressive reformers, female suffragists and peace activists used essentialist arguments about gender as essential tools for change.

The two case studies in this chapter address peace plays written by women. The first section discusses Beulah Marie Dix's antiwar dramas, including two that were on Broadway, Across the Border (1914) and Moloch (1915). The second looks at the phenomenon of War Brides, a vaudeville sensation. None of these plays is set in a particular nation. They do not debate specific military objectives. Instead, these plays are concerned with war's

[2] Harriet Hyman Alonso. Peace as a Woman's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights, Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution Ser. (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1993) 10-12.

effects on Everyman and Everywoman: on soldiers, on families, on women and children. They plead for peace by showing the human costs of conflict. The antiwar stance these plays adopt mirrored the prevailing sentiments of most Americans during this time.

Before the United States declared war on April 6, 1917, the vast majority of Americans wanted their country to remain neutral or to support Allied efforts through the sale of military supplies, but not to enter the war as a belligerent nation. The sinking of the British passenger ship Lusitania on May 7, 1915 by a German submarine—which killed approximately 1200 people, 128 of whom were American citizens (including the powerful theatrical producer Charles Frohman)—helped to solidify American public opinion against "barbarous" Germany, yet public outcry did not translate into a mandate to enter the war. As Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan observe, most American citizens wanted a diplomatic condemnation of the "massacre," such as "to demand from Germany disavowal [of future sinkings of civilian ships], apology, and the payment of an indemnity," but "did not clamor for war."[3]

[3] Thomas A. Bailey and Paul B. Ryan, The Lusitania Disaster: An Episode in Modern Warfare and Diplomacy (NY: Macmillan, 1975) 234-235.

Furthermore, President Woodrow Wilson's reelection in 1916 was at least partially based on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Not surprisingly, most plays from 1914 to early 1917 were antiwar plays, although some critics after the Lusitania incident were scornful of plays that they felt advocated "Peace at Any Price."

Although peace organizations existed in the United States prior to the outbreak of World War I in Europe, (many traced their origins to nineteenth century abolitionist activities), the start of the war in the summer of 1914 reinvigorated and enlarged the peace movement and renewed calls to try arbitration or other diplomatic means to end the fighting. Another post-1914 development within the peace movement was the expansion of women's roles in such groups. According to Barbara J. Steinson, women after 1914 "supplied much of the leadership, enthusiasm, and determination, and performed much of the difficult, but unrecognized, behind-the-scenes organizational work that made the existence of peace organizations possible."[4] Furthermore, many women wanted to form their own peace organizations rather than labor in male-dominated ones. Some of these women's groups,

[4] Barbara J. Steinson, American Women's Activism in World War I, Modern American History Ser. (New York and London: Garland, 1982) 1.

especially the Woman's Peace Party, were afraid that hostile international affairs would derail their efforts to win female suffrage; these organizations took as their missions the promotion of both pacifism and women's rights.[5] Women's groups—whether they had conservative or liberal views about suffrage and other women's rights and roles in society—usually took advantage of widespread essentialist views of womanhood and motherhood as anti-violent and concerned with the preservation of children's lives to claim moral authority on the subject of peace, as previously discussed.[6] Although not all Americans, and not all women, were in favor of peace or neutrality during the period 1914-1917, the overwhelming majority of people held antiwar views, and pacifism was particularly widespread among American women.

Given such antiwar sentiments, it is hardly surprising that female-authored plays in the United States about war between 1913-1917 were pacifist. What is perhaps more extraordinary is that women were writing plays and getting them produced at all. In her dissertation on "New Women" dramatists in the United

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[5] Alonso, 56.

[6] Steinson demonstrates throughout her book female how activists employed traditional conceptions of women to further their causes.

States, Sherry Engle describes how women playwrights and productions of their works went from being relative rarities in the 1890s to "attaining credibility with managers and the public by 1910," and that they "bloomed" in the decade 1910-1920.[7] In 1914, playwright Eleanor Gates said:

> Some one asked me how I accounted for the "irruption of women dramatists" during the past few years. Well, I've irrupted myself pretty recently and I imagine the same explanation could be applied to most of us. Women are beginning to do their own work in the world. Instead of some man reading a play to them while they criticised, suggested changes, and helped him lick it into shape, they are writing their own plays.[8]

During the Progressive Era, more and more women began to "do their own work" outside the domestic sphere, both for pay and in volunteer organizations such as peace and preparedness movements. Women who wrote plays during the

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[7] Sherry Darlene Engle, "New Women Dramatists in America, 1890-1920: Martha Morton and Madeleine Lucette Ryley," diss., U of Texas at Austin, 1996, 98-102. The reference to the "blooming" of women dramatists during the teens is from an article, "Native Drama Gaining by Women Writing Plays," Sun and New York Herald 14 Mar. 1920: 7:6.

[8] "Plans a Big Hotel for Mothers and Children Only," New York Times 4 Jan. 1914: 4, qtd. by Engle 101.

teens were not the first do so, but they were among a pioneering generation of female playwrights. Although some of these women writers wrote light, popular plays that catered to predominately female audiences, many wrote serious plays utilizing some of the same themes and subject matter as their male counterparts. When it came to writing plays about World War I, women dramatists were among the first to tackle this subject matter.

Possibly the earliest war play to be produced in the United States after Europe entered World War I was Katrina Trask's In the Vanguard. Published in 1913, Trask's play premiered on October 12, 1914 at the Academy of Music in Northampton, Massachusetts, under the direction of Bertram Harrison and Jessie Bonstelle. In the Vanguard was also produced in Rochester and Detroit in December of 1914, but it does not seem to have had a professional production in New York City.

In the Vanguard opens with young women discussing war and declaring that they want to marry military heroes. The play follows Elsa, who thinks war is "glorious" and her beau, Philip, who becomes a soldier. Philip seems to be the very model of a valiant and gallant soldier, distinguishing himself in battle and also preventing his comrades from taking liberties with the daughter of the

enemy household with which they are billeted, until he speaks to "The Enemy," a dying soldier. The dying man convinces Philip that they are both engaged in wholesale murder. When Philip offers to get medical assistance for The Enemy, the wounded man laughs and remarks, "Blow a man to pieces in the name of patriotism, and then try to patch the pieces together in the name of humanity. It's really comic when you think about it."[9] Shaken by the encounter, Philip decides to relinquish a promotion to the rank of Captain and requests that he be permitted to serve the remainder of his tour of duty as a private carrying the colors. He returns home to discover his friends, family, and employers are ashamed of his actions and want to disassociate themselves from him. Only Elsa (who has heard a "Voice of Prophecy" which convinced her that working for a universal "Brotherhood" was superior to fighting wars) and Mr. Greart, a wealthy villager with unpopular views on peace, support Philip. That is enough, however, for the happy and idealistic couple; Elsa exclaims to Philip that "the new order *is* dawning upon the earth—and you are in the vanguard!" (139).

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[9] Katrina Trask, In the Vanguard (New York: Macmillan, 1913) 84. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

The reviews for In the Vanguard largely agree that the play lacks dramatic action and is better read than enacted. Some reviewers praise Trask's message even if they disparage her dramatic technique. The [Rochester?] Post Express says the drama is "really a sermon," and The Detroit Tribune concludes, "while 'In the Vanguard' is a valuable contribution to the peace movement, it is not drama."[10]

One of the most interesting reviews of In the Vanguard, by W. J. Black of the Detroit Journal, is worth quoting and discussing at some length because it blames many of the drama's weaknesses on the *gender* of its author and director and takes issue with the aspects of war that are not depicted. Black's review of this play is a revealing example of the biases and preconceptions about gender and war that circulate in many such reviews of women's plays. Black writes of war:

> Not Checkoff [sic] . . . nor Ibsen, nor Shaw could exhaust this idea in one of their masterpieces. In their hands war would drip its

[10] Post Express 11 December 1914 and "'In the Vanguard' at the Garrick," Detroit Tribune 15 December 1914. Both of these clippings are in the Kathleen Comegys Scrapbook, NYPL Performing Arts Collection.

> blood, and the most murderous would recoil at the simple dramatic climaxes.[11]

From the outset, Black places Trask in an impossible condition, comparing her new play to hypothetical war plays penned by the great masters of modern realism. Black's idea that in the hands of these men "war would drip its blood" is not even particularly accurate; Shaw's Arms and the Man, for instance, mocks the ways both genders romanticize warfare. Having established Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw as models of unflinching realism, Black paints Trask and director Jessie Bonstelle as too "feminine" (read sentimental and ill-informed) to handle the subject of war:

> But here we encounter two gentle feminine minds, the widow of Spencer Trask and our own beloved Jessie Bonstelle. "In the Vanguard" is revealed in their hands as a pleasing miracle or morality play . . . . the feminine way is the feminine way. Such a pretty scene was the opening with the girls gaily making garlands for their enlisted heroes in uniform at the church door .

[11] W. J. Black, "'In the Vanguard at the Garrick," Detroit Journal 15 December 1914, in the Kathleen Comegys Scrapbook, NYPL Performing Arts Collection.

> . . . What an opportunity was here? The blare of bugles, the pomp and circumstance of war, the "Tramp, tramp, tramp" and the "rumble of the distant drum" all could have been utilized . . . . War, war! This was a theme to raise the roof with. "Shenandoah" could have been outdone with its colorful alarms. In the procession the blood-red emblems, the maimed, the pensioned, the heroes, the medals, the cemeteries, the Memorial days, the stench and glory. The farthest peanut gallery might roar that patriotism of which it has almost a monopoly. Then the contrast.

Black's effusive declarations of what a war play *should be* eclipse his descriptions of what the playwright actually presented. He does not seem to appreciate that Trask's "pretty scene" of girls bedecking their soldier boys with flowers helps to show that women who idolize men in uniform are also share moral responsibility for promoting war—a point many women authors include in their plays. For the most part, this reviewer avoids judging the playwright's dramatic skill (or ineptitude) but attributes its flaws to its conception and direction by "gentle feminine minds." Black does concede that he agrees with

Trask's politics if not her dramaturgical sensibilities at the conclusion of the review, when he calls the play:

> . . . a significant and dramatic portrayal of the crime of war, and a plea for peace, a dramatization of Mrs. Trask's book, which is being widely read. We may cry aloud for a dramatist. Heaven send us an Ibsen or a Checkoff! Lacking them, Heaven speed this production, for the world needs this message, whether uttered from stage or book or forum.

Black's review is the earliest example of a theme that reoccurs frequently with women's war plays, (which are overwhelmingly critiqued by male reviewers): blaming the author's gender rather than her skill or ideological slant when the play does not satisfy the reviewer's tastes.

While <u>In the Vanguard</u> may not be a particularly well-written drama, some other war plays by women were admired for their craftsmanship as well as (or in spite of) their political themes. One of the most professional of the early war-play writers was Beulah Marie Dix, who was also a dedicated pacifist and prolific writer. Like Trask, she would sometimes be criticized for her gendered point of view about war, but unlike Trask, Dix saw her work

performed professionally in New York and the object of more critical attention.

Beulah Marie Dix's Antiwar Plays

Beulah Marie Dix (1876-1970) is the most important and prolific of the American women who wrote peace plays during the early days of World War I. Her status as an established professional playwright and novelist, her use of deep historical research to inform her writing, and commitment to peace activism made her the best-known and most influential female author to write about war from 1914-1917 in the United States. Her plays Across the Border (1914) and Moloch (1915) surprised audiences because she depicted war as a brutal and futile endeavor rather than a noble cause. For Dix, taking the romance out of war was a deliberate move: she had already achieved considerable success as an author of historical romances, but changed her writing dramatically and strategically in response to the events of her time.

Dix was a Radcliffe-educated author who had achieved professional success as a writer well before 1914. She credits her college education with inspiring her to write plays, "when I was groping for a new means of expression,

I . . . found [at the Radcliffe Idler Club] a little stage that demanded plays."[12] Writing for this group inspired her to look to the past for material. In 1895 school authorities decreed that women playing men's roles were forbidden to dress in pants, so the women compromised by sporting gymnasium bloomers until some of the students "suggested that we write our own plays, and . . . why not lay them in a knickerbockered period and thus solve the vexatious problem of male costume?"[13] Hence, most of Dix's plays from her university days and many later ones were set in the Cavalier period, including her first published play, Cicely's Cavalier.

After graduation, Dix wrote plays in collaboration with Evelyn Greenleaf Sutherland until her friend's death in 1908, and many of these plays were historical dramas. She also published a collection of six one-acts in 1910 called Allison's Lad and Other Martial Interludes, and wrote several historical novels and children's books. Dix's daughter, Evelyn Greenleaf Flebbe Scott, states that historical romance was an extremely popular genre in the

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[12] Beulah Dix Flebbe, "Reminiscences of a Radcliffe Playwright," What We Found at Radcliffe (Boston: McGrath-Sherill, n.d. but c. 1920) 23.

[13] Flebbe 21.

1890s and early 1900s and that her mother's early works were

> romantic in the sense of swashbuckling, never sugary, and they were historically exact. Mother was serious about research, which she felt many of her peers of either sex were not. Possets, poignards, or pomander boxes were not wrongly set in a page she wrote.[14]

The plays contained in the Allison's Lad collection reflect Dix's love of historical period and evidence her keen eye for detail; however, unlike her later pacifist works they often celebrate male sacrifice and military valor. Many of these plays involve the dramatic device *voix du sang*—an innate attraction towards blood relatives[15]—to explain why imprisoned or entrapped men decide to place strangers' welfare above their own, or otherwise include plots revolving around men who willingly die to save their comrades or civilians. Chivalrous and full of martial derring-do, these plays are radically different from the plays Dix would write from 1914-1916,

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[14] Evelyn F. Scott, Hollywood When Silents Were Golden (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1972) 15.

[15] Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, History of the Theatre, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003) 249.

and are at odds with Scott's assertion that pacifism was her mother's "most passionate crusade."[16]

What may have influenced Dix's shift from glorifying martial exploits to condemning them in her writing? First of all, her daughter credits Dix's voracious appetite for historical research with informing her about the realities of actual wars:

> She knew better than most women, most writers, and most readers of the period, that fighting would be hell even if it got labeled "a war to end wars" or "a just cause." In her mind, thanks to her research, were all those sordid facts it was not going to be patriotic to speak about for years (though she did)—namely, that looting, sadism, rape, massacre, and systematic starvation were not weapons merely of a depraved enemy; and that all of it was futile.[17]

Faced with the prospect of a world at war, Dix probably decided to abandon romantic fictions that valorized fighting.

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[16] Scott 29.

[17] Scott 40.

Dix's personal life was likely another factor that affected her writing. She married George M. Flebbe in 1910, a German immigrant and importer of European books. With a German-American spouse and a social circle that now included her husbands' German friends, Dix was likely sensitive to the ways popular opinion in the United States vilified Germans as brutish "Huns" and suspected German-Americans of disloyalty. Dix's daughter writes of the era:

> [Because of] the anti-German feeling of the time . . . . Your next door neighbor of years might actually believe that the whole German army spent its time chopping off babies' hands or impaling them on helmet spikes. Men who offered any contradiction got sent to jail. Daschunds were stoned.[18]

In nearly all of Dix's antiwar plays, she shows how exaggerated reports of foreign atrocities are used by both warring parties to justify their own military actions or she depicts civilian sufferings at the hands of supposedly friendly soldiers.

[18] Scott 44.

Dix protested World War I by writing both plays for both the professional stage and for schools. Scott writes of Dix's activism:

> Up to 1916, she did what she could about the war. At the risk of being labeled pro-German, she wrote two strenuously antiwar plays, Moloch and Across the Border. She even dared to claim that today's enemy can be tomorrow's ally . . . . They did not make money—not in the days of Nurse Edith Cavell and the Lusitania.[19]

Scott's analysis of why these plays were not profitable is not completely on the mark. Across the Border was produced before either event listed above took place, and Moloch opened after the May 7, 1915 sinking of the Lusitania but before Cavell's death on October 12, 1915. In general, Across the Border received more favorable reviews than Moloch, did, possibly due to American outrage over the Lusitania. Many factors, however, can account for a play's financial profit or loss, including the size

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[19] Scott 45. Nurse Edith Cavell was an English nurse who helped wounded Allied prisoners in occupied Belgium escape and was executed by a German firing squad. According to Stewart Haley Ross, Cavell's case was among the incidents that increased pro-war sentiment in the US, and she was even compared by a New York Times writer to a modern Antigone. Stewart Halsey Ross, Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996) 70-71.

of the theatre (Across the Border played in a particularly small house), cast size, technical budget, marketing, and length of run, among other things. Audience support for Dix's politics was likely favorable to mixed. While most Americans wanted to remain neutral, pro-war propaganda, particularly reports of German atrocities against Belgian civilians, was circulated in the United States almost as soon as war broke out in Europe. As early as September 1914, a New York Times editorial said this would be "the first press agents' war" and that all the belligerent nations naturally desired to enlist the sympathies of the United States.[20] It is also true that from the beginning British propaganda was more effective at winning the support of American citizens than were German efforts. Dix's peace politics were widely shared in 1914 and less popular but still prevalent in 1916; however, if her works were perceived as pro-German they would likely not find many sympathetic audiences.

Dix tried to avoid partisanship in her plays, refusing give specific nationalities to her protagonists. In the Princess Theatre playbill for Across the Border was a note that the "people in the play speak English, but

[20] Ross 2.

they are no more meant to be English than they are meant to be Austrian, French, German, or Russian." Likewise, she created "Everyperson" characters in Moloch, which irritated at least one reviewer: "The author has chosen to designate her characters as 'A Man—Robert,' 'His Wife—Katherine,' and so on, and the contending armies are 'the foreigners' and 'our men.' The impersonality of the drama hurts it immeasurably." This critic argues that more specific characters interest audiences more than "merely a man of some nameless nation." [21] Dix's characters and the somewhat episodic nature of her plays (particularly Across the Border) are actually similar to elements of German expressionist drama, although it is uncertain whether Dix or her audiences were aware of this literary movement as early as 1914-15. To a modern reader, however, Dix's blending of realism and expressionistic-like devices may make her plays more interesting.

Across the Border has realistic elements, but it is probably best characterized as a dream play. In the first scene, a group of soldiers, including numerous wounded, are holed up in a hut, cut off from their compatriots and surrounded by enemy troops. The Junior Lieutenant

[21] Heywood Broun, "'Moloch' Makes Plea for Peace," New York Tribune 21 Sept. 1915.

volunteers to attempt to reach reinforcements, despite the heavy odds against him. Rifle shots are heard soon after. The next scene takes place in a cottage designated as "The Place of Quiet." The Junior Lieutenant enters the cottage and takes a small boy hostage, but is disarmed and interrogated by the Master of the House. Throughout his narrative, the lieutenant describes his country's actions as being carried out in "the name of humanity,"[22] yet he catalogues a long string of horrors he has witnessed, including strategic starvation and bombing of civilians and the molestation of a young girl and summary execution of her grief-crazed father. When the Master of the House comments that perhaps little can be expected of "clever heathen," the Junior Lieutenant defends his nation as a Christian land and asserts that, "we are fighting in God's cause, and He is always on our side, for we are always right" (40). Once talk turns to religion, the Junior Lieutenant realizes that his head wound is worse than he thought; he has "crossed the border" (42). He recognizes The Girl in the cottage as literally the girl of his dreams, and is distressed that she shrinks from him. The

[22] Beulah Marie Dix, Across the Border: A Play of the Present (London: Methuen, 1915) 29. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

Master of the House leads him out of the cottage and tells the young man he will make him understand.

The third scene, in “The Place of Winds,” is rather like Ebenezer Scrooge’s journeys with the various Christmas ghosts in Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol: The Master of the House shows the Junior Lieutenant the consequences of his actions during his military career. Throughout, the lieutenant is freezing (a reminder of the misery inflicted on civilians burned out of their homes) and tortured by the sounds of the wind, which seems to be comprised of millions of people crying, screaming—what the Master of the House calls “the wail of the world” (66), and whose volume increases when “you are making your righteous wars” (67). The Junior Lieutenant begs to be given a chance to go back and tell people what he has discovered. He awakes in a field hospital, mortally wounded, and tries to make himself heard over the other injured soldiers, including The Man Who Prays and the Man Who Curses. He is unable to make anyone listen to his message, but The Girl appears and tells him he can join her in The Place of Quiet since he has at least tried to redeem himself and save others.

Across the Border opened at the Princess Theatre in New York on November 24, 1914, along with three other one-

act plays. It was the first war play to be produced in New York after hostilities began in Europe, and before it ended its New York run it had also been produced in Boston and Chicago. A short story version of Across the Border was published in Good Housekeeping in February of 1915, the same month the play was published by the London firm Methuen and Company. Although it may not have "made money" according to Scott, it would be hard to term this play a failure since it received favorable reviews, was produced in at least three cities, and was published in two different formats. Certainly, this play generated discussion, most of it positive. In August of 1915, Vogue called Across the Border the "best play that has thus far been inspired by the European War."[23] The New York Times called Across the Border "as elaborate and ambitious a work as it has fallen to the Princess to present since this small playhouse opened its doors," and said it was "a voice raised in the theatre against the monstrous horror and infamy of war."[24] Theatre Arts Magazine called it "a realistic and highly imaginative arraignment of the folly, cruelty, and horror of war" and judged it to be

[23] Vogue 15 August 1915, in a scrapbook in the Robinson Locke Collection, Series 3, Vol. 368, NYPL Performing Arts Collection.

[24] "Four One-Act Plays at the Princess Theatre," New York Times 25 Nov. 1914 : 11:1.

"impressive and worthy."[25] Drama critic Hector Turnbull, of the New York Tribune, found this play particularly praiseworthy, calling it:

> . . . undoubtedly a playlet of power, and one who has seen it . . . will find food for reflection for a long time, as it is well-nigh impossible to rid one's mind of its stirring effect. . . . It is a play that makes itself felt at once by the sincerity of its theme and the admirable manner in which it is written and constructed.[26]

The criticism of this play hints at its effectiveness as both a piece of writing and a performed work. For the small Princess Theatre, this play was an especially "elaborate and ambitious" play to mount, but the production was "impressive and worthy." It is impossible to know when Turnbull writes of the play's "stirring effect" whether his subjective reaction to the play was an emotion shared by most audience members, but the positive tone of most reviews suggests the play was well-received by spectators. Perhaps encouraged by those who found

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[25] " The New Plays," Theatre Arts Magazine January 1915: 44.

[26] Hector Turnbull, "Four New Plays at the Princess," New York Tribune 25 Nov. 1914.

Across the Border to be a "playlet of power," Dix began work on a second, longer antiwar play, Moloch.

The title is a biblical reference to a Phoenician god to whom parents sacrificed their children, but which is used metaphorically to stand for the god of war who exacts a terrible tribute from those who follow his ways. Despite this allegorical title and (as discussed previously) Dix's disinclination to specify her characters' nationalities, Moloch is far more realistic than Across the Border. Written in "a Prologue, three acts and an Epilogue," Moloch follows a family before, during, and after a war. The prologue is set in a country-house and introduces the family: the parents, Robert and Katherine; their small boy Roland who is frightened by a picture-book illustration whose caption reads, "They made the children pass through the fire to Moloch;"[27] Phil, the family friend, a doctor who saved the child's life once, and who is engaged to the man's sister, Gertrude; the man's brother Basil and the girls who are "sweet on him," and so forth. By the end of the prologue, war has been declared and Phil, who is a foreigner, is asked by the village to leave. The first act,

[27] Beulah Marie Dix, Moloch (New York: Knopf, 1916) 7. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

“Mobilization,” opens with women making nosegays and talking about handsome soldiers. Robert and Basil decide to join the services and Gertrude resolves to repudiate her love for Phil in favor of her love for her country.

The second and third acts of the play are filled with wartime horrors. The family, unable to evacuate their town house because little Roland has typhoid, finds their home filled with enemy soldiers. One of them, a Lieutenant, is revealed to be Phil’s cousin, and is kind towards the family; however, their servant Martha kills the young officer in his sleep to avenge the deaths of her sister and young niece and infant nephew. Martha is dragged into the street and shot as a warning to the neighbors, and the family’s house is burned. Roland dies in the cold and Robert, receiving news of his son’s death, becomes a heavy drinker and a cruel officer. He threatens to torture a captured enemy aviator (Phil) and is only prevented by Katherine (now a nurse) who recognizes Phil and helps him to swallow a suicide capsule. Robert also shoots a young, recently conscripted soldier who does not want to kill. Dix said that in Moloch she

> tried to show how endless and purposeless war really is when stripped of its imaginary glamour; how it changes men’s very natures and

> bequeaths a legacy of hate to little children . . . . Men who before war were touched by the sufferings of a nameless dog in war become so changed and brutalized that they do not stop at the most savage deeds.[28]

Throughout the play, wartime rules and codes of conduct are mentioned, and then broken. In the epilogue, labeled "the Fruits of Victory," Basil is in a wheelchair, Robert is an alcoholic in poor health, the countryside has been razed, and the country-house has been stripped of most of its furnishings. The roof leaks, and there is talk of new taxes. The only hopeful note is that Katherine has adopted an orphan boy whose father was killed by Robert's men. Then, in what one reviewer termed "Socratean irony,"[29] news comes that the nation will now go to war again—against their former allies and in alliance with the recent enemy. Old stories of foreign atrocities are recycled with the new foes as the villains, and Robert declares pessimistically, "As long as men are men, there'll be fighting"(93).

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[28] "Miss Dix Talks of Her New Play," Chicago Daily News 15 May 1915.

[29] Percy Hammond, "'Moloch' at Powers; News of the Stage," Chicago Tribune 23 May 1915.

Moloch opened at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York on September 20, 1915, and had previously been produced (in May) in Cleveland and Chicago. Chicago reading audiences also had a chance to read the play in The Chicago Herald, which purchased serialization rights to the play in 1915. A piece in the New York Telegraph on the play's opening in Cleveland reports telegrams that describe the audience "following it with breathless attention and receiving it with tumultuous applause."[30] After its New York debut, the Boston Evening Transcript called the play a "Vivid Picturing of Physical Destruction and the Moral Warping Wrought by Warfare."[31] Although a plot synopsis of Moloch might give the impression that the play's depictions of wartime travails and atrocities are heavy-handed, Percy Hammond of the Chicago Tribune found:

> Miss Beulah Dix's thorough aversion to war has led to few excesses in writing about it in "Moloch." . . . . Perhaps it is for this reason that the play wavers on the rim of success fiscally and as propaganda—though the experts assert that its unrelieved mark of pessimism is

[30] "'Moloch A Great Success," New York Telegraph 12 May 1915.

[31] "Miss Dix's New Play," Boston Evening Transcript 21 Sept. 1915, in a scrapbook in the Robinson Locke Collection, Series 3, Vol. 368, NYPL Performing Arts Collection.

> its handicap. Her honesty "wears no disguise nor ornament"—an unprofitable virtue in the theatre. Even the dialogue of "Moloch" has a straightforward colloquial quality without showy smartness or epigram—a sacrifice to sheer naturalness inimical to large royalties . . . . It is just a picture of war as it is seen by a woman who broods over its madness and devastation, and who is able to write of it tragically and equitably.[32]

Many critics fault women who write war plays with lacking authenticity. Interestingly, Hammond considers Dix's play to be so realistic that she jeopardizes her box office.

New York Tribune critic Heywood Broun wrote a much less flattering review of Moloch. He calls Moloch "peace propaganda from a female viewpoint, which is so irritating that it blinded us to many merits in a drama which contains much which is altogether fine." Broun's use of the term "female viewpoint" here can be interpreted as his conviction that Dix lacks an "innate" understanding of the lines drawn between justifiable and unacceptable violence in wartime. He vehemently objects to Dix's juxtaposition

[32] Hammond n.pag.

of two scenes of Robert's moral decline: the torturing of a prisoner and the execution of a young recruit who is reluctant to fight:

> It was in this scene that the woman's hand was thrust out of the play and into our face. . . . To shoot a whimpering mutineer must have seemed to her all of a piece with the torturing of a prisoner. In our view one thing was decidedly "not cricket" while the other was something which any men of our acquaintance would do and not dream of either.

Broun finds Dix's thesis repugnant, asking:

> . . . how anybody can watch the Great War and see fat vices fry away in the fire and still think that no good can come from conflict. When "Moloch" draws its indictment against war it draws an indictment too, we think, against courage, against sacrifice and against patriotism . . . . If you feel about war as Beulah Dix does you will probably like her play. We hate her viewpoint, but we have much admiration for her workmanship."[33]

[33] Broun n.pag.

Broun's criticism's of Moloch, with its disparaging remarks about "a woman's hand" and his protestations that men would not hesitate to shoot a dissenter, is echoed in another review that likewise faults Dix's gendered viewpoint and her perceived lack of understanding of the "manly virtues" of war. The Dramatic Mirror calls Moloch "the handiwork of hysterical womanhood . . . [which] has failed to interpret the moral of silent devotion to duty . . . and the glory of heroic immolation upon the altar of patriotism."[34] Criticisms such as these, while certainly sexist, probably also reflect fears that the United States would be drawn into the conflict and the critics' desire to fight a "just war" in that eventuality.

After World War I, the United States renewed its desire to be a neutral, pacifist nation, and plays like Moloch were sometimes reevaluated. In a brief letter to Dix from Frances W. Spague of Boston, Massachusetts, Spague writes of finding a reference to Across the Border in one of her old diaries and includes a clipping about Moloch from "the [Boston Evening?] Transcript":

> And "Moloch," by Beulah Marie Dix Flebbe, when produced by Holbrook Blinn and George Tyler, was

[34] "First Nighter," Dramatic Mirror 22 Sept. 1915: 8 qtd. in Wainscott 11-12.

> so far from being "pretty-pretty" that people were carried out in a faint after nearly every performance! Mrs. Flebbe was called "coarse" and "hysterical" for being the first to get away from the idea of war as a chocolate soldier musical comedy. Today, rather belatedly, many critics say her "Moloch" was the best thing to come out of the World War.[35]

Although reading this play today it is hard to imagine audience members "carried out in a faint," this clipping and the other reviews discussed document this play's power—to frighten, disgust, or instill admiration.

Although Dix had two plays on Broadway during 1914-1915, she also wrote several short antiwar plays during the same time period that were unlikely to ever receive any professional productions or generate any royalties. Between March 1915 and April 1916, Dix published four plays and one pageant under the auspices of the American School Peace League. This organization promoted the annual observation of a Peace Day on May 18, whose purpose was to instill:

[35] Ts. Frances W. Sprague to Beulah Marie Dix, n.d., and unsourced clipping, Beulah Dix Flebbe Papers at the Knight Library, University of Oregon.

> into the minds of young people the great laws of human brotherhood, to point out the historical significance of the progressive measures making for world peace, adopted by the two Hague conferences, and to emphasize the American ideal of peace through justice.[36]

To help achieve these goals the plays could be performed without payment of royalties by schools or other groups of school-aged children. In The Enemy (1915), recommended for secondary school boys, a youth who wants to volunteer for military service comes to the realization that a captured enemy soldier is really "just like any other chap," and rethinks his decision to enlist.[37] In A Pageant of Peace (1915), recommended for elementary school students, a series of allegorical characters show what happens when War takes men from their families and communities. Eventually Peace and Justice displace War, while Wisdom, Prosperity, and Social Justice drive away Crime, Famine, and Pestilence. One of the most surprising aspects of this play is that Dix specifies that Peace is to be played by "the tallest and manliest boy in the

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[36] Fannie Fern Andrews (Secretary of the American School Peace League), preface to both Beulah Marie Dix's The Enemy and A Pageant of Peace (Boston: American School Peace League, 1915).

[37] Dix, Enemy, 24.

school,"[38] contradicting popular conceptions of "Peace" as feminine or weak. This pageant also suggests that a country's true heroes are its explorers, firemen, nurses, and scientists, rather than soldiers, and it offers as a model of nations cooperating together the United States' forty-eight "sovereign states that have lived in peace for fifty years" (17). The pageant concludes with peace lyrics to be sung to the tunes of familiar ballads, including a song based on the patriotic hymn "America" with new lyrics promoting internationalism by In the Vanguard author Katrina Trask.

The following year Dix published three more juvenile peace plays. Where War Comes, recommended for lower school grades, is the story of two young children who want to play at soldiers until the "Dream Lady" shows them little children like themselves who are hungry, cold, and lost—all because soldiers on both sides have taken their homes, livestock, and family members away. This peace play ends with the children deciding to wear Red Cross armbands rather than soldier caps so they can play that they are helping war victims. The Glorious Game, recommended for school-girls, centers around a family of

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[38] Dix, Pageant of Peace, 12. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

women who take in refugee women, including an enemy refugee girl. The daughters of both sides learn they have lost their brothers and mourn together—both for their brothers' lives and the fact that wars had "killed the best" parts of them already.[39] Finally, Clemency, recommended "for amateurs," is a play about a farm woman who is told by her uncle that she can have "any living thing that's on the place"[40] for her birthday present; she shocks him by electing to shield a captured enemy soldier from a lynch mob instead of selecting a horse or cow to keep for herself. These simple, didactic skits were obviously written and donated to the American School Peace League as part of Dix's peace activism rather than to advance her career as a professional playwright. Nevertheless, these little plays reiterate many of Dix's themes from her adult pacifist plays.

By mid-1916 it seemed less likely that the United States could stay out of World War I, and the international economic pressures and trade barriers which were a by-product of the European war along with homegrown

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[39] Beulah Marie Dix, The Glorious Game (Boston: American School Peace League, 1916) 23.

[40] Beulah Marie Dix, Clemency, (Boston: American School Peace League, 1916) 12.

anti-German prejudices were severely harming Beulah Marie Dix's husband's business. After a visit to her friend and former agent Beatrice de Mille in California, Dix decided to relocate her family and accept a lucrative job as a staff writer for Hollywood films. Dix wrote few plays after Moloch and her American School Peace League Plays; the rest of her career was dominated by her work as a screenwriter.[41]

Suffrage and Pacifism on the Vaudeville Stage: Marion Craig Wentworth's War Brides

In January of 1915, another female-authored antiwar play opened in New York. One critic wrote that "No man or woman interested in history making should fail to see it, for the drama will be recorded as one of the incidents of the war destined to play a significant part in influencing the public opinion of the world,"[42] and another said four months later that the play was "heralded currently as the

[41] Scott 6-8 and 38-45.

[42] "War Brides is Given Place as Greatest Drama of the Moment," Atlanta Constitution 13 Feb. 1916. NB: Article states it is reprinting excerpts from Irma Dooley's "World Has Woman's Message, and It Is Against All Wars—'War Brides' Greatest Drama of the Moment, published the previous year.

greatest peace play of the century."[43] This play broke records for attendance and longevity in theatres where it played, had successful national tours, was published three separate times, and made into an acclaimed silent film—which one contemporary reviewer called the second greatest film ever made. Yet the play, Marion Craig Wentworth's War Brides, has not been recorded by historians as a significant incident of World War I or remembered as a great peace play; rather, it is all-but-forgotten. While arguably the enduring literary merits of this one-act play may not be great enough to justify its reclamation from obscurity, its remarkable popular success make it valuable as a part of a cultural history of women and war.

Just as women's writings about war have been marginalized, popular theatre has been ignored or slighted by most theatre historians until quite recently. War Brides played the vaudeville circuit, although it was not expressly written for this venue. Wentworth admitted she had mixed feelings about producing her play in this way:

> I have been somewhat distressed at having the playlet done in vaudeville, with all the other attractions before and after it. There is something incongruous in a trained elephant

[43] Minneapolis Journal 24 Apr. 1915. Locke Envelope, NYPL.

> following Nazimova, [the actress who played Joan, the play's protagonist,] or a blackface team paving the way for Joan and her family. However, perhaps this is the best way of getting it before the people, for the people who go to vaudeville theatres have been wonderfully responsive.[44]

Wentworth's comments about the other offerings surrounding her play do reflect the variety of material that comprised an evening's bill in vaudeville. A program from B.F. Keith's Palace Theatre in New York (the flagship house for the most important vaudeville circuit in the Eastern US) from a performance of War Brides shows that music, a novelty act, a blackface duo, dance, and an actress presenting "Bits of Acting" preceded it. War Brides closed the first half of the show, and the portion after intermission included several high-quality stars such as Will Rogers and the dance team of Pat Rooney, Jr. and Marion Bent. The next-to-closing act was M. and Mmme. Corradini's Menagerie, a "Wonderful Group of Trained

[44] Carlton W. Miles, Unsourced [Minneapolis] clipping 25 Apr.1915, Locke Envelope, NYPL.

Zebras, Elephants, Horses, and Dogs."[45] The program included so many vaudeville stars that the management inserted a note to audience members not to judge the merit of the artists based upon their order on the bill, as was the common custom. Nazimova in War Brides was clearly the headliner, though, and the fact that she played the Palace three weeks in a row before moving to another location on the Keith circuit attests to the "wonderfully responsive" (and profitable) reception audiences gave the play.

But the quotation cited above also shows how Wentworth, who was a committed socialist, seemed to be torn between her artistic ambitions and her political conscience. She told an interviewer she was planning to rewrite her drama to make it a full-length play which could stand alone at "first-class houses" but worried if she did the piece "may lose its chance of reaching the common people, who after all are the ones we should care most to reach."[46] Indeed, War Brides probably helped diversify vaudeville audiences where it played; it was a much-discussed "event" which generated enough publicity to attract patrons who did not regularly attend vaudeville.

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[45] Program, B.F. Keith's Palace 8 Feb. 1915 (the third and final week of War Brides at the Palace), NYPL Clippings File on War Brides.

[46] Miles, n.pag.

As Alison Kibler discusses in her study of women in vaudeville, bringing in a female star of the "legitimate" theatre for a limited engagement in vaudeville was a tactic frequently employed in the early twentieth century to appeal to women audiences and make vaudeville a more "refined" form of popular entertainment.[47] War Brides created such a critical and popular buzz that it attracted patrons of all classes to its performances.

Why did this play generate so much discussion? In part because of the rather daring ideas the author espoused. Wentworth argues that women's material and maternal labors are exploited in wartime for the state's benefit, as they take men's peacetime jobs and rear their children alone, while being denied the right to have a voice in making public policy. Wentworth especially decries romantic depictions of "war brides" who marry men they scarcely know, likening them to "breeding machine[s]" (31). She credited a newspaper piece with suggesting the subject matter to her, and the following item was printed in the playbills wherever the show toured: "Press Clipping: 'The war brides were cheered with enthusiasm and the churches were crowded when the large wedding parties

[47] Alison M. Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville, Gender and American Culture Ser. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P,1999).

spoke the ceremony in concert.'" The insertion of this press clipping into the program may have been done to show the situation depicted in the play was inspired by current events in Europe. Many found the play to be an important commentary on war and gender; one editorial declared "War Brides is an Uncle Tom's Cabin of women's slavery to war,"[48] and the president of the New York Association of Suffragists called the play "the Magna Carta of Woman."[49]

Much of War Brides' success was due to a powerful performance by actress Alla Nazimova as Joan, a young pregnant woman who kills herself rather than bear a child for a war-loving society. Nazimova, who trained at the Moscow Art Theatre and had made her reputation in the United States by playing Ibsen heroines, had recently been cast in a serious of weak plays portraying exotic vamps. In War Brides she saw the opportunity for both a professional and artistic come-back. She called the part of Joan, a factory girl who marries a peasant farmer, "the greatest role I ever had." When Nazimova had starred in Hedda Gabler, she declared, "My ambition is not to make my

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[48] "The Play of War Brides: How Marion Craig Wentworth's Powerful Plea has Swept the Country." Buffalo Express 23 May 1915. NB: Article states this piece was first published in the Boston Daily Globe, n.d.

[49] Gavin Lambert, Nazimova: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 173.

audience laugh or cry. I want to feel that when they go away, I have made them *think*."[50] Similarly, when she announced her decision to appear in War Brides, she framed it as her chance to advocate for women and peace, saying, "I am not merely doing something as an actress, but for the womanhood of the world . . . . [to protest] the miseries and brutalities war entails on women."[51] In another interview she remarked,

> With this little tragedy I aim to be the Jeanne d'Arc of peace. The sainted Jeanne bore the red banner of war and rode in glittering mail, but I will bear the white banner of peace and dress as millions of suffering peasant women are dressed in Europe.[52]

Nazimova's comparison of her part with Joan of Arc is reflected in her character's name; originally the protagonist was named Hedwig, but the name was changed to Joan—ostensibly to keep the play from appearing too partisan with Germanic-sounding names.

Whatever Nazimova's motives for playing Joan, War Brides certainly made people think—or at least prompted

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[50] Lambert 4.

[51] Lambert 172.

[52] New York Press 24 Jan 1915.

them to talk and write and go to the theatre. Less than a month after War Brides opened, Nazimova had received "hundreds of letters of praise from suffragists and peace propagandists."[53] The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune posed the question, "What would be the emotions of American mothers if they had to give up their sons to the war god without the privilege of saying a word to influence the beginning or the ending of the war?," and invited its readers to answer in hundred-word essays.[54] The paper promised the authors of the best responses would receive free tickets to the play and that Nazimova would serve as a judge in the contest. In its initial New York run, War Brides played for three weeks at the Palace in New York, setting a new record.[55] At a time when vaudeville headliners customarily played for one week in a vaudeville theatre before moving on, War Brides often played two or three weeks at a single theatre on the Keith circuit.[56] Most of the performances at the Palace sold out—a

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[53] New York Star clipping from 17 Feb. 1915 in the Locke Scrapbook, NYPL.

[54] Cincinnati Commercial Tribune 14 Nov. 1915. Locke Scrapbook, NYPL.

[55] Miles, n. pag. A New York Star clipping from 17 Feb. 1915 in the Locke Scrapbook, NYPL asserts that Nazimova's performance was the "first time a dramatic sketch had been held over [a week] in a Keith theatre." Lambert 173, talks of Bernhardt doing it first.

[56] Cincinnati Commercial Tribune 14 Nov. 1915. Locke Scrapbook, NYPL.

vaudeville rarity—and Nazimova's popularity in this play even eclipsed the records set by Sarah Bernhardt's appearance in vaudeville a decade earlier.

Part of War Brides' popularity can be attributed to the play's pacifist politics, which suited the largely isolationist United States. However, Lambert writes that after the sinking of the Lusitania audience attendance of War Brides began to slip.[57] Still, this did not prevent the play from being made into a silent film the following year. It opened on November 11, 1916, had a long run in New York, and went into general circulation a month before the United States entered the war in early April 1917. With the declaration of war, producer Lewis J. Selznick withdrew the pacifist film that had grossed $300,000, added new titles to set the motion picture in Germany, and re-released it. Nazimova commented that this tactic worked because "people were willing to think of Germans suffering, but not ourselves or our allies."[58]

What is perhaps more surprising than the fact that box office trends tend to mirror changes in public opinion and new political developments is that War Brides' bold

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[57] Lambert 174.

[58] Lambert 182.

statements about women's rights were so widely accepted. One article described Wentworth as standing "for the most radical reforms in government, the marriage relation and the general position of women,"[59] but most profiles of Wentworth or reviews of the play did not characterize Wentworth as a radical. Wentworth's views towards peace and suffrage were "made safe" by her invoking women's status as mothers. Resorting to "motherism" was a tactic that suffragists often employed, but what is striking about the reviews of War Brides is how newspaper writers hasten to reassure their readers that Wentworth's stances spring from her own position as a mother of a young son. Although Wentworth was a divorcée, as well as a socialist, these aspects of her identity are ignored or downplayed in favor of discussions of her motherhood. Although War Brides advocated rather revolutionary ideas, it was framed in such a way that it could be presented and discussed in even extremely conservative sections of the country. For instance, Wentworth answered a question for the New York Dramatic Mirror about how she came to write the play in terms of sisterly sympathy and motherly love:

[59] "Women to Bring Peace: Author of 'War Brides' Says They Will Stop Bloodshed," Philadelphia North American, reprinted in the Kansas City Star 20 Jan. 1917.

> I suppose it was largely the result of my intense feeling for those women over there in the warring countries. It may be that the flash came to me as I stood looking at my own sleeping boy and thought of the years of care that I had given him . . . and the awful possibility that I might have to send him forth one day to be shot down . . . what was it but the love of a mother for her own that gave me the depth of feeling that made it possible for me to write the play?[60]

This interview is not unlike other "motherist" statements of its era that were often tied to claims that intuitive knowledge, special compassion, and usually, superior moral character were granted to women so they could be effective mothers. However, when the preceding quotation is compared to a seemingly similar article in another newspaper, a subtle difference emerges:

> Mrs. Wentworth attributes the fact that she was able to write this gripping sketch to her being a mother herself. Her little boy of nine has always been her companion. When the war broke out she used to look at him and think of those

[60] Adam Hull Shirk, "Marion Craig Wentworth: An Interview and an Appreciation," New York Dramatic Mirror 18 Nov. 1916.

> other mothers whose sons were going away to be killed. "I thought," she continued, "of how much those mothers had given to make fine men of their little boys, and how futile it all was."[61]

Tellingly, Wentworth refers not only to mothers' love, but also to their labor. Her mention of "how much those mothers had given to make fine men of their little boys" reveals how the socialist suffragist viewed child-rearing as real work that was extravagantly praised but materially devalued in contemporary society.

Because so many Americans did not want to be drawn into World War I and since pacifism seemed so "natural" for women, the more liberal elements of War Brides were often ignored. Reviewers were even divided in their opinions of whether or not War Brides was a pro-suffrage play. Some journalists claimed that it was not advancing the suffrage cause, but only arguing against war. Only one writer though, commented on the implications women's increased participation in the work force might have on women's ideas:

> I suspect that the authoress of this play put her own heart in only one line . . . It is

[61] "Incentive for War Brides Universal," unsourced clipping Locke envelope, NYPL.

> where the captain shouts that Joan is the product of the factory town. Mrs. Wentworth never meant to condemn women who work nor the work that they do. What she designed was to show in a sentence the attitude of the old order to this new consciousness of woman that is born of her closer contact with the world and its workers.[62]

Although Wentworth used the doctrine of "motherhood" to make her play more palatable, she challenged traditional ideas of woman's place throughout the play. Why, then, did so many mainstream theatregoers approve of the play?

Perhaps the fact that Wentworth juxtaposed Joan, the resistant mother-to-be, with a more resigned older character, only called The Mother, made some audience members feel sorry for women in wartime without challenging their beliefs about the "Woman Question." The Mother is devastated when she learns that her three elder sons have been killed in battle, but does not protest when the government demands her youngest boy go to the front to replace his dead brothers. The Mother, played by Gertrude Berkeley, exhibits the grief, submissiveness, and blind

[62] Henry Christian Warnack, "Sound Depths of the Tragic," Los Angeles [title?] 29 Jul. 1915, Locke Scrapbook NYPL.

patriotism that are “proper” female responses to losing sons to war. She is written sympathetically, and perhaps this allowed some audience members to identify with her rather than the “mad” character Joan.

Interestingly enough, even though Wentworth’s work can be read as a protest play, it can also be viewed as comfortably reifying isolationist politics and motherist conceptions of women. One newspaper wrote approvingly that “she has crystallized the sentiment of all other women worthy of the title and honor of womanhood. . .” Perhaps Wentworth was able to use motherhood to subvert the patriarchal institution of war and to suggest new political strength for women because her class and race afforded her the luxury of being “worthy of the title and honor of womanhood” despite her radical views. It is significant to remember that not all women were deemed “worthy of the title” in 1915—women who were non-white, the poor, or recent immigrants were rarely able to invoke “womanhood” or “motherhood” to achieve political support or respect for their feelings.

War Brides was a remarkably popular play that generated a great quantity of discussion about war, gender, and politics. Besides its value as an example of a woman’s World War I protest play and a worthy addition

to the genre of suffrage plays, War Brides also deserves to be remembered as a part of vaudeville history and a testament to the potential of popular theatre as a forum for fomenting political change. Although Wentworth's appeal to motherhood may have been a somewhat essentialist tactic, she was able to spin the concept in such a way that radical ideas seemed acceptable to a mainstream audience.

A review of War Brides in the Dramatic Mirror compared it to Dix's Across the Border and its reception:

> One of the critics who reviewed Beulah Marie Dix's peace playlet "Across the Border," said it would have been a big piece of work had it not been written by a woman, which of course, wasn't true. That was an echo of the old attitude of man to woman. "War Brides" is vital because it *was* written by a woman.[63]

This critic's review also opens with a quote from War Brides about women wanting a voice in decisions about war. Clearly, the reviewer feels that Wentworth's gender grants her a particular authority to speak about war as it

[63] "'War Brides' With Mme. Alla Nazimova, is Gripping Little Tragedy," New York Dramatic Mirror, 8 Feb. 1915. The review is not signed, so my use of the pronoun "he" to refer to the critic in this paragraph is speculative.

affects women. His reference to Dix shows that he is aware of the usual criticisms leveled at women who write about war, and that he rejects the idea that women cannot write about certain subjects even as he affirms that they might offer fresh perspectives about them.

Marion Craig Wentworth and Beulah Marie Dix were both professional women who supported themselves and their families through writing, and, in Wentworth's case, performing (she was also a platform reader). They are unusual enough for their time for having writing careers at all, and for a woman to have a serious play produced on Broadway or tour the country in vaudeville was even rarer. Although these authors might be remarkable for their era, the antiwar attitudes contained in their plays were widely shared during the first years of World War I. Dix and Wentworth are both exceptional (in terms of their success) and representative (of the pacifist convictions shared by many others) of their era.

By the end of 1916 support for neutrality was waning, as were pacifist plays. The 1917 Espionage Act and the Sedition Act of 1918 outlawed political dissent, so not surprisingly, most plays produced from 1917-1918 tended to support government policies and provide entertainment for an anxious populace. After the Armistice, dramatists and

audiences began to ask what World War I had accomplished, and what sort of a society would emerge in the postwar era. The next chapter will examine plays written during and after World War I that use the war as a way to argue for social change. Like Wentworth and Dix, some of these authors hoped that future wars and other types of violence could be avoided, and their dramas all express the belief that World War I might serve as a catalyst to transform society.

Chapter Three:
"What 'twas all for": Plays for Postwar Social Change

> FELIX: Getting into the old uniforms makes you want to talk it all over again?
>
> SILAS: The war? Well, we did do that. But all that makes me want to talk about what's to come, about—what 'twas all for.[1]

Susan Glaspell's play Inheritors was presented in 1921 by the Provincetown Players, one of the most influential non-commercial theatres of the twentieth century. Inheritors is a sprawling, thoughtful, complicated play that asks if fundamental American liberties and principles are under attack. Act One of Inheritors takes place on July 4, 1879 as Silas Morton and his friend Fejevary return from a patriotic rally, wearing their old Civil War uniforms and talking about their responsibilities to their nation. In the exchange quoted above, Silas tells Fejevary's son Felix that reliving war stories is not enough; people must also consider how they

[1] Susan Glaspell, Plays by Susan Glaspell, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby, British and American Playwrights Ser. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 112. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

will continue to work for a better future. Although Act I takes place in 1879, the other three acts are set forty-one years later in 1920 and ask what type of country the United States will become in the wake of World War I. Glaspell invokes the past, but her critique of American society centers on contemporary issues. She uses history to tease out her ideas about the legacies of idealism, opportunity, and freedom that pioneers bequeathed to future generations of Americans and how she believes those gifts must be protected, not squandered. Like Glaspell, many women during and (especially) after World War I wrote dramas asking what the United States was really trying to achieve through its participation in the war and what type of nation it would become in the aftermath: about "what 'twas all for." Many female playwrights also used non-commercial venues like little theatres and schools to produce their work, as Glaspell did with Inheritors.

In the teens and twenties, the little theatre movement gave opportunities to legions of writers and artists who otherwise would not have had outlets for their work, including many women. As early as 1917, Thomas H. Dickinson noted that women played a prominent role in creating little theatres, and credited them with having a "combination of faith, vision, and inexperience" that

allowed them to undertake the risky business of starting innovative theatres.[2] Dickinson felt that inexperience was a necessary "negative advantage" since without the "daring that comes from ignorance" few people would have ventured their time, talents, and resources founding what he calls the "insurgent" theatre.[3]

Some of the earliest pioneers of the little theatre movement in the United States were women. In 1907 the Hull House Theatre in Chicago was transformed under the direction of Laura Dainty Pelham from an amateur dramatic club into an organization patterned after European independent theatres, making Pelham's theatre a forerunner of the American little theatre movement.[4] Most histories of the little theatre date the movement's full emergence to 1911-12, when three companies were founded after the US tour of the Irish Players of the Abbey Theatre. One of these three little theatres was the Toy Theatre in Boston, under the direction of a "Mrs. Lyman W." Gale.[5] By the time the United States went to war in 1917, at least a

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[2] Thomas H. Dickinson, The Insurgent Theatre (New York, B.W. Huebsch, 1917) 128.

[3] Dickinson 128-129.

[4] Dickinson 61.

[5] For more about the Toy Theatre and its contemporaries, see Constance D'Arcy MacKay, The Little Theatre in the United States (New York: Henry Holt, 1917) 14-15 and Dickinson 133-150.

dozen little theatres were founded and/or directed by women, including some like the Workshop Theatre of Yonkers and the Neighborhood Playhouse of the Henry Street Settlement in New York which were established and completely run by women.[6]

The phrase "little theatre" is something of an umbrella term, including groups with differing objectives and levels of professionalism. Some were basically amateur civic theatres that afforded community members the opportunity to make and watch theatre. Others were "community" theatres in the sense that they served a particular demographic or ideological group: the settlement house theatres were for immigrant communities, The Negro Players and Krigwa (Crisis Guild of Writers and Artists) troupes were for African Americans, and organizations like The Wage Earners' Theatre were for socialist and working-class audiences. Still other groups were dedicated to new plays and modes of production, like the Washington Square Players and Provincetown Players. All of these types of little theatres produced war plays. One characteristic most little theatres shared was that they defined themselves as idealistic, progressive, or interested in tackling "important" plays and issues,[7] so

[6] MacKay 83 and Dickinson 164-165.

it is understandable that they would produce plays about war and society.

Unlike the idealism that drove most little theatres, the majority of established theatres were largely profit-motivated and tended towards entertainment rather than edification. Therefore, it is not surprising that most war plays produced immediately after the United States entered World War I were not serious critiques of American objectives and the ways the war might yield social change—particularly those in commercial venues like Broadway theatres. Rather, most war-themed plays and revues were filled with rally-round-the-flag patriotism or escapist love stories.

At least one woman playwright, Rida Johnson Young (1875-1926), wrote popular, morale-boosting war plays. Young was a lyricist and writer of romantic comedies who sometimes used a military setting for her lovers' escapades, as in The Boys in Company B (1907) and Her Soldier Boy (1916). When the United States went to war, she wrote the book and lyrics for another martial romantic romp, Little Simplicity (1918). Described as "a play with music," Little Simplicity's improbable plot featured a flower girl in Algiers who falls in love with a visiting

[7] For more on little theatres and their aims, see Sheldon Cheney, The Art Theater, rev. and enl. ed. (1925; New York: Kraus, 1967) 15-16, Dickinson 76-81, and MacKay 1.

American lad who saves her from being forced into a sheik's harem. She is reunited with him five years later in France when he has become a soldier and she a singer entertaining the troops. According to one critic the play's highlights were "the shivery pectoral dances of the Cameron sisters [a popular vaudeville dance duo] and . . . abounding chiffons--such an eyeful as one had despaired of getting in war time."[8] Six months prior to the opening of Little Simplicity, Young told an interviewer that she hoped to see a woman write "the GREAT AMERICAN PLAY," but that it would not be herself since she was content to "potter in my garden and continue writing little plays that have no mission except to be clean and amusing."[9] Frolicsome depictions of doughboys' amorous adventures with beautiful chorines not only characterized Little Simplicity, but many other wartime plays, too. Certainly, issue-oriented plays such as the ones discussed at length in this chapter are not representative of all war plays of this era, or even all that were authored by women.

Besides the widespread impulse to make theatre that made audiences' cares disappear, wartime dramatists had to

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[8] Rev. of Little Simplicity, New York Evening Sun 5 Nov. 1918. NYPL clippings file on Little Simplicity.

[9] Helen Ten Broeck, "Rida Young--Dramatist and Garden Expert," Theatre April 1917: 250.

be careful not to write plays which could be considered disloyal or a hindrance to enlistment efforts, or they would risk imprisonment under the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. The few plays produced during this time that questioned if certain individuals or groups should serve their country predictably answered "yes" by the dramas' conclusions. One such Broadway play, Allegiance (1918) by Amelie Rives (1863-1945) and her spouse, Prince Troubetzkoy, considered "the problem of the hyphen," or the presumably divided loyalties of German-Americans.[10] Allegiance centers around three generations of men in a German-American family who disagree on issues of nationalism and fealty until the play's end, when all are united in their renunciation of Germany. Another play from the same year that considers the allegiance of "hyphenated" Americans is Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Mine Eyes Have Seen, discussed at length in the following section. Since sedition laws seemed likely to extend into the immediate postwar era, even some dramas produced after the armistice were tempered by real or perceived restraints placed on free expression. Therefore, most serious dramas of this era are not explicit critiques of the United States' involvement in World War I; they are

[10] " 'Allegiance,' War Play in New York," Christian Science Monitor 6 Aug. 1918. NYPL clippings file on Allegiance.

considerations of what the fruits of victory or lessons learned might be.

This chapter focuses on six plays for social change, discussed in three case studies. The first section examines three short plays about African American soldiers—-Mine Eyes Have Seen (1918) by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Aftermath (1919) by Mary Burrill, and May Miller's Stragglers in the Dust (1930)—and the dramatists' hopes that participation in the war effort might lead to improved conditions for African Americans. The second looks at two plays produced by the Provincetown Players, Edna St. Vincent Millay's ironic verse play Aria da Capo (1919) and Susan Glaspell's Inheritors, both of which critique the ways that wars and the ideals they purportedly espouse or the bloodshed they produce are quickly forgotten. The final case study is Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up (1923), a folk play that argued for an end to violence, and (somewhat less explicitly) for increased economic and educational opportunities for poor rural residents. Although these plays are very different from one another, all are concerned with the ways World War I might change the nation, and all were produced (at least initially) in non-commercial theatres that offered women new artistic opportunities.

The African American Soldier and World War I

When African American women began to write plays in the teens, twenties, and thirties, they often (although not exclusively) wrote dramas that protested the social problems begotten by racism. As Ted Shine notes, women were part of an effort to "change the image of blacks on the American stage," creating diverse African American characters from all classes and different sections of the country, but who shared similar experiences of white discrimination and bigotry.[11] Three such plays are about World War I: Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Mine Eyes Have Seen (1918), Mary Burrill's Aftermath (1919), and May Miller's Stragglers in the Dust (1930). All protest racism in American society and address the irony of African American men fighting for freedom abroad when they had little at home. These plays are all set stateside and explore the experiences of African American soldiers in a racist society. These three plays address race and war and the effects of both on not only black soldier-participants,

[11] Ted Shine, "Opportunities for African-American Women Playwrights," in Yvonne Shafer, American Women Playwrights 1900-1950 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 160.

but also on their families and society as a whole. Furthermore, unlike white female playwrights, who wrote far fewer war plays than white men, during and after World War I more African American women than men used the theatre to explore issues raised by the war.[12]

Mine Eyes Have Seen (1918) and Aftermath (1919) are also among the first plays by African American women dramatists to be produced and/or published.[13] Rather than focusing on "firstness" however, I believe these plays are

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[12] I have only found one male African American dramatist who wrote a World War I play, Joseph Seamon Cotter, Jr. According to James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian in Lost Plays of the Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940 (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1996) 22, Cotter died of tuberculosis in his early twenties, and his short play On the Fields of France was published posthumously in The Crisis in June 1920, printed on a single page. Cotter's play is a fable of two soldiers--"A White American Officer" and "A Colored American Officer," who die together in France, sharing a single canteen, holding hands, experiencing visions of celebrated white and black American military heroes, and expressing the conviction that someday the United States will be "our country," belonging to both races.

[13] Nellie McKay, for instance, names Alice Dunbar-Nelson as the first African American woman to publish a play, noting that Mine Eyes Have Seen was published in 1918. However, because Angelina Weld Grimke's anti-lynching drama Rachel was produced in 1916, and published in 1920, McKay calls it, rather than Dunbar-Nelson's drama, "possibly the oldest extant play by a black woman." Nellie McKay "'What Were They Saying?': Black Women Playwrights of the Harlem Renaissance," The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined, ed. Victor A. Kramer (New York: AMS, 1987) 133. Neither play may be the earliest play written by an African American woman, though--Leo Hamalian and James V. Hatch note that Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins wrote at least three plays from 1877-1880, and that AME Book Concern published Katherine D. Chapman Tillman's play Fifty Years of Freedom; or From Cabin to Congress in 1910 and also her Aunt Betsy's Thanksgiving, c.1914. Hamalian and Hatch, African American Drama 125. Nevertheless, many African American women began publishing plays in the teens and twenties, often encouraged by opportunities offered by jounals such as The Crisis and Opportunity, and Dunbar-Nelson and Burrill were among these pioneers.

valuable for the historical light they shed on their times and I find it significant that drama was used by some African American women as a means of participating in important public debates almost as soon as African American women began to write plays in meaningful numbers. Mine Eyes Have Seen and Aftermath are both anti-lynching dramas as well as war plays; Dunbar-Nelson and Burrill use mob violence which has happened before the action of the plays begin to heighten the stakes for the soldier-protagonists of their plays.

The third war play in this section is May Miller's Stragglers in the Dust (1930). Although it was written a dozen years after the war ended and is not as well-known as Mine Eyes Have Seen and Aftermath, this play also addresses issues related to World War I soldiers and racism. While Mine Eyes Have Seen is concerned with a man's decision to honor the draft and Aftermath encourages veterans to fight again for democracy—this time in their own backyards—Stragglers in the Dust is about the young men who did not return from France alive or whole and their parents. Together, these three plays display the hope that World War I would or could effect change in American society via African American involvement in the war effort.

To say that one-act protest plays by African American women were not considered viable Broadway fare during this time period is of course an understatement: there was no real opportunity for these plays to receive any professional productions or to be produced in mainstream theatres frequented by white audiences—but that was not the intent. Rather, like W. E. B. DuBois' well-known axiom that African American theatre should be "about us, by us, for us, and near us,"[14] these plays were written for and (largely) performed in African American communities, particularly in schools. To judge these works based on contemporary critical response is unfeasible, as they were rarely reviewed. What these plays do offer is a commentary on African American involvement in World War I and the hopes that such participation would change African Americans' second-class status as citizens. These plays echo and illuminate debates in African American journals like the Crisis, and hence my examination of these plays is not centered around their critical reception but on the ways they participated in and critiqued sociopolitical discussions.

Enlistment of African Americans and Mine Eyes Have Seen

[14] W. E. B. DuBois, "Krigwa Players' Little Negro Theatre." The Crisis, 32 (July 1926) : 134-36.

> CHRIS: Must I go and fight for the nation that let my father's murder go unpunished? That killed my mother—that took away my chances for making a man out of myself?[15]

Should African Americans fight to protect a country that has not protected them? This question is central to Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Mine Eyes Have Seen, but public opinion on this question was not unanimous either before the United States formally entered the World War I or after. In the August 1916 issue of The Crisis, W. E. B. DuBois cites both Harry Cummings, a black councilman in Baltimore who "offers fifty thousand colored soldiers from Maryland to the Governor" and a response to Cummings' proposal by W. Ashbie Hawkins:

> When respectable colored men in this city have difficulty in purchasing or renting homes for themselves and families . . . they cannot easily be persuaded to fight to maintain such a condition. It may be wise and prudent to appear thus always ready to fight for the Stars and

[15] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Mine Eyes Have Seen, in James V. Hatch, ed., and Ted Shine, consultant, Black Theater, U. S. A.: Forty-Five Plays By Black Americans (New York: The Free Press, 1974) 175. All further references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

> Stripes . . . but no man, white or black, can love a city, a state or a nation that restrains and hampers his activities on every hand, and that indorses [sic] and perpetuates race friction by class legislation.[16]

Hawkins argues that the United States must earn the patriotism of African Americans before asking a blood sacrifice of them. Others did not ask if the nation was worthy of African American military service, but rather, wondered who "deserved" exemption: DuBois juxtaposes a chilling example of white racist thought with Hawkin's statement, quoting Willard D. McKinstrey of the Watertown, NY Times, "It seems a pity to waste good white men in battle . . . . we will be sacrificing white blood where Negro blood would . . . be a more fitting sacrifice, and drawing our skilled labor when unskilled labor was available." When the United States entered the war, some whites vehemently disagreed with McKinstrey, frightened at the prospect of putting weapons in the hands of African American men: "Universal military service means that millions of Negroes who will come under this measure will be armed. I know of no greater menace to the South than this," DuBois quotes Mississippi Senator James K. Vardaman

[16] W. E. B. DuBois, "The Looking Glass," The Crisis, 12 (August 1916):184. The McKinstrey quote also appears on this page.

as saying.[17] More sympathetic whites were likewise divided in their views; some believed mistreatment of African Americans should exempt them from military duty, while others argued that all citizens should be allowed to join the armed services, regardless of race.

Yet some African Americans were already serving in the military. When the United States declared war on April 6, 1917, approximately 10,000 African Americans were in active service in the four regiments of the Army open to black soldiers, and another 10,000 were serving in various units of the National Guard.[18] But as African Americans volunteered to fight, they were permitted to enlist only in those four black regiments, and once the regiments filled to capacity, recruitment of African Americans was suspended.[19] Ironically, just before the declaration of war, the First Separate Battalion of the District of Columbia (a black National Guard unit) was called out to protect the Capital, an assignment many thought went to them because an African American battalion would presumably not contain any *German* Americans who

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[17] W. E. B. DuBois, "The Looking Glass" The Crisis, 14 (May 1917): 23.

[18] Emmett J. Scott, Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War (1919 New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969) 32-33.

[19] Scott 34.

could harbor divided loyalties. Emmett J. Scott, the Secretary of War's Special Assistant for Negro Affairs, notes, "it was highly significant that their very *color* which was the basis of *discrimination in time of peace* was considered prima facie *evidence of unquestionable loyalty in time of war* [his emphasis]."[20] When Congress passed the Selective Service Law in May of 1917, it made no distinction between the obligations black men and white men owed their country, and on June 5, Registration Day, over 700,000 African American men registered for the first draft.[21] Scott estimates the total number of black troops who served in World War I as nearly 400,000, of whom approximately 367,710 were inducted under the Selective Draft Law.[22] About twenty percent of African American troops were trained as combatants; the remainder served in stevedore and labor battalions.[23]

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[20] Scott 35-38.

[21] Scott 66-67.

[22] Scott 32.

[23] Scott 315-316. DuBois writes in "An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War," The Crisis 18 (June 1919): 64, that 200,000 African Americans were in the American Expeditionary Force, of which about 150,000 were stevedores or laborers. More recently, Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri argue in The Unknown Soldiers: Black American Troops in World War I (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1974) that a crucial difference between African American draftees and white ones is that all inducted white men were given basic training whether or not they were assigned combat or support positions, but few black draftees received significant military training, as it was assumed they would only be laborers (97), a position Barbeau and Henri call "the military equivalent of chain gangs" (90).

As African American men became soldiers, stevedores, and (eventually) officers,[24] most African American intellectuals and leaders supported black involvement in the war.[25] Patriotic writers argued that African Americans had given their lives for liberty since Revolutionary War hero Crispus Attucks, and would continue to do so. America was their country, imperfect as it might be. This sort of allegiance also had a pragmatism behind it: if African Americans refused to serve, they would appear to be defining themselves as something other than full citizens of the United States; if they fought, they would be in a stronger position to demand equality when the war ended. Appeals to the President and the nation to stop oppression of patriotic citizens were frequent. In "Awake America", DuBois argues that the United States cannot be a moral crusader for world peace and sanction violence against its own people simultaneously, "Let us enter this war for Liberty with clean hands. May no blood-smeared garments bind our feet when we rise to make

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[24] See Scott's chapter "Colored Officers and How They Were Trained," 82-91 for a discussion of the efforts of African American leaders to establish a facility to train African American officers.

[25] For a sampling of pro-involvement opinions, see "The Looking Glass: Loyalty," The Crisis 14 (May 1917): 22-23; "Editorial: Resolutions of the Washington Conference," The Crisis 14 (June 1917): 59-60; "Editorial: A Philosophy in Time of War," The Crisis 16 (August 1918): 164-165; "The Looking Glass: Over There" The Crisis 16 (August 1918), and Scott, 411-412. For a dissenting view, see The Crisis 14 (July 1917): 138.

the world safe for Democracy." He lists the wrongs Americans should "pledge our sacred honor" to correct, and concludes his essay with the admonition, "No land that loves to lynch 'niggers' can lead the hosts of Almighty God."[26] Also, the adoption of a patriotic tone was a political necessity for any African American newspaper or journal that wanted to stay in print and out of trouble. Hamalian and Hatch note that the arrest of the African American editors of The Messenger under the Espionage Act quieted most dissenting voices.[27] Tylee observes that the NAACP was investigated by the Justice Department for DuBois' outspokenness and that he had to temper his criticism of the United States government to avoid prosecution.[28]

Arguments that African Americans should not serve because of past and present injustices were often regarded as coming from German propagandists who wanted to stir up racial division to weaken the American war effort.[29]

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[26] W. E. B. DuBois, "Editorial: Awake America," The Crisis 14 (September 1917): 216-217.

[27] Hamalian and Hatch, African American Drama 135.

[28] Clare M. Tylee, with Elaine Turner and Agnès Cardinal, War Plays by Women: An International Anthology (London: Routledge, 1999) 28.

[29] See Scott 40-41 and 346-347 for his views on the German propaganda effort in America and Scott 138-139 for an account of a bombardment upon the 367th Infantry in France of shells that

Perhaps the most damaging bit of "propaganda," however, was the sizable number of lynchings reported in 1917-1918. Scott writes, "the number of lynchings of Negroes seemed to be on the increase during the course of the war, and THESE LYNCHINGS, BE IT REMEMBERED, WERE NOT 'Made in Germany' [his emphasis]."[30] In addition to lynching, large-scale mob violence—particularly a devastating race riot in East St. Louis—was a reminder that the ideals of freedom and democracy that America espoused abroad fell short at home.

Playwright Alice Dunbar-Nelson, who contributed "Negro Women in War Work" to Scott's Official History, describes the effect "so-called German propaganda", rumors based on "hysterical fear", the spurning of African American women's offers to help in war relief, and other prejudicial behaviors had upon the morale of many African American communities in the spring and summer of 1918. She credits an "army of women teachers" with influencing children and their parents to remain patriotic. Dunbar-Nelson describes an especially effective tactic used by some:

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contained propaganda circulars addressed "To the Colored Soldiers of the American Army".

[30] Scott 347. The lynching statistics Scott cites are credited to Monroe N. Work of the Tuskegee Institute.

> Here and there, however, there was a more spectacular appeal made to the patriotic emotions of the race through pageants, demonstrations, or mass meetings. In some cases, the schools through school pageants and plays appealed directly to the patriotic emotions; plays written by Negro authors were staged, commencement exercises became rallying grounds to the warmth of the race and its love for the nation.[31]

Alice Dunbar-Nelson's own play, Mine Eyes Have Seen, was among the patriotic appeals she describes. It was published in the April 1918 issue of The Crisis and performed that same month at Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware.[32]

Mine Eyes Have Seen enumerates reasons why African Americans might feel disinclined to fight for a nation that consistently maltreats them, yet ends by advocating patriotic involvement in the war. To a modern reader, Dunbar-Nelson's ending may not seem credible. Nellie

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[31] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "Negro Women in War Work" in Scott 394.

[32]. Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds. Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998) 411. Hatch and Shine quote Dunbar-Nelson's niece Pauline Young as saying Dunbar-Nelson "taught us English in the high school. She produced her play and we all took parts. The audience loved it . . . but nobody would publish it (173)."

McKay, for example, reads against the text and concludes that the play only appears to inspire allegiance:

> . . . her play, with its ironic twist on the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', is biting satire on the political blindness that keeps people from seeing how they participate in and help to perpetuate their own oppression, and on the power that supports that blindness.[33]

In light of the Espionage Act and the prosecution of African Americans who denounced the war (the socialist Eugene Debs, for instance, was arrested and convicted in 1918 for obstructing recruiting efforts by distributing pamphlets and delivering speeches expressing the opinion that working classes "furnish the corpses" without having a voice in war decisions),[34] it is easy to see how critics like McKay might regard Mine Eyes Have Seen as a coded, ironic antiwar play. Judging by Dunbar-Nelson's own description of the importance of bolstering African American patriotism during the World War I and the fact that Scott mentions as "notable among the patriotic

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[33] McKay 137-38.

[34] Oliver Wendell Holmes, Debs v. United States, 249 US 211 (1919). Qtd. in Sheila Suess Kennedy, ed. Free Expression in America: A Documentary History (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999): 58-60.

meetings and parades"[35] events which took place in Wilmington under Dunbar-Nelson's leadership, it is difficult to see Mine Eyes Have Seen as a subversive text.[36] When she wrote her play in 1918, Dunbar-Nelson was employed as an English teacher at Howard High School and she spent the summer in the South as a field agent of the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense.[37] It is not likely that Dunbar-Nelson participated in war work as a dove in hawk's feathers; straightforward confrontation seems to have been more her style in matters of conscience.[38] In short, Dunbar-Nelson's wartime activities and her political outspokenness do not support

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[35] Scott 420.

[36] McKay's analysis seems to be based upon a piece of bibliographic information about Dunbar-Nelson (which she cites) that precedes the play in James Hatch and Ted Shine's anthology, Black Theater, U.S.A.: Forty-Five Plays By Black Americans, "A member of the American Friends Peace Committee, she traveled the country delivering militant speeches." Gloria Hull's biographic article, "Alice-Dunbar-Nelson: Delaware Writer and Woman of Affairs," Delaware History 17 (1976) mentions founding member Dunbar-Nelson's involvement with the Friends American Inter-racial Peace Committee, but places her national speaking engagements for this organization during her tenure as Executive Secretary, from 1928 to 1931 (94). Alice Dunbar-Nelson was probably one of many women who supported World War I but became a pacifist afterwards.

[37] Scott 11.

[38] For example, Gloria T. Hull notes in Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984) that Dunbar-Nelson, "had to be reminded of the [Friends American Inter-racial Peace] committee's policy of not endorsing other groups when she became involved in a movement by domestic workers to form a labor union" (44), and that in 1920 she lost her teaching position because she "traveled to Marion, Ohio for Social Justice Day—despite the nonsupport of the school administration" (41).

an interpretation of her play as a subtly disguised antiwar work. Instead, Jeanne-Marie Miller's conclusion that "love of humanity and pride in the history of the Black race's contributions to the preservation of that humanity are shown to be more important than personal considerations"[39] is a statement of theme that can be supported both by the text and by the actions of the author herself.

Mine Eyes Have Seen is set in the Northern tenement home of a poor working family. In an interesting spin on the tendency of white playwrights to give thick accents to African American characters, Dunbar-Nelson gives some of her white ethnic characters a light dialect, but all of the black characters speak standard English. Through the exposition, it is quickly established that the family's father was murdered "back home" while trying to resist eviction; the others joined the Great Migration to the North; the mother died; the older brother was crippled in an industrial accident; and now the younger brother's draft number has been called. Dunbar-Nelson makes it clear that white society only has a few "uses" for African

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[39] Jeanne-Marie A. Miller, "Black Women Playwrights from Grimke to Shange: Selected Synopses of Their Works," All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist, 1982) 282.

American men: sport for Southern mobs, grist for Northern factories, and cannon fodder. Chris, the younger brother, has been attending socialist meetings and has no intention of honoring the draft.

A procession of friends, family, and neighbors argue with Chris; their discussions are much like the ones quoted in journals like The Crisis. The disabled brother, Dan, reminds Chris that African Americans have always fought in the nation's wars. Chris' girlfriend Julia responds to Dan that the war "isn't our quarrel" and that "white people, they hate us. Only today I was sneered at when I went to help with some of their relief work" (177). Repeating widespread anti-German propaganda, a friend working as a muleteer for the war effort says the Germans crucified children and an Irish neighbor whispers that her husband was maimed before he died in battle.[40] But, Jewish and Irish friends maintain that *they* have been allegiant to their homelands even in the face of persecution. As Clare M. Tylee observes, the inclusion of characters like a widowed Irish mother and a Russian-Jewish socialist is not accidental, because "apart from German Americans, the

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[40] See Scott's chapter "German Propaganda Among Negroes" for a letter that describes rumors sweeping through Harlem. One of the most horrific is a rumor that Germans gouge out the eyes and cut off the arms of captured African American soldiers and then set them free to find their way back to the American lines.

Irish, members of the Socialist Party and Jews were among the groups most opposed to the ending of American neutrality in 1917."[41] That Jewish socialists and Irish women maintain that their people have been loyal to their countries in wartime regardless of mistreatment is crucial to the plot because the neighbors' pride in their heritages acts as a challenge to Chris to prove his faith in his own. This appeal to ethnic pride changes Chris' mind, and when a band playing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" goes by in the street, Chris has apparently decided to respond to the draft call.

Mine Eyes Have Seen is definitely a recruitment play, which probably limited its appeal after the war ended. It was produced at least once during the 1920s by a school participating in a dramatic festival,[42] but a playreader evaluating the script for the Federal Theatre Project's Play Bureau in the mid-1930s rejected the play as outdated: "This . . . war time stuff makes me think of the 'Come On Boys' posters in front of the Army recruiting stations. Hardly worthwhile."[43] A second playreader

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[41] Tylee et al. 28.

[42] NYPL Scrapbook (MWEZ + n.c. 25,335). The Stevens School (place unspecified) performed Mine Eyes Have Seen during a competition with 20 other schools in May of 1926.

[43] John D. Silvera, Playreader Reports File, Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress.

disagreed, recommending the piece as "a play of tremendous power, radiating a strong courage to serve . . . in spite of the injustice he [the protagonist] has received as a result of . . . [the nation's] negligence in protecting its citizens against mob violence."[44] Mine Eyes Have Seen is not only a war play, but also one that protests lynching. Dunbar-Nelson wrote her play to recruit soldiers, but the war in Europe was not necessarily the only front she had in mind. At the play's close Chris' family and neighbors sing along with "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make them free! (177)" The freedom at issue can be read as not only the liberation of German-occupied Europe, but also as the hope that African Americans fighting for their country could help free themselves from domestic terrorism by proving their mettle in the war effort.

When Chris' real-life counterparts went abroad, some won impressive honors—for example, the first two Americans ever to be awarded the French *Croix de Guerre* were Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, African American soldiers in the 369th Infantry[45]—but many were also subject to race-

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[44] [?]etrah S. Willie, Playreader Reports File, Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress.

[45] Scott 256. For a description of the incident that led to this honor, see Scott 257-259.

motivated mistreatment.[46] Home-grown prejudice followed soldiers abroad; in DuBois' words, "A nation with a terrible disease set out to rescue civilization; it took the disease with it in virulent form."[47] But for some, the real issue was not the experience of the war itself as much as the question of what sort of America would African American veterans find when they returned home. In their plays Aftermath and Stragglers in the Dust, Mary Burrill and May Miller both argue for homecomings that will change the relationships between Africans Americans and whites.

Plays About About African American Veterans: Aftermath and Stragglers in the Dust

In a 1919 opinion column, W.E.B. DuBois argued that it was right for African Americans to fight, but that they now faced a new struggle:

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[46] See Scott 15-21 for commendations by Secretary of War Baker, General Pershing, and Theodore Roosevelt. For DuBois' discussions of injustices he discovered at the war's end, see "Documents of the War," The Crisis 18 (May 1919): 16-21; "Opinion," The Crisis 18 (July 1919): 127-130 ; and "An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War" 69-72. In the second article mentioned above as well as in "Opinion," The Crisis 18 (May 1919): 10, DuBois upbraids Scott (as Special Assistant to the Secretary of War) for not revealing the extent of discrimination African American soldiers faced abroad. For Scott's assessment of black soldiers' treatment, see his Chapter XXX, "Did the Negro Soldier Get a Square Deal?".

[47] DuBois, "An Essay Toward a History of the Black Man in the Great War" 87.

> . . . we are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.
>
> We *return*.
>
> We *return from fighting*.
>
> We *return fighting* [his emphasis].[48]

One month earlier, Mary Burrill's play Aftermath had appeared in The Liberator, a socialist journal. Rachel France writes that the play "echoes an editorial by DuBois in which he called for returning Negro soldiers to marshal their wartime courage to fight 'the forces of hell' at home";[49] however, given the chronology, it might be more accurate to suggest that DuBois' editorial echoes Burrill's play, in which an African American veteran is empowered by his military experience to confront white aggressors.

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[48] DuBois, "Opinion: Returning Soldiers," The Crisis 18 (May 1919): 14.

[49] Rachel France, A Century of Plays by American Women (New York: Richards Rosen, 1979) 50. Also cited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, ed., Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies Ser. 117 (New York: Greenwood, 1988) 9.

Hamalian and Hatch note that Burrill's play "anticipates the 'Red Summer' of 1919."[50] Twenty-five race riots and seventy-six lynchings took place from June to December of 1919.[51] For some African Americans, the Red Summer, despite the bloodshed, was a sign of hopeful change. In November 1919, a letter signed by "A Southern Colored Woman" was printed in The Crisis. The author described reading about the Washington, DC riot as "the thrill of a lifetime." She alludes to "the insults we [African American women in the South] have borne silently, for we have hidden many of them from our men because we did not want them to die needlessly in our defense." She credits Washington men (who formed armed patrols to protect themselves and their neighborhoods after an alleged assault against a white woman led to reprisals against African Americans)[52] with putting "a new hope, a new vision into their almost despairing women."[53] Burrill's play may have inspired a similar thrill (or fear) in some of its 1919 readers, who were the drama's

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[50] Hamalian and Hatch , African American Drama 135.

[51] Peter M. Bergman, assisted by Mort N. Bergman and staff, The Chronological History of the Negro in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 387.

[52] Bergman 388.

[53] "A Southern Colored Woman," "A Letter," The Crisis 19 (November 1919) 339.

primary audience for nearly a decade. Aftermath, which appeared in print just before the Red Summer, was not performed until long after. Its first production was by The Krigwa Players at the Little Negro Theatre in New York in May 1928 as part of the David Belasco Little Theatre Tournament.[54] Still, Aftermath was noticed at the time of its publication; in a November 1919 article entitled "The Hope of a Negro Drama", Willis Richardson praises a play by Ridgley Torrence and Burrill's Aftermath as worthy examples of dramas about African Americans.[55]

Unlike Mine Eyes Have Seen, Burrill uses a strong dialect in Aftermath. Hamalian and Hatch contrast white authors' misuse of dialect for African American characters ("near jibberish") with the efforts of African American playwrights to write in authentic folk dialogue.[56] They argue that "Black playwrights recognized many ways in which black people used English according to class, region, and social strata" and that in Aftermath the South Carolina characters use a dialect that is similar to one

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[54] Perkins 55 and Hamalian and Hatch 135.

[55] Willis Richardson, "The Hope of a Negro Drama," The Crisis 19 (November 1919) 338. Also cited by Leslie Catherine Sanders, The Development of Black Theater in America: From Shadows to Selves (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1988) 23-24. Sanders also cites Bernard Peterson Jr., "Willis Richardson: Pioneer Playwright," Black World 24 (April 1975) 43, who says that Burrill was one of Richardson's English teachers.

[56] Hamalian and Hatch, African American Drama 18.

used by backwoods whites.[57] This type of dialect is illustrated by Millie's speech about her brother John's experience in France:

> . . .an' he kin go evahwhere an' dey ain't nobody all the time a-lookin' down on him, an a-sneerin' at him 'cause he's black. . . . he sez it's the firs time evah in his life he's felt lak a real, sho-nuf man![58]

Millie's dialect is the speech of a rural Southerner. This play is part of a larger trend during this time towards folk drama; Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up, discussed later in this chapter is another example of a World War I play set in Carolina, and the two plays employ similar language for their characters although their races differ.

John, the protagonist of Aftermath, is not just a rural youth treated like an equal for the first time in France, he is also depicted as a war hero. In what may be a bow towards Johnson and Roberts, who were given the *Croix de Guerre* for repelling a dozen or more Germans, Burrill makes John a decorated veteran who has been awarded the War Cross for fighting twenty Germans and

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[57] Hamalian and Hatch 19.

[58] Mary Burrill, Aftermath in Perkins, 59. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

saving his entire company. But what John does not know is that while he was fighting the war his unarmed father tried to fight off a mob of white men after an argument over cotton prices and was burned to death while his younger brother was helpless to interfere. When John comes home with a pair of guns and a newfound sense of pride, he learns of his father's death. Full of fury, John reflects on hypocrisy,

> I'm sick o' these w'ite folks doins--we're "fine, trus'worthy feller citizuns" when they're handin' us out guns, an' Liberty Bonds, an chuckin' us off to die; but we ain't a damn thing when it comes to handin' us the rights we done fought an' bled fu'! I'm sick o' this sort o' life—an' I'm goin' to put an end to it! (65)

John and his brother take the guns he has brought home from the war and go to find the men who killed their father, knowing it could be their final gesture of defiance. In the 1928 little theatre production of this play, the ending was changed; instead of the curtain falling on a note of militant pride as John and his brother leave to avenge their father's lynching, blocking was added that showed how John's intended retribution failed. In the words of a Billboard critic who found the

play's anti-lynching theme "offensive," John "staggers in, almost carrying the badly put together scenery with him, and dies melodramatically."[59] Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens write that Burrill was devastated by the way the ending was changed without her consent.[60]

As Burrill wrote it, Aftermath is a call-to-arms for African Americans to defend the liberties they had helped to protect and to extend those rights to their own communities. DuBois also wrote about the "terrible weapon of Self-defense" in 1919, but cautioned that, "We must never let justifiable self-defense against individuals become blind and lawless offense against all white folk.[61] Both DuBois and Burrill advocate self-defense and just vengeance, but stop short of calling for all-out race war as some revolutionary writers of the sixties would do.

Part of Burrill's legacy seems to have been her ability as an English and speech teacher at Washington's Dunbar High School to inspire her students to write plays, too. Kathy Perkins credits Burrill with urging Willis

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[59] "Scottish Group Wins Cup in Little Theater Tournament," Billboard 40:20 (19 May 1928) 7. Also qtd. by Perkins and Stephens, 79-80.

[60] Perkins and Stephens 79. They cite a 1928 letter from Burrill to DuBois which expresses her dismay with the change.

[61] W. E. B. DuBois, "Opinion: Let Us Reason Together," Crisis 18 (September 1919): 231.

Richardson to write (he was the first African American to have a play produced on Broadway). Another student of Burrill's was May Miller, who as a high school student encouraged by Burrill, won a fifty-cent prize and publication of her first play, Pandora's Box in School's Progress magazine. Miller went on to win other awards at Howard University and in Opportunity's Literary Contests, and Perkins identifies Miller as the most widely published female African American playwright of the 1920s and 1930s.[62] Miller taught speech, drama, and dance at Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore until she retired in 1944, when she also gave up playwriting for poetry.[63]

But in spite of May Miller's success as a playwright and poet, her Stragglers in the Dust was not published until 1989. Perhaps the Depression limited her opportunities for publication and production; all of her other plays written and published in the 1930s were history plays written for the anthology Negro History in Thirteen Plays, which she co-edited.[64] Unlike Burrill's confrontational call to arms, Stragglers in the Dust explores racism in a subtler way. Perkins writes, "Miller

[62] Perkins 143.

[63] Perkins 143-44.

[64] Perkins 284.

cleverly dealt with sensitive issues of the times without offending her audience by leaving unanswered such questions as: "Is the body in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier really that of a black soldier?"[65]

The play, set in the early 1920s, opens with Nan, a cleaning woman, singing to herself by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, her scrub bucket temporarily abandoned. A stage direction reads, "one instinctively thinks of 'I dreamed I dwelt in marble halls' and realizes that here is a new interpretation."[66] When Mac, the watchman, tells her it is time to go home, she tells him how she likes to stay near the Tomb because she believes her son is there:

> Dat grand ol' man stand up dere an' tol' how dey calle'd an' how Jim lef' me broken hearted tuh go fight for dis country and den how de guns got him. An' how dey fin' him finally on dat fiel' in France an' bring him back ober heah an put him in dere. . . . Didn't he say "Yuh mother dere bow'd in grief." Ah was hidin' behin' dis very pillow an' Ah heah'd him, but Ah didn' come out cause Ah know'd dere'd be them dere as

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[65] Perkins 144.

[66] May Miller, Stragglers in the Dust in Perkins, 145. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

> wouldn’t want Jim tuh stay dere cause he’s cullud. (146-147)

The watchman tries to make Nan understand that the Unknown Soldier is a universal symbol, but quickly gives up and talks to her condescendingly, “as if pacifying a child” (147). After Nan leaves, Mac speaks to Bradford, a well-dressed white politician searching for his shell-shocked son, about Nan’s conviction that the Unknown is her son; Bradford is shocked by the idea, saying it is not possible, “But if it were, what a terrible joke on America!”(148).

After this point, Miller’s drama becomes less of a protest play about the selective amnesia white society has exhibited towards men who were asked to die to uphold freedoms, and more of a melodramatic ghost story. Bradford’s son, wounded in France, was saved by Jim, who died instead. Now the dazed white boy haunts the tomb, believing Jim got what was rightfully his, and talking about how Jim has offered to share the ceremonial grave. The son dies and Bradford leaves, telling an uncomprehending Mac that the corpse is not his son’s body: his son went in the tomb. Although the latter half of the play is much less engaging than the first part, Miller’s technique of leaving the play’s meaning open-ended forces

the reader to decide for him/herself the answers to questions Miller asks: Did Nan have special knowledge about the soldier in the Tomb? Did the dying white boy really see Jim? Would there be people who would insist on removing the Unknown Soldier if he were discovered to be African American? How does American society treat its veterans after they come home? Stragglers in the Dust does not offer closure in the plot, perhaps because the author was suggesting the best resolution might be fostering brotherhood in real life. The possibility of two youths of different races sharing a national memorial to those who fought in the "war to end all wars" suggests that racial enmity might be buried, too.

Mine Eyes Have Seen, Aftermath, and Stragglers in the Dust are all quite short one-acts, "miniature genres," to use Jeanne-Marie Miller's term.[67] But diminutive as they are, the plays tackle serious, weighty, timely topics. It is also worth noting that all three playwrights were high school teachers at a time when most African American plays were performed in schools and churches; therefore, they were in positions to influence future directions in African American dramaturgy. Furthermore, Dunbar-Nelson, Burrill, and Miller, along with Cotter, are the first to

[67] Jeanne-Marie A. Miller, "Georgia Douglas Johnson and May Miller," 363.

explore the theme of racism and military experience in drama, a theme which will be used by later African American playwrights such as William Branch in A Medal for Willie, Adrienne Kennedy in An Evening With Dead Essex, Charles Fuller in A Soldier's Play and Leslie Lee in The Ninth Wave and Black Eagles. The African American women who wrote World War I plays are notable not only as political dramatists whose short works address crucial issues of their own times, but also as harbingers of future political debates and dramatic writing.

"The New World Shaped:" Two Thought-Provoking Plays from the Provincetown Players

> To me, the justification of the Provincetown Players' existence—aside from discovering Eugene O'Neill, a mixed blessing. . . was in two plays: one was Susan Glaspell's 'The Inheritors'; a beautiful, true play of war-time . . . . The other play . . . was Edna St. Vincent Millay's 'Aria da Capo', a war-play too, in its own symbolic fashion, and full of the indignation and pity which war's useless slaughter had aroused in her poet's mind and heart.[68]

[68] Floyd Dell, Homecoming: An Autobiography (New York: Farar and Rinehart, 1933) 267, also qtd. in C.W.E. Bigsby, A Critical

Floyd Dell was a member of the Provincetown Players, and his avowal that Inheritors and Aria da Capo were the only two plays that fully justified the group's efforts is probably based on his own complex relationships with the theatre and its members. He had "respect and admiration" for Glaspell and had been in love with Millay, but clashed with some other Provincetown members.[69] But Dell's opinion of Inheritors and Aria da Capo as the two pieces that proved the company's worth is probably also due to their subject matter. These two plays are manifestations of ideas which had been important to Dell and other Provincetown members for several years: concern over World War I, a desire to preserve freedom of expression, and a belief that creativity and imagination were tools which could reshape the world.

Early in 1917, with US entry into World War I imminent, the Provincetown Players decided "after considerable discussion" to do a program of war plays.[70] This bill, which played in February 1917, included Ivan's

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Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, 1900-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 14.

[69] Dell 266 and 268.

[70] From meeting minutes of 10 Jan. 1917, qtd. in Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1931) 24.

Homecoming by Michael Gold, Barbarians by Rita Wellman, and The Sniper by Eugene O'Neill.[71] Wellman's Barbarians, a lost play and the first female-authored war drama to be performed by the Provincetown Players, was an ironic one-act about women who dreaded the approach of "barbarian" soldiers, only to find the men who arrive are not so frightening as they had anticipated. In March of 1918, Provincetown founder George Cram ("Jig") Cook's antiwar play The Athenian Women, (a retelling of Lysistrata) was produced, and was revived at the Bramhall Playhouse the following month for the Women's Peace Party of New York State.[72] These plays are all either explicitly antiwar or stress the humanity of individuals regardless of national allegiance.

By the start of the 1918-19 season, seven members of the Provincetown Players were in the military and Floyd Dell been indicted and tried (along with other editors of The Masses, a socialist magazine) for allegedly violating the Espionage Act by writing that conscientious objectors evidenced a "fundamental stubbornness of the free soul."[73]

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[71] Deutsch and Hanau 207.

[72] Robert Károly Sarlós, Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players: Theatre in Ferment. (n.p.: U of Massachusetts P, 1982) 87 and 173-74.

[73] Dell 315.

The war also prompted the Provincetown Players to issue a manifesto acknowledging that theatre was often viewed as "socially justified in this dark time" as a way to escape from reality, but that:

> . . . if we felt no deeper value in dramatic art than entertainment—we would hardly have the heart for it now. One faculty, we know, is going to be of vast importance to the half-destroyed world—indispensable for its rebuilding—the faculty of creative imagination. . . . The social justification of which we feel to be valid now for makers and players of plays is that they shall help keep alive in the world the light of imagination. Without it the wreck of the world that was, can not be cleared away, and the new world shaped.[74]

This manifesto professes the Provincetowners' belief that art is socially significant and can help remake society into something better. Yet the positive social change that the Provincetown Players and others hoped would follow the war did not readily materialize. Both Aria da

[74] Manifesto written by George Cram Cook, 1918 and qtd. in Oliver Sayler, Our American Theatre (1923; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1970) 97, Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1931) 44, and C.W.E. Bigsby, A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, 1900-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 19.

Capo (1919) and Inheritors (1921) are grounded in the disillusionment and frustration of the immediate post-World War I era. The war that had been fought "to end all wars" had concluded with a treaty that assigned blame and heavy reparations to Germany, the United States' refusal to join the League of Nations, and extreme nationalism—all of which seemed to argue against permanent peacekeeping. In a climate of disappointment and rampant intolerance towards "radical" ideas, Edna St. Vincent Millay created Aria da Capo, a parable of war's cyclical nature, and Susan Glaspell wrote Inheritors, a complex condemnation of materialism and xenophobia and an ardent defense of academic freedom.

Aria da Capo

PIERROT: Come drag these bodies out of here!
We can't/Sit down and eat with two dead
bodies lying/Under the table! . . . The
audience wouldn't stand for it!
COTHURNUS (off stage): What makes you think so?—
Pull down the tablecloth/On the other side,

and hide them from the house/ And play the farce. The audience will forget.[75]

Edna St. Vincent Millay's Aria Da Capo is a metatheatrical antiwar verse play. In the scene quoted above, an actor is about to resume his interrupted rehearsal of a harlenquinade when he realizes that the corpses of shepherds from a tragedy are still underfoot. At the urging of Cothurnus (a character who represents Tragedy and serves as a stage manager) Pierrot and his leading lady, Columbine, hide the bodies and repeat the same merry banter and feasting that opened the play. The title of the piece refers to a musical composition that introduces a motif, moves to a second theme, and finishes by returning to the original one. Millay uses this structure to comment upon the recurrent nature of war and society's quick forgetfulness.

Aria da Capo opened on December 5, 1919, just over a year after the Armistice that ended World War I. In Millay's play, a frolicsome comic banquet is abruptly displaced by a war parable played by two shepherds. The rustic youths are content until one of them proposes a "game" and they divide the stage and their flock into two,

[75] Edna St. Vincent Millay, Aria Da Capo: A Play in One Act (New York: D. Appleton, 1920) 34.

using crêpe paper ribbons to construct a “wall” between them. Once this boundary exists, the shepherds become increasingly suspicious of one another, oblivious to the needs of their sheep, and preoccupied with wealth. Eventually, they kill one another. This play-within-a-play simply but effectively addresses many of the causal factors behind war: nationalism and xenophobia, the artificial and sometimes arbitrary nature of borders, material greed, and desire for power. It also portrays the slaughter of the shepherds as a senseless act that changes nothing, since the comedy resumes immediately—literally over their dead bodies. New York Times critic Alexander Woollcott said that Aria da Capo was a “fairly enigmatic” piece from a company for whom “inscrutability” was commonplace and that the play was liable to “pass over the heads of the average unthinking audience;” however, he also thought that:

> surely no mother from a gold-starred home, who saw the war come and go like a grotesque comet and who now hears the rattlepated merriment of her neighbors all the more distinctly because of the blank silence in her own impoverished home—

> surely no such mother will quite miss the point of "Aria da Capo."[76]

Woollcott's comment that a bereaved mother would understand Aria da Capo since she remembers the effects of a war that others seem determined to forget is one way to interpret this play. Indeed, America did seem set on distancing and disremembering the war; the year after Aria da Capo premiered Warren G. Harding was elected president by a wide margin, promising a "return to normalcy." But another way to look at Aria da Capo is through what is implied rather than enacted in the play: the inevitable return of war.

Millay biographer Joan Dash writes that Aria da Capo captured the postwar era's "sense of bitterness and loss, the cynicism, the belief that nothing will ever be any better because history is a treadmill."[77] Millay's ending, with the return of Columbine and Pierrot's frivolous badinage and banqueting, allows the audience to imagine the cycle continuing, but never depicts war intruding once again. Millay's ending is subtle, open to multiple

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[76] Alexander Woollcott, "Second Thoughts on First Nights: There Are War Plays and War Plays," New York Times 14 Dec. 1919, sec 8: 2. Critical Essays on Edna St. Vincent Millay, William B. Thesing, ed. (New York: G. K. Hall, 1993) 40-41.

[77] Joan Dash, A Life of One's Own: Three Gifted Women and the Men They Married (1973; New York: Paragon, 1988) 146. Qtd. by Barbara Ozieblo, ed., The Provincetown Players: A Choice of the Shorter Works (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1994) 30.

meanings, and probably politically astute. Jo Ellen Green Kaiser observes that after World War I modernists had "a desire to effect change and a premonition that such a desire is futile" and so protested social conditions from a "mythic remove," as Millay does in Aria da Capo.[78] Besides making an interesting aesthetic choice, Millay's use of classicism and modernized commedia dell'arte also allows her to safely critique her contemporary world in a way writers using a more literal mode could not do in 1919. What Barbara Ozieblo calls "the flippant veneer" of Millay's antiwar play "ensured its passage through the nets of the most zealous guardians of the Sedition Act."[79] Although the Sedition Act was intended to prevent wartime criticism of the American government, it seemed in the immediate postwar period that it was being co-opted by conservatives to suppress expression of liberal views.

Aria da Capo was acclaimed when it opened and went on to become an extremely popular one-act in little theatres and colleges for half a century. Alexander Woollcott said the Provincetown production was the "most beautiful and most interesting play in the English language now to be

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[78] Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, "Displaced Modernism: Millay and the Triumph of Sentimentality," Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal, ed. Diane P. Freedman (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1995) 37.

[79] Ozieblo 30-31.

seen in New York,"[80] and Provincetowners Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau called it the best presentation that year (out of a sixteen play season) at their theatre.[81] Widely produced in subsequent years, it became one of the mainstays of amateur theatre groups.[82] Ironically, Aria da Capo's antiwar message lasted longer than its author's pacifist ideals.[83] Like many others who worked for peace in the immediate postwar era, Millay supported US involvement in World War II.[84] Therefore, Millay's interest

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[80] Woollcott 40.

[81] Deutsch and Hanau 54, also qtd. in Jean Gould, The Poet and Her Book: A Biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay (New York: Dodd, 1969) 106.

[82] For instance, an unsourced clipping in the NYPL [circa 1964] says that Aria da Capo is "still the most popular one-act play in the annals of the Dramatists Guild Service." Gould also remarks on its widespread production by little theatres and colleges, 107.

[83] According to one of her obituaries, Millay's WWI-era antiwar activities were not confined to writing Aria da Capo; she also supported pacifist friends who were accused of treasonous activities by "reciting to them her poetry to comfort them while juries decided on their cases." "Edna St. Vincent Millay Found Dead at 58," New York Times 20 Oct. 1950, NYPL clippings file on Edna St. Vincent Millay.

[84] In 1940 Millay wrote anti-isolationist poems: There Are No More Islands Any More and the collection Make Bright the Arrows. Once the United States entered the conflict, she participated in wartime radio programs, such as the 1942 broadcast of her The Murder of Lidice, about the Nazi destruction of a village in Czechoslovakia, Unsourced clipping [circa 1964] NYPL Clippings file on Millay and Samuel A. Tower, "She Was the Most Popular Poet of Her Time, New York Times (12 July 1981) sec. 2: 33. Most critics and even Millay herself believed that her anti-fascist writings were better as propaganda than as poetry. For a discussion of critical reception of Millay's later work see Harold Orel, "Tarnished Arrows: The Last Phase of Edna St. Vincent Millay," Kansas Quarterly 1 (1960): 73-78 and Thesing 166-173. For a dissenting view, see Kaiser 39-40. Kaiser, unlike most critics, does not see Millay's rejection of modernism in this era as negative, but as a shrewd political choice

in participating in political debates via literature continued long after Aria da Capo, although that little parable about war and self-absorption is generally considered her best play and her finest war-themed work.

Whereas Millay critiqued war and apathy through a short, timeless, and metaphorical play, her colleague Susan Glaspell wrote a lengthy and (more) realistic indictment of specific contemporary American policies and attitudes in Inheritors. Despite the differences in length, style, and subject matter, however, both Millay and Glaspell address the types of issues that mattered to the members of the Provincetown Players, the things they hoped would shape the "new world" after the war. In Aria da Capo, characters gobble delicacies like macaroons and artichokes while blithely ignoring suffering, while Inheritors depicts the erosion of foundational American principles when individuals and institutions become obsessed with materialism. Although Millay's play is more cynical than Glaspell's opus, both plays are idealistic and castigate unthinking, self-centered behavior.

Inheritors

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that framed her political views within American popular culture's dominant mode during that time (particularly for literature written for women readers): sentimentalism.

FEJEVARY: We have just fought a great war for democracy.

MADELINE: Well, is that any reason for not having it? (140)

Susan Glaspell's play Inheritors dramatizes the hypocrisy of the immediate postwar era, when labor groups, "radicals," and "foreigners," were suppressed or arrested for their "anti-Americanism." 1919-20 was filled with strike-breaking, race riots, deportation hearings for "red aliens," and rampant disregard of First Amendment rights.[85] The xenophobia and fear of radicalism of the time was exemplified by the case against Italian immigrants and anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti—who were arrested in 1920 for an alleged murder, but whose political convictions seemed to be the most compelling "proof" of their guilt. Concerned that the United States was abandoning the democratic principles for which World War I had purportedly been fought, Glaspell wrote her play about declining idealism in the United States.

[85] For a discussion of issues surrounding freedom of expression during this time see Zechariah Chafee, Jr, Freedom of Speech (New York: Harcourt, 1920). Chafee, a Harvard law professor, observes that over 1900 wartime prosecutions and other judicial actions against seditious speech were ". . . followed since the armistice by a widespread legislative consideration of bills punishing the advocacy of extreme radicalism (1)."

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Glaspell invokes history to contrast pioneer values of the nineteenth century with contemporary attitudes. In Act I, set in 1879, Silas Morton and his Hungarian friend Felix Fejevary (who left his homeland after fighting for freedom there) return from a Fourth of July celebration wearing their Civil War uniforms and wondering "what 'twas all for" (112). Grandmother Morton, who was the first white woman settler in the region, reminds the others of the sacrifices and hardships her generation endured—burying children, fighting Indian Wars, working sixteen-hour days to have adequate homes and food and then sharing those modest possessions with other settlers traveling west—in order that her son and grandchildren might have more comfortable, prosperous lives. Offered an opportunity to sell a piece of the land his family and government took from the Native Americans, Silas Morton decides that his inheritance can be put to a more noble use if it is used to "plant a college" that can be a legacy for all the "boys of the cornfields—and the girls (113)." Morton, who only had a couple of winters' worth of formal education himself, has learned from his friend Fejevary to appreciate ideas. He believes that learning can enrich life " . . . like fertilizer. Get richer. See more.

Believe more (111)." As his forefathers and mothers worked to provide material comforts for him, Morton wants to do something to enrich "all the children" intellectually and culturally (115).

The rest of the play is set in 1920. Fejevary's son, now a banker and president of the board of trustees for Morton College, is showing a state senator around the school, proudly talking about male students drilling on campus and strike-breaking at a local steel works. Senator Lewis is duly impressed with the "Americanism" the school exhibits, except for a well-known scholar who has supported a former student who was a World War I conscientious objector. The senator makes funding for the college subject to silencing or firing the "radical" professor.[86] Meanwhile, Hindu students passing out handbills in support of a free India and protesting another Indian student's deportment are taunted by American students, clubbed, and arrested, and Silas Morton's granddaughter Madeline gets involved, hitting a police officer with her tennis racket. The play ends with the professor agreeing to suspend his political activities (since his wife is ill and he cannot afford to lose his position), and Madeline—in trouble a second time for

[86] Gainor documents many cases of professors who lost their jobs during the war; see 125-126.

speaking her mind—leaving her home to face imprisonment. Glaspell also uses pollen as a metaphor for isolationism: Madeline's father has cross-bred a superior strain of corn, but cannot keep the wind from drifting his prize pollen over the neighbor's fields and improving their crops. The wind and pollen do not stop at property boundaries, and ideas like freedom and democracy should not stop at national borders.

Throughout the play Glaspell presents characters who sacrifice a part of themselves for something larger. Silas Morton gives away land for a college so that "maybe I can lie under the same sod as the red boys and not be ashamed (118)." Madeline is willing to go to jail rather than apologize for her belief that in America anyone should be allowed to "say what he believes to be true (142)." Characters who are never seen on-stage provide further examples selflessness: Madeline's mother died helping to nurse immigrant children through diphtheria; Indian students face expulsion from college, deportation, and punishment from British authorities for wanting independence for their country; Madeline's brother was killed in battle in France; and the conscientious objector, Fred Jordan, is placed in solitary confinement in a cell whose length and breadth are scarcely bigger

than a coffin because he cried out when a warden chained up another inmate by his wrists. Those who are generous enough to sacrifice themselves are contrasted against others who choose expediency over idealism or who are only concerned with self-preservation.

Inheritors is a long, multi-faceted, sprawling play. When it opened in March 1921 at the Provincetown Playhouse, it was reviewed in the New York Times under the headline, "How Miss Glaspell Does Run On."[87] Another reviewer thought it was "a bit late" for a play to address the imprisonment of conscientious objectors, and remarked that "time means nothing . . . to the Provincetown Players. The play began at 8:35 and ended at 12 sharp."[88] The Weekly Review thought Glaspell was heavy-handed with her premise:

> nobody in this play (speaking loosely) is allowed to straighten his necktie or stretch his legs or light a pipe or peel an orange or whistle a tune or pat his daughter on the head

[87] "How Miss Glaspell Does Run On," New York Times 27 Mar. 1921.

[88] Unsourced clipping, NYPL clippings file on Inheritors.

without some reference, explicit or implicit, to the righteousness or the danger of free speech.[89]

Despite complaints that the play was overwritten, many critics did praise Glaspell for tackling her subject matter. Call said it was a "thoughtful and courageous drama"[90] and Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau remember the reception of the premiere of Inheritors: as "moving:" "Keyed up with the lingering overtones of war, the audience responded to the play's indictment of mob spirit."[91] A Vogue reviewer concluded that Inheritors "is moving to those who accept its thesis and annoying or boring to those who do not," and also mentioned an unexpected benefit of the play's lengthiness: a United States Marshall who had "come to the play to see if stories of its 'un-Americanism' were true enough to justify its suppression or amendment" left after the first act.[92] The play was successful enough that the

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[89] "'Inheritors' At Provincetown and 'Nice People' on Broadway," Weekly Review 4:100 (13 April 1921). NYPL Clippings file on Inheritors.

[90] "Benefit Performance of 'Inheritors' for Friends of Freedom in India," Call [New York] (16 April 1921). Provincetown Scrapbooks on microfilm, NYPL.

[91] Deutsch and Hanau 79.

[92] Rev. of Inheritors, Vogue (May 5, 1921) Provincetown Scrapbooks on microfilm, NYPL. Also qtd. by J. Ellen Gainor, Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48 (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001) 113.

Provincetown Players extended its run in April and brought it back again in mid-May.

Inheritors received a major revival in 1927, when Eva Le Gallienne produced it at the Civic Repertory Theatre. Many of the reviews echo the original notices, praising the "spirit" of the drama but faulting its construction. One such critic said it would be better as "a masterpiece of two short acts and a prologue" because at times " . . . the action drags so interminably that even the most frenzied advocate of academic freedom could find it in his heart to wish that all these courageous characters hadn't insisted on being noble at such great length."[93] The Federal Theatre Project also revived the play in 1937 in Jacksonville, Florida, despite the fact that it received mixed responses from its play readers.[94] But one little theatre found in Inheritors something of a signature play: the Hedgerow Theatre in Moylan, Pennsylvania. This theatre—which was founded by Jasper Deeter, an actor in the original Provincetown production—performed Inheritors in its repertory from 1923-1954 (with the exception of some of the World War II years), with special performances

[93] "Birthright," World (8 Mar. 1927) NYPL Reviews 1926-27.

[94] Playreader Reports File, Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress. For instance, one reader calls Inheritors "meritously conceived" but that it "proceeds unevenly and at times incoherently." Another (George Ronald Brown) thought it was a little out of date but that it "probably was a bomb-shell" in 1921.

on the Fourth of July and Memorial Day. It was viewed as coming "closer than any other play in expressing the longstanding social and political views of the Hedgerow company as a whole over the years."[95] Widely viewed as an imperfect but important play, Inheritors is precisely the sort of non-commercial, thought-provoking drama that the Provincetown Players hoped to create.

Commercial pressures soon divided the Provincetown Players, however, and in the spring of 1922 they announced they were suspending productions for a year. Susan Glaspell and George Cram Cook went to Greece and the Provincetown Playhouse was leased to another producer. But during this interim another play about the war and its legacy was produced at the Provincetown Playhouse. Like Inheritors, Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up (1923) argued that education was crucial to citizenship and that change was possible if people looked beyond themselves.

"The Most Beloved American Folk Play:" Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up

[95] Hedgerow Theatre press release, 1982. NYPL clippings file on Inheritors.

WIDOW CAGLE: As long as thar is hate thar will be feuds—and wars.[96]

In Lula Vollmer's Appalachian folk play, Sun-Up (1923), the Widow Cagle loses her son in World War I and rethinks her own relationship to violence as a result. Recognizing that her son is not any more to her "than other mothers' sons—air to them," Widow Cagle decides not to honor the code of the feud that demands she kill the son of the revenuer who killed her husband (75). Vollmer suggests that peace—on a local or global scale—can be achieved when love and recognition of common humanity replace long-held hatreds and prejudices.

Similar to the plays about African American soldiers discussed earlier in this chapter, Sun-Up questions what obligations poor white rural residents owe a government that seems to ignore their needs. When she hears that her son Rufe is required to register for a draft, Widow Cagle asks, "What right has the Guv'ment to tell us mountain folks to do or what not to do. Air we beholdin' to them? Air they doin' anything fer us [. . .]?" (12-13). Widow Cagle is deeply suspicious of "the law" since her husband

[96] Lula Vollmer, Sun-Up: A Play in Three Acts, Contemporary Drama Ser. (New York: Bretano's, 1924) 77. All further references to this text will be cited parenthetically.

was killed trying to make a living on his own land and urges her son to resist conscription and follow “the laws of yo’ own folks” (14). Later, she shelters an army deserter, telling him, “Ye air welcome, Stranger, as long as ye air honest, an I reckon ye air if ye ain’t done nothin’ worse than run away from war (51).” Although Sun-Up also depicts Rufe as heroic for deciding to fight for his country—a decision that also prompts a pretty young neighbor named Emmy to marry him—the parts of the play that condone civil disobedience probably made it impossible to produce during and immediately after the war. It is likely that the play’s politics were viewed as even more problematic because at times Widow Cagle espouses a kind of homespun socialism, such as when she says “Thar ain’t no reason fer war, unless us poor folks fight the rich uns for the way they air bleedin’ us to death with the prices for meat and bread (3)” and guesses the reason mountain children do not go to school or seem to apply themselves to their studies is because “Ye kin fill a young un’s brain all ye want to, but hit’s goin’ to run out if thar’s a hole in his stomach” (13-14). Parts of the play could certainly be construed as hampering enlistment efforts, while its class observations may have been considered “red” during the immediate post-war era.

Vollmer wrote Sun-Up in 1918, supposedly after hearing an anecdote about a boy who arrived at a southern war camp and asked, ”Air this hyar France?”[97] This example of naiveté is repeated in Sun-Up when Widow Cagle, who thinks her son is going to fight Yankees agian, asks him “Whar IS France?” and Rufe replies, “I don’t know. I heared it wuz ‘bout forty miles ‘tother side o’ Asheville” (21). Unlike some writers of folk plays whose depictions of poor, uneducated Southerners cast them as sordidly exotic or hopelessly primitive, Vollmer (a North Carolina native herself) uses examples of mountain people’s “ignorance” to underscore their lack of educational opportunities. Like Silas Morton in Glaspell’s Inheritors, Rufe Cagle is a farmer who has had only a smattering of schooling, but believes “that little bit o’ larnin’ taught me to respect somethin’ a little higher than my own way of wantin’ ter do things” (14).

Sun-Up received its first production by an amateur company in Scarbourgh, New York, under the direction of Henry Stillman. Stillman, along with another director named Benjamin Kauser, directed its Manhattan premiere in May 1923, performed by the Players Company, Inc. at the

[97] Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative American Plays: From 1767 to the Present Day, 7th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957) 983.

Provincetown Theatre. Originally it was not a critical success, even though its realism and acting was praised—particularly Lucille La Verne's performance as Widow Cagle. The New York Times called the acting "splendid" but said that Vollmer's dramatic talent was "undeniably crude and uncertain."[98] The critic for Theatre Magazine devoted half of the Sun-Up review to complaints about the airless little theatre in which it was performed.[99] The final act, in which Widow Cagle discovers that the deserter she is harboring is the son of the man who shot her spouse, but decides not to kill him after hearing the "voice" of Rufe, was especially disliked. Heywood Broun, critic for World, wrote that after a cable arrives with news of Rufe's death the "friends of the author should have rushed to the stage and nailed down the curtain."[100] One of the only critics who was enthusiastic about the play was Anita Brown, who said the "picture of a portion of America of which most of us are woefully ignorant—the poor mountain folk . . .[was] . . . so superbly realistic that it is worth traveling many miles and suffering all

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[98] "'Sunup' A Vivid Drama," New York Times 25 May [1923]. NYPL Reviews.

[99] Rev. of Sun-Up, Theatre Magazine 38.268 (July 1923) 16.

[100] Heywood Broun, "At the Provincetown Theatre, 'Sun Up,'" World 25 May [1923]. NYPL Reviews.

the discomforts of this impossible little theatre to see."[101] Based on its reviews, it seemed unlikely that the play would last long.

But Sun-Up had what Burns Mantle called "the unusual experience of hanging on and on despite the scant attention paid it by the professional playgoers."[102] Audiences adored the play, which transferred to the Lennox Hill Theatre and was billed as "The Most Beloved American Folk Play" by September 1923. Soon Sun-Up moved to a Broadway theatre and was made into a Metro-Golwyn-Mayer film in 1925, promoted as "The Play That Touched the Heart of Broadway!"[103] Lucille La Verne toured the United States and England with Sun-Up, then mounted a 1928 revival on Broadway. By this time the critics had acquired a taste for Sun-Up; for instance, Billboard called the revival one of the season's best shows and said that since its original production it "has lost none of the poignant beauty nor forceful drama that has lifted it to a high

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[101] Anita Block, "'Sun Up,' A Play About the Poor Mountain Folk of Carolina, Is One of the Most Unusual, Interesting and Worth-While Plays of the Season," Call 26 May 1923, NYPL clippings file on Sun-Up.

[102] Burns Mantle, "Lula Vollmer," American Playwrights of Today (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1929) 193.

[103] Advertisement in the NYPL clippings file on the cinema version of Sun-Up.

place in the American theatre."[104] Arthur Hobson Quinn even put Sun-Up in his canon of drama in the United States when he chose the play as his example of an American folk play.

Even if some critics granted Sun-Up a "high place" in American theatre, it was not a highbrow show. Its most enduring legacy was probably the success it enjoyed throughout the country in little theatres, schools, and Chautauquas during the twenties and thirties.[105] Appropriately, Sun-Up was produced by one of the few professional theatres in southern Appalachia: the Barter Theatre of Abingdon, Virginia, a theatre founded during the Depression which allowed patrons to buy tickets with farm goods that then fed the actors. When Lula Vollmer died in 1955, critic Robert Downing said she deserved "a salute from as many of our amateur actors as any playwright of our time. Hundreds of young players received an opportunity in their home town dramatic groups

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[104] Rev. of Sun-Up, Billboard 40.45 (10 Nov. 1928) 46.

[105] For example, by the time the Loyola Community Theatre of Chicago entered the Eighth National Little Theatre Tournament in 1930, a reviewer remarked that the play was still fresh "despite the fact that 'Sun-Up' has been performed so often by Little Theatre groups." Rev. of Sun-Up, Herald Tribune 10 May 1930. NYPL Reviews, 1929-30.

to appear in Miss Vollmer's 'Sun-Up.'"[106] Until the approach of World War II made antiwar plays unpopular, Sun-Up was certainly a "beloved" folk play.

Unlike most plays that offer an idealistic hope that society can be reformed, Sun-Up did make a real, material contribution to social change. Lucille La Verne, who was born in Tennessee, said she had always believed that mountain farmers' "ignorance was due to a lack of desire to learn" until Sun-Up made her understand that people were illiterate because "the schools were inadequate, too scattered to serve this farflung population."[107] After receiving hundreds of letters from concerned audience members wanting to know how they could help, La Verne established a fund called the "Widow Cagle's Mite" to support mountain schools. Lula Vollmer also gave generously to this work; her New York Times obituary describes how she raised $40,000 for schools in mountainous parts of the South by waiving royalties.[108]

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[106] Robert Downing, letter, "Drama Mailbag," New York Times 15 May 1955.

[107] Lucille La Verne, "'Sun-Up' and the Mountain Folk," Sun 30 Oct. 1928. NYPL Collection of Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1928-29. Other descriptions of this charitable work appear in Billboard 40.45 (10 Nov. 1928) 46, and in 1928 programs of La Verne's revival of Sun-Up.

[108] "Lula Vollmer, Author of 'Sun-Up,' Dies; Drama About the South Ran Two Years, New York Times 3 May 1955, NYPL Clippings File on Lula Vollmer.

Although Sun-Up may not have been able to end feuds or wars, it was able to accomplish several things. Vollmer introduced audiences in other parts of the country to some of the challenges facing residents of rural southern Appalachia. Although some stereotypes of the region are perpetuated in Sun-Up, it was a far more sensitive portrait of Appalachians than many later dramatic treatments of poor white Southerners on Broadway, such as the popular but prurient long-running hit Tobacco Road or the cornpone-laden musical Li'l Abner. Furthermore, by dramatizing the problem of inadequate education in Appalachia, some productions of Sun-Up raised money to combat illiteracy in the mountains. Finally, the play provided a vehicle for scores of amateur actors in little theatres.

Sun-Up's fundraising for education is a concrete example of using theatre along with other tactics to try to achieve a tangible result. All of the plays in this chapter might be read as activist works, however. For Burrill, Dunbar-Nelson, and Miller, the participation of African American soldiers in the war brought the hope that blacks might obtain full citizenship and civil rights. Stragglers in the Dust and Aria da Capo both reminded Americans of the amnesia exhibited towards those who had

died or been wounded in war. Inheritors advocated the freedom to speak and act according to convictions, whether or not those notions were in vogue. Sun-Up and Stragglers in the Dust urged audience members to put aside bigotry and hatred and treat old enemies as brothers. Except for Mine Eyes Have Seen and Aftermath, all these plays can be considered antiwar to one degree or another, and both Dunbar-Nelson's and Burrill's plays are anti-lynching dramas, protesting racial violence.

Most of playwrights discussed in this chapter faced challenges getting their plays produced. All of these plays except Stragglers in the Dust were written when limitations were placed upon freedom of expression, and Sun-Up and Aftermath were not performed for several years after they were written. The African American playwrights' works were rarely produced, undoubtedly due to the paucity of production opportunities available to women of color. All of these plays were written when more and more doors were opening for women dramatists—especially in little theatres—but the opportunities for white and black women were certainly not equal. Once they managed to be produced in the first place, all three plays by white women discussed in this chapter were produced for years after their initial productions, and Aria da Capo

and Sun-Up became almost ubiquitous among little theatre and college groups.

The plays described in this chapter can also be considered harbingers of dramatic trends of the late twenties and the thirties. Although relative to their male counterparts few women dramatists had work produced in professional venues like Broadway theatres during this time, many female playwrights saw their plays performed in little theatres. Additionally, interest in antiwar plays increased markedly during the thirties, especially as Europe seemed to drift closer to war. In 1937, the Federal Theatre Project released pamphlets describing antiwar plays available for production. Two full-length and three one-act plays by US women dramatists were included in the list considered suitable for professional production, but over twenty one-acts by female authors were included in its companion list of plays for community theatres.[109] The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) also revived all of the plays discussed in these case studies save the ones about African American soldiers, and mounted

[109] Antiwar Plays, National Service Bureau Publication 31 (Nov. 1937) recommends the following plays: Maria M. Coxe, If Ye Break Faith; Constance Marie O'Hara, The Years of the Locusts; Dorothy Clarke Wilson, Brothers and C'Est La Guerre; and Ruth Morris and B. Schoenfeld, Peace Song. The other publication is Antiwar Plays for Community Theatres, National Service Bureau Publication 32 (Oct. 1937).

premieres of two women's antiwar plays: Blocks by Molly Day Thatcher in 1937 and If Ye Break Faith by Maria M, Coxe in 1938. At the same time the FTP was mounting these peace plays, however, anti-fascist plays were also being produced. Eventually, antiwar plays gave way to anti-Nazi plays, as discussed in the next chapter. Plays for social change continued to be written by women dramatists, but most were no longer explicitly antiwar. By the time the United States entered World War II, most war plays tried to marshal public opinion in support of the war effort.

Chapter Four:
"Shaken Out of the Magnolias": Plays to Mobilize America

> FANNY: Well, here we are. We're shaken out of the magnolias, eh? [. . . .]
>
> DAVID: Mama. (She turns). We are going to be in for trouble. You understand that?
>
> FANNY: I understand it very well. We will manage. You and I. I'm not put together with flour paste. And neither are you—I am happy to learn.[1]

This exchange from the end of Lillian Hellman's anti-fascist play Watch on the Rhine (1941) invokes two recurring themes in many American war plays of its era. The first is the notion that the United States can no longer stand apart from the rest of the world. In Hellman's play, the (then) European and Asian war is brought into a Washington D.C.-area home via a German son-in-law (Kurt Müller) and his deep-seated anti-fascist convictions. When Kurt is forced to choose between

[1] Lillian Hellman, Watch on the Rhine, Six Plays by Lillian Hellman (New York: Vintage, 1979) 301. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

murdering a Nazi informant or submitting to the man's extortion and surrendering funds that may win the release of several political prisoners suffering in Nazi captivity, he opts to kill. Kurt's decision, rooted in his love of Germany and hatred of fascism, is depicted as a heroic act even though it is outside the letter of the law and will subject his American relatives to uncomfortable scrutiny from the police. Kurt's mother-in-law Fanny and brother-in-law David understand Kurt's actions spring from his belief that even a man who hates violence has an obligation to fight when "the world is out of shape" (299). Their approval of and collusion with Kurt is more than familial support: it is a declaration that they too are allying themselves with the anti-fascist resistance movement. These characters stand for all the ordinary Americans Hellman hoped to "shake out of" isolationism and convert to active anti-fascism through her popular and persuasive play.

The second theme alluded to in Fanny's final speech is the strength of ordinary Americans in extraordinary times. Fanny's declaration that she is "not put together with flour paste" (and neither is her son) is echoed in other plays of the era that praise the resilience and resolve of American fighting men and the women left to

manage the home front. Valerie Beth Mangum (whose dissertation on American attitudes towards war in US drama was completed soon after World War II ended) characterizes the period immediately before and after American entry into the war as a era marked by a "restoration of faith: faith in a cause, faith in the essential goodness of man."[2] The notion that World War II was a "good war," fought by men who had faith that theirs was a just cause, is an idea that permeates American war historiography, particularly since the Vietnam War, and has been a common trope in popular discourse since the 1998 publication of Tom Brokaw's book The Greatest Generation.[3] Mangum's characterization of her own time as an era of restored faith reveals that these views of World War II were already being constructed at the time it was waged. Most playwrights of this time period also exhibited an

[2] Valerie Beth Mangum, "American Attitudes Towards War as Reflected in American Drama, 1773-1946," Diss., U of Texas at Austin, 1947, 412.

[3] An example of this type of war historiography is the aptly titled book by Studs Terkel: "The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two (New York: Pantheon, 1984). Terkel notes that the title of his book was suggested by Herbert Mitgang, a WWII army correspondent, and that the phrase "has been frequently voiced by men of his and my generation [Terkel was born in 1912] to distinguish that war from other wars, declared and undeclared" (vi). Tom Brokaw's The Greatest Generation (New York: Random House, 1998) prompted a reverential reassessment of the generation before the Baby Boom. Comparisons between World War II and the "War on Terror" that followed the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks have often drawn parallels between Pearl Harbor and September 11, including suggestions by some politicians and pundits that the conflicts may be morally equivalent.

abundance of nationalistic faith that American citizens would not only muster themselves to support a war effort but would also be able to handle and surmount even the most difficult and unfamiliar challenges.

The faith, optimism, virtue, and determination of ordinary Americans is invoked frequently in World War II plays. This chapter addresses plays that advocated the conversion and enlistment of American citizens for war during the period 1939-1944. The first wave of plays sought to harness and mobilize public opinion by exposing and denouncing fascism, especially Nazism. Anti-fascist plays existed prior to 1939,[4] but as Europe erupted into war that year debate over possible American participation became more urgent. 1939 was also the year that a female dramatist had a successful anti-fascist play produced on Broadway: Clare Boothe Luce's Margin for Error. Margin for Error is a "satirical melodrama" that disarms the Nazi menace through ridicule. Most of its comedy rests upon

[4] One notable example of a pre-1939 anti-fascist drama is the Federal Theatre Project's (FTP) productions of Sinclair Lewis' It Can't Happen Here, which opened simultaneously in twenty-two different theatres in eighteen cities on October 27, 1936. In all, nearly 500,000 people throughout the United States saw one of the FTP's productions of It Can't Happen Here, according to John O'Connor and Lorraine Brown in Free, Adult, Uncensored: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project (Washington, D.C.: New Republic, 1978) 59. Mangum observes that anti-fascist plays were performed in the United States as early as 1933, although most of these had limited appeal for Depression-era audience members and closed after short runs (414-415).

the premise that a Jewish-American policeman is charged with protecting the life of a Nazi ambassador. Unlike most anti-Nazi plays of the era,[5] Margin for Error had a successful Broadway run; however, it did not spark the kind of serious critical discussion about possible American intervention in the war that other plays—especially Watch on the Rhine—would engender.

The first case study in this chapter examines Watch on the Rhine as well as Lillian Hellman's second anti-fascist play, The Searching Wind (1944). Watch on the Rhine is an important play because it marshaled public opinion against fascism more successfully than any other American play prior to Pearl Harbor. In The Searching Wind, Hellman continues her theme of American involvement in anti-fascist activities and uses American families as a metaphor for political engagement.[6] Together, these plays

[5] In The American Drama 1930-1940: Essays on Playwrights and Plays, (New York: Modern Chapbooks, 1941), Joseph Mersand writes that Margin of Error was "the most successful" of anti-fascist plays that were produced in New York and the "most bitter condemnation of Nazi-inspired characters since the Nazi regime assumed power" 55-56. He says that prior to Margin of Error many playwrights, including "dramatists [who] were among our best" (like Elmer Rice and Clifford Odets) wrote anti-Nazi plays that failed on New York stages.

[6] Vivian M. Patraka discusses the ways that families—marriages in particular—are models for political relations in her discussion of Watch on the Rhine in Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999), 70-81. However, Patraka continues her analysis of Hellman's anti-fascist writings through an examination of female friendship in the "Julia" story in Pentimento (81-85). I am intrigued by the way Hellman returns to the

give voice to Hellman's passionately anti-fascist views and their productions provided critics and audiences with opportunities to ask searching questions about national and personal political responsibility.

The second case study looks at productions of two wartime comedies, Gladys Hurlbut's Yankee Point (1943) and Ruth Gordon's Over Twenty-One (1944). These plays are morale-raising patriotic comedies that revolve around middle-aged men who decide to enlist and the ways that their wives also serve their nation through wartime work. Yankee Point is especially concerned with the conversion of American sentiments from pacifism to militarism and frames patriotism and wartime sacrifices as family affairs. Over Twenty-One challenges both men and women to take on jobs to which they are unaccustomed. Like Fanny in Watch on the Rhine, the women in Yankee Point and Over Twenty-One are "not made of flour-paste" and are capable of tackling challenging circumstances. The plays that make up this chapter's case studies both reify some gender roles (through their depictions of women as supportive mothers and/or wives) *and* depict women facing new challenges and occupations. These plays not only contend

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idea of familial relationships as a metaphor for political affairs in a second play and will discuss The Searching Wind in this light.

that wars affect women, children, and non-combatants (as the peace plays discussed in Chapter 2 argued), they also sought to enlist women as well as men in active participation against fascism.

"The Villains and the Bumblers": Lillian Hellman's Anti-Fascist Dramas

> . . . the United States declared war. It was useless now to say yes, many of us knew it was coming; during the war in Spain, Hitler and Mussolini could have been stopped, the bumblers and the villains led us into this. (I had tried to write some of that in *Watch on the Rhine*.)[7]

In her memoir An Unfinished Woman, Lillian Hellman recalls that she and others believed that war was coming and might have been avoided. Long before the United States entered World War II (as well as during the war) Hellman was an active anti-fascist whose writings and fund-raising activities tried to raise awareness in the United States of fascism and to aid refugees. Both of her anti-fascist dramas took aim at "the bumblers and the villains" whose actions or inactions precipitated a second

[7] Lillian Hellman, An Unfinished Woman, Three (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1979) 134. Also quoted by C.W.E. Bigsby, A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, 1900-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 289.

world war. From her own experiences abroad, Hellman understood the political naïveté of many Americans during the 1930s and did her best to shake her public "out of the magnolias" in her plays and in other ways. Hellman's own political wake-up call came when she was a young woman studying abroad in Bonn in 1929-30. She became aware that a group of German students with whom she was involved were part of an organization connected with Hitler's National Socialism; they did not realize Hellman was a Jew and invited her to join their group.[8] Carl Rollyson observes that Hellman "transformed this brief brush with anti-Semitism with the naiveté Americans often reveal in their contacts with other cultures into two superb plays: *Watch on the Rhine*, and *The Searching Wind*."[9] While her plays were arguably Hellman's most significant contributions to the cause of anti-fascism, she also acted out her political convictions in other ways.

Hellman, like many other writers of her generation, was galvanized into political action during the Spanish Civil War. In 1937, she joined with fellow playwrights Dorothy Parker and Archibald MacLeisch to found an

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[8] Hellman, Unfinished Woman 64.

[9] Carl Rollyson, Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Her Legacy (New York: St Martin's, 1988) 36.

organization called Contemporary Historians to support the making of a documentary called The Spanish Earth, which was used to raise awareness about the war and money for ambulances.[10] Later, Hellman traveled to Spain herself and wrote an article called "Day in Spain" about wartime atrocities that was eventually published in The New Republic in 1938.[11] She was involved in fund-raising for refugees fleeing Franco's fascism, and later, for exiles escaping Hitler.[12] The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee published a special edition of Watch on the Rhine, and Hellman also wrote a screenplay, The North Star (1943) about a Russian town invaded by Nazis.[13] Hellman's commitment to anti-fascism sometimes eclipsed other political considerations; for instance, although she was sympathetic to communism she wrote and staged Watch on the Rhine during the period of the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, prompting some reviewers in communist papers to censure her.[14]

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[10] Hellman, Unfinshed Woman 76-77 and Rollyson 106.

[11] Lillian Hellman, "Day in Spain," The New Republic 13 April 1938: 297-98. See also Rollyson 108.

[12] Katherine Lederer, Lillian Hellman (Boston: Twayne, 1979) 4.

[13] Bigsby 289 and Lederer 6.

[14] For example, Ralph Warner's "'Watch on the Rhine' Poignant Drama of Ant-Fascist Struggle," in the Daily Worker (4 April 1941) took Hellman to task for not advocating an overthrow of Hitler via a

Hellman and other writers believed that victory over Franco might have prevented a greater international conflict.[15] During the Spanish Civil War, the fascist governments of Germany and Italy supported and supplied Franco, and Spain became a testing ground for new tactics and arms, particularly the use of warplanes to bomb towns like Guernica.[16] When Hellman wrote Watch on the Rhine, she made her protagonist, Kurt Müller, an exile from Nazi Germany and a former member of the International Brigades (an international anti-Franco army). Kurt recalls a battle in Spain that he fought with five hundred other Germans, saying, "We did not win . . . . It would have been a different world if we had" (269). In the character of Kurt, Hellman expresses her conviction that fascism is a political force that must be countered by people of conviction—regardless of nationality. Her play opened (on April 1, 1941) at a time when the United States was

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revolution of Germany's working class; similarly, Alvah Bessie in New Masses 15 April 1941 said Hellman needed to define "anti-fascist" and that the character of Kurt "never states the cure for this pestilence of our time – world-wide organization by the working people against their separate home-grown brands of fascism."

[15] Rollyson 107-8.

[16] Dennis Beck and Kathleen Juhl, "A Note from the Dramaturg and the Director" and "Approaching the Play," program for Watch on the Rhine at Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX, 1999.

officially neutral and most Americans hoped they could remain isolated from the war engulfing Europe. Watch on the Rhine (the title comes from a German song) brings the European war to America in the form of an exiled German son-in-law, but most playgoers understood that the family Hellman depicted was representative of more than just a household connected to Europe through marriage. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt saw the production a couple of weeks after it opened in New York:

> All the way through I was thinking of how the family symbolized our country as a whole, so unaware do we seem to the dangers and horrors all around us. I feel sure, however, that like Fanny in the play, we shall not be made of paste if our test comes.[17]

Roosevelt's observation that the Farrelly family was a metaphor for the United States and the threat it might face was echoed by Life magazine, which said the play brought the Nazi danger close to home and that the title could also be "Watch on the Potomac."[18] Vivian M. Patraka notes that the "imperiled family in America familiarizes

[17] Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," New York World-Telegram 21 Apr. 1941.

[18] "New Broadway Hit, 'Watch on the Rhine,' Brings Nazi Danger Close to Home," Life 14 Apr. 1941.

the play" and that by focusing on a family's fate Hellman causes the spectator to both "internalize and internationalize" the crisis presented.[19] This strategy was extremely effective, and most critics felt that Watch on the Rhine was the finest anti-fascist play to date.[20]

Reviewers who thought Hellman's play was the best treatment of its theme often cited the fact that she had managed to write an anti-fascist work without a single fascist in it.[21] Others praised her ability to avoid simplistic or overtly didactic approaches. One critic said it was "the first intelligent play dealing with the European conflict,"[22] and another called it "a play and not a soapbox."[23] Hellman's focus on an extended family's experiences was what made the play so moving for critics and audiences. Richard Lockridge called Watch on the Rhine "the best drama on the anti-Nazi theme because it

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[19] Vivian M. Patraka, Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999) : 70, 74.

[20] Brooks Atkinson, for instance, said Helllman "translated the death struggle between ideas in familiar terms we are bound to respect and understand." "The Play." New York Times. 2 Apr. 1941.

[21] For example, see "New Play in Manhattan," Time 14 Apr. 1941 and Louis Kroenenberger's "'Watch on Rhine' Is Called One of Our Few Great Plays," [PM] Apr. 13, 194[1] in the NYPL clippings file for Watch on the Rhine.

[22] Harold Eaton, "New York Opening of 'Watch on the Rhine,'" Newark Star-Ledger 2 Apr. 1941.

[23] Sidney Whipple, "Watch on the Rhine Avoids the Soap-Box," New York World-Telegram 2 Apr. 1941.

elevates the theme to the human level and keeps it there."[24] Perhaps the most eloquent praise of Hellman's approach to her subject was Louis Kroenenberger's assessment:

> It is an anti-Nazi play which differs from all the others as completely as it transcends them. It is a play about human beings, not their ideological ghosts; a play dedicated to the deeds they are called upon to perform, not the words they are moved to utter.[25]

Kroenenberger evaluates Watch on Rhine in terms of some of the most basic elements of drama, particularly realism: characters and their actions. For him (as well as many audience members), Hellman's strategic use of ordinary people as characters in a global conflict made the play more meaningful than other anti-fascist plays.

However, not all critics lauded Hellman's dramaturgy. Some felt that her characterizations and craftsmanship were not up to the standard she had set for herself in

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[24] Richard Lockridge, "The Stage in Review," New York Sun 12 Apr. 1941.

[25] Louis Kroenenberger, "Watch on the Rhine—The Best Play of the Season," PM, n.d. Watch on the Rhine Scrapbook, Lillian Hellman Collection, HRHRC.

plays like The Children's Hour and The Little Foxes.[26] An aspect of the play that was frequently criticized as overwritten was the long, poignant farewell Kurt Müller says to his children when he decides to return to Germany even though he knows the decision will likely cost him his life. Most critics agreed with Burns Mantle when he called this scene "completely heart-wrenching,"[27] but some felt that it was over-wrought. John Anderson thought it was "one of the longest farewells since Bernhardt's, an anticlimax in which Miss Hellman seemed anxious to put down every known instance of human tyranny—to put down, in fact, anything except the curtain,"[28] and Esquire compared the leave-taking with a Weber and Fields music hall act.[29] Hellman responded to this criticism by cutting the farewell scene significantly.[30]

The emotional pathos of the father's farewell scene is not the only aspect of the play that may be read as

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[26] See for example "Message Without Hysteria: 'Watch on the Rhine' Presents Subtle Indictment of Nazis," Newsweek, 14 Apr. 1941.

[27] Burns Mantle, "'Watch on the Rhine' Stirring Drama of a Family of Refugees," New York Daily News 2 Apr. 1941.

[28] John Anderson, "'Watch on the Rhine' at the Martin Beck," New York Journal American 2 Apr. 1941.

[29] George Nathan Jean, Esquire July 1941. Watch on the Rhine Scrapbook, Lillian Hellman Collection, HRHRC.

[30] Sidney Whipple, "Revisions Strengthen Watch on the Rhine," New York World-Telegram 12 May 1941.

melodramatic. The play is essentially a showdown between good and evil, represented by the hero Kurt Müller and the villain Teck de Brancovis (the Romanian house guest and Nazi collaborator who attempts to extort funds from Kurt in return for silence).[31] Both as written by Hellman and as portrayed by actor Paul Lukas, Kurt is noble and heroic. Richard Watts, Jr. praised Hellman for giving theatre audiences a hero, declaring that "with the common man of England and China and Greece, of Spain and Finland and now of Yugoslavia, standing unafraid against the oppressors and valuing liberty more than life, the day of the hero has returned."[32] Watts' belief that global events necessitated heroic actions from ordinary men was a sentiment that would be repeated often as the United States was drawn into war, too. However, Watts also valorized Hellman's choice of a German as a heroic figure. He said with "the melodrama of the world growing ever more intense, it is increasingly tempting and progressively more dangerous to select heroes and villains according to nationalities rather than social and ethical codes."

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[31] Bigsby, for example, calls Watch on the Rhine "a morality play in which goodness challenges and defeats evil" 288.

[32] Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theatre: A New Heroic Drama," unsourced [Herald Tribune] article in the NYPL clippings file for Watch on the Rhine.

Rather than cast Kurt and Teck's characters according to nationality, Hellman opted to make Kurt a valiant member of a German resistance movement and Teck an opportunistic Romanian refugee. One critic found Teck representative of "those desperate, deracinated Europeans . . . whose only instinct is for survival,"[33] while another found it significant that the blackmailer was not a Nazi, but represented "the fruits of Nazism:" people or governments who collude with evil due to their own knavery or fear.[34]

Some Watch on the Rhine audiences reacted to Teck's villainy with hisses, prompting Lucille Watson, the actress who portrayed Fanny, to scold them. New York Journal-American critic John Anderson devoted an article to this phenomenon. Anderson felt that a "Nazi stooge" was a villain that an audience could believe in—"inside the theatre and out."[35] He argued that Americans had returned to "a sort of fundamentalism" and they viewed "people and events in the broadest terms of black and white." Anderson felt this neo-fundamentalism and theatregoers' sibilant responses to political scoundrels

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[33] Kroenenberger "One of Our Few Great Plays."

[34] Whipple "Avoids the Soapbox."

[35] John Anderson, "Hist! The Villain in New Moustache Returns," New York Journal-American 20 July 1941.

onstage were reactions fostered by the threat of totalitarianism:

> The hisses Miss Watson objects to are good American hisses but they have been provoked by Berlin and Moscow. What happy beer drinkers used to do in the American Music Hall as an attack on out-moded villainy, we now find is done in all seriousness because the villainy is no longer a joke, but something on our star-spangled doorstep.

If American audiences viewed Nazism and those who collude with fascism as villains encroaching upon their "star-spangled doorstep," they still did not come to a consensus about what action should be taken to eradicate the scoundrels, and this lack of consensus about American foreign policy translated into questions about the precise meaning of Watch on the Rhine.

Today, most readers would interpret Watch on the Rhine as a pro-war play, and indeed, in 1941 many also viewed the play in those terms.[36] However, not all critics

[36] Patraka is a good example of a recent critic who views the play as explicitly pro-war (84-5). Many critics in 1941 thought the play advocated American military involvement, and Alvin H. Goldstein wrote that audience members' politics would color their perceptions of the play: "Those who demand direct action against Fascism will look on the work as a stroke of genius, joining in the unanimous verdict of New York dramatic critics; others favoring more moderate

or audience members were so sure about Hellman's proposed course of action. One critic thought the play showed "the necessity, for the sake of democracy, of giving all aid to the democracies short of war,"[37] while another said Hellman "skirted the question of war without eliminating it as a possibility."[38]

Lillian Hellman addressed audience members' varying reactions to the play and her own intentions in several interviews. In the earliest one she acknowledged the multiplicity of meanings audiences and critics found in her play:

> . . . I find the play so variously interpreted on every hand that I have decided it is so fluid a script that anybody can bring to it any meaning they want to. . . . I didn't intend it as a war play at all, although I find that that seems to be one of the widespread impressions it creates."[39]

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conduct will catalogue it as another piece of pro-war propaganda." "Watch on the Rhine Voted a Brilliant Drama." St. Louis Post-Dispatch 6 April 1941.

[37] Ira Wolfert, "Footlights of Broadway," Chattanooga Times (released by North American Newspaper Alliance, Inc.), 6 April 1941.

[38] Ralph Warner, "'Watch on the Rhine' Poignant Drama of Anti-Fascist Struggle," Daily Worker, 4 April 1941.

[39] Luicus Beebe, Stage Asides: "Miss Hellman Speaks Up," New York Herald Tribune. 18 May 1941.

In another interview a week later, Hellman expounded upon her idea that she did not "intend it as a war play" by adding that she was "trying to assert that Germans must work out their own destiny."[40] In earlier drafts of Watch on the Rhine, Kurt is more explicitly "radical" (communist). Hellman hints at this more broadly in a third interview:

> In *Watch on the Rhine* I wanted to say two things. For me there are no easy answers to Fascism. . . . But the only final, the only complete overthrow of Fascism must come from the masses of the people. You cannot make a world for other people. In the last count, it is their right, their privilege, to make it for themselves. This they will do. I tried to say this through Kurt Mueller. Through Fanny and David Farrelly I wanted to say that I have not given up on my faith in good American liberalism.[41]

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[40] Alvin H. Goldstein, "The Woman Behind Powerful Broadway Plays," St. Louis Post Dispatch, 25 May 1941.

[41] "What 'Watch on the Rhine' Really Says to America," Click July 1941.

Perhaps Hellman did hope that anti-Hitler German masses aided by "good American liberalism" could end fascism. It is also possible that this interview was intended to placate communist critics who had faulted her for her failure to spell out a working-class revolution as a solution to fascism in her play. Very probably, Hellman knew that a "fluid" script like Watch on the Rhine was more attractive to audiences than one that took an unequivocal political stance. In spring and summer 1941, the nation was still undecided about the role it should play in the war. By the end of the year, Pearl Harbor had changed indecision into a war effort, and Watch on the Rhine's anti-Nazi message seemed more important than ever to a nation trying to defeat Germany and its allies.

President Roosevelt selected Watch on the Rhine for a "command performance" on January 25, 1941 at the National Theatre. The occasion was the president's Diamond Jubilee Birthday Celebration, as well as a fund-raiser to benefit infantile paralysis.[42] According to the New York Times, attendance at this performance was Roosevelt's "first public appearance away from the White House since the war began, except to address Congress and attend

[42] Bryer xix.

church."[43] Roosevelt's choice of Watch on the Rhine for his "command performance" and first public outing since the war began is appropriate since as a nation the United States had truly been "shaken out of the magnolias" by Pearl Harbor.

Whether or not Hellman intended Watch on the Rhine to be a pro-war play, she did not balk at comparing Kurt with American soldiers at war when it suited her purposes. Hellman and her longtime companion Dashiell Hammett turned the play into a screenplay, but censors would not allow a character to commit murder with impunity (as Kurt does) in a film. Hellman compared Kurt's actions with patriotic men fighting Nazis, asking film censors if they thought American soldiers (now at war against Germany and its allies) were committing murder, too—and the ending was permitted to remain as she had written it.[44] The film opened in 1943, and the New York Film Critics selected it as best picture.[45]

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[43] "Watch on Rhine Seen by President," New York Times 26 Jan. 1942.

[44] Mellen 177 and Alice Griffin and Geraldine Thorsten, Understanding Lillian Hellman (N.p.: U of South Carolina P, 1999) 74. Patraka also discusses this incident in a footnote, citing William Wright's 1986 biography Lillian Hellman: The Image, the Woman (New York: Simon) 182. Patraka writes that the "incident outlines the contrast between the domestic code of morality and the wartime code Hellman imported into the home" (138).

[45] Bryer xx.

Perhaps Watch on the Rhine's greatest accomplishment was its timeliness. Brooks Atkinson called it a "play of pith and moment"[46] when it opened, and in her book Pentimento, Lillian Hellman said about Watch on the Rhine that "[t]here are plays that, whatever their worth, come along at the right time, and the right time is the essence of the theatre and the cinema."[47] Watch on the Rhine came along at a time when the nation was ready to think about fascism as something other than an exclusively European concern, making attending the play "an experience of tremendous importance for any American," in the words of one newspaper critic.[48] Critics were divided about the enduring value of the play; for instance, Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times thought the drama "ought to be full of meaning a quarter of a century from now when people are beginning to wonder what life was like in America when the Nazi evil began to creep across the sea,"[49] while conversely, The New Yorker's theatre critic wondered

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[46] Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times 2 April 1941.

[47] Lillian Hellman, Pentimento, Three (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1979) 492. Also quoted by Lederer 50.

[48] Arthur Pollock, "'Watch on the Rhine' Beautiful and True," Brooklyn Eagle 2 April 1941.

[49] Brooks Atkinson, "Watch on the Rhine," New York Times 24 Aug 1941.

> . . . what our children will make of it, this story of a political refugee who murders a guest in a peaceful American household with everyone's complete moral approbation and even their connivance . . . .If 'Watch on the Rhine' still means much to anybody twenty-five years from now, . . . it will have failed . . . . It is a fine, honest, and necessary play, but I would be glad to think that someday people who happen to run across it in libraries may find it melodramatic and improbable for all its eloquence.[50]

These two assessments of the play reveal fundamental differences of opinion about the value of political theatre and the role of the arts in constructing history and memory. For Atkinson, Watch on the Rhine could function as a type of snapshot, documenting what life was like in a specific historical moment when Americans began to think about Nazism as something other than someone else's problem. Although the characters and the particular circumstances of the play are fictional, realism invites audiences to engage in identification with the characters, imagining themselves as part of or

[50] "This is It," The New Yorker, 19 May 1941: 32.

analogous to the family presented on stage. Through identification and empathy, the fictional play can make future audiences feel they understand history, that they have a visceral understanding of "what life was like in America" at a particular historical moment. For Atkinson, then, the play has the potential to contextualize history, giving meaning to an era that future generations will not remember first-hand. For the New Yorker critic, the experience of living in a world threatened by fascism is a necessary prerequisite for understanding the play; without personal memories of the drama's political and historical context it would not "mean much" to spectators. To this critic, Watch on the Rhine is meant to inspire immediate political change, and
if audiences in the future can still identify with and comprehend the play then it "will have failed." For Watch on the Rhine to succeed it needed to instigate such sweeping change that for future generations personal identification with the characters would be impossible and the play would be a "melodramatic and improbable" relic of a bygone age.

Although Watch on the Rhine's timeliness can be viewed as one of its strengths, recent critics have noted that Hellman's deliberate use of traditional gender roles

in this play is a devolutionary move, particularly since earlier plays of hers explicitly critiqued gender. Patraka observes that Hellman "resurrect[s] gendered inequality . . . denigrating opposition to patriarchy by rationalizing regressive fictions about gender on the basis of this 'larger' crisis," and that she "capitalizes on the nostalgia" for traditional gender relations in this play.[51] Hellman's depiction of Sara Müller is particularly stereotypical; Sara is deferential towards Kurt and his politics and is a paragon of wifely patience. Griffen and Thorsten call Sara an "ideal wife and mother of the forties" because she has spunk (since she defied her mother and married Kurt for love) but chooses to be a "satellite" to Kurt and his convictions.[52] That even in 1941 Hellman's depiction of Sara seemed false to some audience members is evidenced by a fan mail letter Hellman received from a young woman, Josephine Frantz. Franz thought Hellman's portrayal of Sara was too good to be truthful, finding it "unlikely" that a well-born woman like Sara would exchange her privileged life for marriage to Kurt and hard to believe that they were still devoted

[51] Patraka 70-71, 81.

[52] Griffin and Thorsten 69.

to one another after a long marriage. Frantz told Hellman she should be more realistic in her depiction.[53] Hellman replied to Frantz, asking, ”Hadn’t we better say that it is as realistic for a woman like Sara to be good as for a woman like Sara not to be so good?”[54] In the play, Hellman uses the transatlantic marriage between the “good” American wife and the heroic European man as a model of harmonious international relations, and it stands in marked contrast to the villain Teck’s unhappy marriage with his American wife, Marthe.[55]

Hellman returned to the idea of relationships as metaphors for politics in her second anti-fascist play, The Searching Wind. This play is a condemnation of what Hellman calls, “nice, well born people who, with good intentions, helped to sell out a world.”[56] The play is set

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[53] Josephine L. Frantz, letter to Lillian Hellman, Lillian Hellman Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

[54] Lillian Hellman, letter to Josephine L. Frantz, Lillian Hellman Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

[55] This idea is discussed at length by Patraka 74-81; my intention here is not to re-state her insightful arguments but to show how the model of domestic relationships as metaphors for political actions that Patraka uses to analyze Watch on the Rhine may also be productively applied to The Searching Wind.

[56] John Phillips and Anne Hollander, “The Art of the Theater I” Paris Review, 33 (1965): 84. Also cited by Jackson R. Bryer, ed., Conversations with Lillian Hellman, (Jackson and London: UP of Mississippi, 1986) 66.

in the home of Alexander (Alex) and Emily Hazen in the present (1944) in Washington D.C. Their son, Sam, is home from the Italian front with a leg injury. Emily is preparing for a dinner party confrontation with Catherine Bowman (Cassie), who was once her best friend. Through a series of flashbacks a love triangle between Cassie, Alex, and Emily is developed against a series of political turning points that depict fascism's expansion in Europe. In their youth, Cassie and Alex have a passionate pre-marital affair, but when Cassie confides in Emily about her relationship with Alex, Emily claims, "I suppose I'd always thought I might marry him some day," a statement that Cassie accuses Emily of inventing as soon as she heard about her relationship with Alex.[57] This scene is set in Italy in 1922 as Mussolini's forces march in with only token resistance from the Italian government. Emily succeeds in winning Alex away from Cassie and marries him. However, Cassie continues to see Alex (platonically) every summer and in 1938 they admit they have each only been in love once—with each other—and resume their affair. Alex comes close to telling Emily about Cassie, but Emily

[57] Lillian Hellman, The Searching Wind (New York: Viking, 1944) 34. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

manages to stop his declaration of what she presumably already knows.

Alex's inability to commit to either woman parallels his indecisive actions as a young diplomat and later, ambassador. Although he does not like Mussolini, he accepts his superiors' rationalizations that the dictator should be able to stabilize Italy and prevent it from becoming communist. Another flashback is set in Berlin in 1923, as the Freikorps (fascists) incite a crowd to attack people in the Judenstrasse. Alex, who is in a restaurant with Cassie as the mob races through the streets, declares he will make an official protest, "on the grounds that many Americans are in Berlin," while Cassie chides him for his diplomatic double-speak, retorting, "The Embassy couldn't put it on the grounds that it's a horror and a disgrace. That would be too simple, wouldn't it?" (61). In the final flashback in 1938, Alex is an ambassador anguishing over a report he must send back to the United States regarding Hitler's occupation of the Sudetenland, but eventually he recommends appeasement. Ironically, Alex decides upon this course of action to try to avoid involving the United States in a global conflict that might risk his own son as a soldier, but later sees his actions helped to precipitate the very scenario he wished

to deflect. By the play's end, Alex and Cassie's affair is out in the open, Emily has been chastised for carelessly socializing with and making investments with people that support fascism, and Sam reveals he is scheduled for amputation the next day. As C.W.E. Bigsby notes, The Searching Wind was Hellman's "attempt to establish a connection between private and public morality."[58] Alex's romantic equivocations between Cassie and Emily and his diplomatic prevarications are both part of his character. Rollyson observes that "[I]n politics, as in love, Alex has never been willing to commit himself wholeheartedly to one side."[59] Alex's lack of conviction makes him one of the "bumblers" that Hellman thought helped bring about World War II, and this play tries to assess both the human and historical costs of equivocation and self-absorption. Alex Hazen is emblematic of all the Americans of his generation who watched Europe descend into war, and his young son stands for the generation that will pay the price for this inaction.[60]

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[58] C.W.E. Bigsby, A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, 1900-1940, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 289.

[59] Carl Rollyson, Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Her Legacy (New York: St Martin's, 1988) 206.

[60] Howard Barnes, for example, is one of the critics who saw Sam as representative of the younger generation paying for the sins of its parents; see "The Theater: Eloquence, Art In 'The Searching

Some critics felt that Hellman's blurring of the personal and the political was ineffectual. The New York Times reviewer thought that the love plot "sometimes gets in the way of the first [plot], interrupting as it is about to make important points and slowing it,"[61] and the Cue critic thought that Hellman included the love story as a "sugar-coating of drama around the appeasement-lesson pill she presents."[62] A more recent critic said the love triangle is "trivializing" and that it "inadequately parallels the political theme."[63] Some critics thought The Searching Wind was really two plays that Hellman combined inexpertly.[64] Overall, critics were mixed in their evaluations of Hellman's play, and tended to praise the

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Wind,'" New York Herald Tribune 23 April 1944, while George E. Sokolsky vehemently rejects this thesis and many of Hellman's other arguments about the war and its causes in "The Battle of the Generations," New York Sun 15 April 1944.

[61] Lewis Nichols, "'The Searching Wind'" New York Times 23 April 1944.

[62] "The World's Conscience," Cue 22 April 1944: 11. In a similar vein, the New Yorker critic wrote, "I can only assume that this play started out as a drama of ideas, seemed in this state either too special or too didactic, and that a sort of reversed love story was added for commercial reasons." "Miss Hellman Nods," New Yorker 22 April 1944: 42.

[63] Bernard F. Dukore, American Dramatists 1918-1945, Macmillan Modern Dramatists, (London: Macmillan, 1984) 148.

[64] For example, see Louis Kronenberger, "Going to the Theater." PM April 23, 1944.

political messages of The Searching Wind while dismissing the domestic drama.

Hellman's love triangle plot, however, does not only serve to illuminate Alex Hazen's vacillating character. The love story is also a betrayal and revenge story—of the privileged, spoiled heiress Emily stealing Cassie's "beau" even though life with Alex leaves her bored and unfulfilled, and of Cassie deliberately choosing to become Alex's mistress as a way of punishing Emily for marrying Alex and for carelessly enjoying the material things her comfortable inheritance affords while Cassie struggles to support herself as a schoolteacher. Seen in this light, Alex is a pawn, manipulated by the two women in his life. To some critics, the behavior of the women was simply unimaginable. The New Yorker critic confides, "A young woman who ought to know assures me that this sort of conduct is entirely possible of her sex, but it is outside my experience."[65] An interesting response to this critic and to New York Times critic Lewis Nichol's assertion that Hellman was less successful "in dealing with the state of the heart" than with "the state of the world," was offered

[65] "Miss Hellman Nods," 42.

by a female audience member, Margaret Mower, in a letter to the Times Drama Editor. Mower writes:

> It seems to me that these gentlemen have missed the point Miss Hellman is trying to make. From my humble and feminine point of view it appears to me that she is indicting not only the political appeasers and compromisers but the personal ones as well. Both of these women exemplify this in their dealings with each other. Their hypocrisy, their malice, their inability to arrive at a clean-cut issue appear to me to be the point Miss Hellman is offering as an obbligato to the main theme.[66]

Mower's identification of the women in The Searching Wind as appeasers and compromisers is significant because she does not see Alex as the only active or interesting character in the play. Unlike Sara in Watch on the Rhine who is implausibly good, Cassie and Emily are complicated characters who can sometimes be sympathetic but who are also petty and duplicitous. Emily Hazen and Cassie Bowman are not wholly admirable, but they do have agency, something Sara Müller lacks in Hellman's earlier play.

[66] Margaret Mower, letter, New York Times 16 Jul. 1944

Kurt and Sara are an impossibly harmonious couple in a play that is essentially an anti-fascist melodrama. Emily, Alex, and Cassie are complicated and flawed characters in a difficult and imperfect drama about those who abetted fascism through indecision.

Perhaps Louis Kronenberger summed up the play best when he called The Searching Wind, "a rewardingly grown-up evening in the theatre rather than a successful play."[67] Like many other critics, Kronenberger welcomed The Searching Wind as a bracing breath of fresh air in a theatrical season that was dominated by escapist fare: "Almost at the tail end of the season has come Lillian Hellman's The Searching Wind to prove that, after all, Broadway's theater props include a thinking cap."[68] The Searching Wind is not a finely written play, but it is an intelligent, thought-provoking piece of writing.

The stimulating, provocative nature of The Searching Wind, coupled with a paucity of other serious plays in 1943-44, made Hellman's drama successful. It ran for 326

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[67] "Going to the To Theater."

[68] "Going to the To Theater." One of the most evocative descriptions of the fluffiness of the 1943-44 season comes from New York Times critic Lewis Nichols, "When the historians of the theatre poke their grimy fingers into the records of this particular season, the chances are excellent they will use as a chapter heading the word Tinsel." "'The Searching Wind'" New York Times 23 April 1944.

performances and missed winning the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award by a single vote.[69] Like Watch on the Rhine before it, The Searching Wind was made into a feature film in 1946.

The Searching Wind would be the last of her screenplays that Lillian Hellman would see produced for two decades, however.[70] The woman whose plays challenged spectators to act ethically in political matters famously refused to "cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions" by testifying against others in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) as the second World War gave way to the Cold War. Hellman was blacklisted in Hollywood for her defiant stance and lost a lucrative film contract. Hellman's own refusal to compromise is the sort of political behavior Alex Hazen in The Searching Wind is incapable of embodying, and her willingness to follow the dictates of her conscience despite grave personal consequences is the similar to the exemplary behavior that her hero Kurt Müller personifies in Watch on the Rhine. The irony of these plays is that most of the female

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[69] Sally Burke, American Feminist Playwrights: A Critical History, Twayne's Critical History of American Drama Ser. (New York: Twayne, 1996) 119.

[70] Katherine Lederer, Lillian Hellman, (Boston: Twayne, 1979): 6.

characters in them are either “satellites” or an “obbligato to the main theme” rather than politically involved participants in world events even though Hellman herself clearly felt women as well as men had an obligation to act against fascism or other forms of political injustice. The plays discussed in the next case study also cast women as secondary players in world affairs, but the women in these plays also have important work to do to support the war effort.

"Into the Breach . . . and Mama'll Handle the Home Front!": Enlistment of American Families in <u>Yankee Point</u> and <u>Over Twenty-One</u>

GOW: You! Yuh, but, Polly, what makes you think you can do it? You never did anything like it before!

POLLY: Well, you never were a Major before. Women never ran railroads or built airplanes or were welders before . . . . Look at all the kids flying bombers and fortresses! Yesterday they were cutting rugs at college! Men who never left their home towns before, today they're scrambling up those hills to Rome! . . . . This is a world of changes. The waltz is on the wane, kiddo. You better oil up your joints, or you'll turn quaint. . . .

GOW: But the newspaper business, Polly—there's a lot to know.

POLLY: Lamby, it's a luxury of the past to be doing something that's your business to do.

So once more into the breach, dear friends,
and mama'll handle the home front![71]

Paula Wharton (Polly), the heroine in Ruth Gordon's comedy Over Twenty-One (1943), is a successful writer who decides to put her own career on hold to keep house for and coach her husband as he struggles through officers' candidate school, then agrees to take over his job as a newspaper editor for the duration of the war. Her speeches and actions attest to the changes World War II brought to Americans as middle-aged men left their careers to become officers, women entered the workplace, and young men enlisted. Keeping to one's accustomed tasks is a "luxury of the past" in a country at war. The idea that "mama'll handle the home front" as men leave their families to fight is a major idea in both Over Twenty-One and Gladys Hurlbut's 1942 comedy Yankee Point. These two comedies both have mid-life couples as their protagonists, and in both plays the men decide to join the service while the women support their spouses *and* tackle new responsibilities and occupations.

[71] Ruth Gordon, Over Twenty-One: A Comedy, New York: Random House, 1943: 137-8. Subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

Yankee Point was inspired by and based upon several real incidents. In June 1942 eight Nazi saboteurs landed in the United States, four on Long Island and four in Florida. The Long Island group was questioned by a Coastguardsman, which led to the discovery of a buried cache of explosives. After one of the saboteurs turned himself in to the FBI, all of them were captured before any damage was done. In Yankee Point, the detection and capture of a saboteur who lands on a beach in a small New England town is a major plot point. Secondly, the playwright, Gladys Hurlbut, worked as a plane spotter in the Catskills during the summer of 1942, and her experiences led her to write a play whose heroine, Mary Adams, is a woman who commands an observation post along the Atlantic coast. Hurlbut remarked in an interview that women who served their country through such work were "largely unhonored and unsung. Their work is desperately monotonous, but they are doing a fine and important job and I feel that some one should say a good word for them."[72] Hurlbut's portrait of women who volunteer for civilian defense duty is warm and celebratory. One of the townsmen, Doc, says of his wife's plane spotting job,

[72] "Play Inspired By the Life of Plane Spotter," unsourced article, NYPL Clippings File on Gladys Hurlbut.

"Margie's nuts about it. Gosh, when a plane goes over, half the women in town run out in their yards to identify it."[73] Although Doc is gently mocking the women's dauntless devotion to their spotter duties, the play as a whole champions their work as necessary and valuable. Finally, Hurlbut includes among her characters a war widow named Ruth Lapo who was apparently based on a real pilot's wife who served as a model of courage to other women after her husband was killed in action.[74]

Many critics mentioned the topicality of Hurlbut's play. Variety said the author "has taken her theme and main action from the headlines, showing the changes wrought in a typical American family by the war."[75] Howard Barnes wrote "'Yankee Point' is as topical as a movie," which is an interesting point because it suggests that film was becoming the media charged with representing war

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[73] Hurlbut, Gladys. Yankee Point. Ts.: I-18. For this unpublished work I will be using the act and page designations found in the typescript rather than repaginating continuously. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

[74] I have not yet been able to ascertain the actual war widow's name nor the publication(s) that profiled her, but several reviewers mention that she is based on a real individual. For instance, Linton Martin writes that the actress playing Ruth "has the delicate task of appearing as a thinly disguised figure of current history—the widow of a flier shot down in action by the Japanese, who must perforce appear in public as a heroine." "'Yankee Point' at Walnut St.," Philadelphia Inquirer 17 Nov. 1942.

[75] "Yankee Point," Variety 18 Nov. 1942.

as a current event, rather than theatre.[76] But Barnes also called the play "a muddled and inconclusive work, with little more depth than a war poster," explaining that "the author has never been quite sure whether she wanted to write a topical war melodrama or a study of the people who are fighting the war for all they are worth, even though they stay at home."[77] For Barnes, combining a story about spy-saboteurs with a domestic comedy about wartime families made for an ineffective play.

Barnes was not alone in his criticism of Hurlbut's combination of subjects and genres, as this was one of the things most often censured in reviews of Yankee Point. One of the most evocative criticisms in this vein was the Philadelphia Inquirer's statement that, "'Yankee Point is a curiously scrambled combination of b'gosh bucolic comedy, in the quaint community characters introduced, and Marines-to-the-rescue melodrama."[78] Actually, part of the point of the play is that the Marines do *not* come to save the heroines; the women save themselves and their

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[76] Howard Barnes, "War Poster Drama," New York Herald Tribune n.d. NYPL Clippings File on Yankee Point. Gerald M. Berkowitz also posits that the relatively small number of WWII plays may be explained if war was "more naturally the province of films" which could depict battles convincingly. American Drama of the Twentieth Century, London and New York: Longman, 1992.

[77] Howard Barnes, "'Yankee Point,' a War Poster," New York Herald-Tribune 29 Nov. 1942.

[78] Linton Martin, "'Yankee Point' at Walnut St."

community from the saboteur. The spy's Nazi uniform and cache of dynamite are unearthed on the beach near the plane spotters' Observation Post (Mary Adams' converted summer house) by an intrepid little Scottie dog named McTavish, and his owner, Miss Higgins—one of the women who works as a spotter—-turns the evidence in to Mary, who reports the find. Although the Coast Guard, FBI, and local police are all searching for the spy, it is Mary who discovers the fugitive hiding in the wreckage of an old ship near the Post. With the help of Miss Higgins and Bob, Mary's spouse, Mary captures the spy and discovers maps of their beach and a nearby dam in his possession, as well as instructions to signal during an air raid that night. Mary not only catches the saboteur, she also is able to inform the Air Force of the impending assault so they can intercept the enemy bombers. As the villain is led away, he curses, "You and your summer houses—and your silly women!" (II-39). The "silly women" keeping watch in the beach house are the ones who safeguard the community.

That women—along with the Coast Guard and a small number of regular military units—are capable of defending the home front as most men ship off overseas is precisely the point of this play. All of this happens as Bob Adams is just about to report for duty and leave his family. In

the final scene, he departs knowing there will be an air raid that night, but also aware he cannot stay to protect his own family. Mary, her daughters, and even a crotchety old nurse called "Miz" who has spent most of the play lying on a couch cataloging her aches and ailments all rise to the occasion and act courageously under fire. Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror observes:

> . . . when an invasion finally comes, men, women, children, and dogs carry on heroically to repel it. And repel it they do. But they don't let the enemy's feint scare them into demanding that our troops be kept at home to protect them, which is what the enemy wants.[79]

This play probably was designed at least in part to reassure civilians that they could manage under duress without keeping large numbers of troops stateside. It underscores the way that all Americans—in the military or not—had roles to play in the conflict. Towards the end of the play, a radio commentator opines that the invasion is designed to try to frighten the United States:

> Now you know why they're doing this as well as I do—they think we'll get scared and want our men

[79] Robert Coleman, "'Yankee Point' is Play With Great Heart," Daily Mirror [New York] 25 Nov. 1942.

> and our planes kept home to make us safe. Is anybody scared? All I know is, a new American army went into combat tonight—ten million civilians! They're on the job now. In the cities, in the mountains and on the beaches—This is everybody's war . . . (III-33)

The notion that "this is everybody's war" provides a throughline for most of the characters in the play. Although war interrupts and changes their lives, most of the characters actively contribute to some aspect of the war effort, joining the "new American army" of civilian participants.

Yankee Point acknowledges that many Americans became disillusioned or philosophically opposed to war after World War I. The character of Bob Adams is framed as such a man. He is a gentle English teacher who served his country in the First World War and came home a staunch pacifist as a result of the horrors he witnessed "over there." However, he decides to reenlist because he feels that the present conflict is partially his generation's fault. He tells his friend and physician, Doc, "Wish they'd make us go back and do it over again—instead of our children" (I-19). Since the play begins after Bob has made his decision to rejoin the services, his former

principles and his decision to abandon them are revisited through his conversations with his eldest daughter, Sandy. Sandy is a pacifist who tells her father she resents “a few things—like having listened to you so hard all my life—like having to remember all the fine speeches you made against uniforms—and drums!” (II-22). Bob tells Sandy that he decided to return to the military because he fears if this war is not won “we won’t be allowed to teach the truth” (II-23), and he wants her to see that he has “settled for action—no more words” (I-34). Sandy also reveals that she and her husband, Ted (who is mentioned but is not an actual character in the play) are not “slackers” even though they loathe war. She says, “We’ll do our part. He’s going the minute he’s called. Only we won’t wave flags and beat drums because we think it’s dirty, nasty business!” (II-23). As father and daughter reconcile with each other, Hurlbut makes the points that people who hate war might still decide to participate in this one without being hypocritical, and that peacetime pacifism may be forced to yield to wartime pragmatism.

Another way that Yankee Point develops the idea that “this is everybody’s war”, is through the actions and attitudes of the plane spotters. The women who are occupied at civilian defense jobs revel in their work.

Early in the play Miz derides Mary's labors as "lot of foolishness" because "the army's got soldiers wherever it's important." Mary replies, "not right here they haven't. This postage stamp piece of sky is ours—to protect" (I-14). Happy to diligently defend their own little "postage stamp piece of sky," Mary and the other female plane spotters resolutely keep to their tasks. On the day her dog discovers the German uniform, Miss Higgins refuses to leave her post even when her shift is over, exclaiming to Mary, "Oh my dear—the unspeakable joy of being useful!" (II-6). For women who were volunteering to support the war effort in myriad ways, "the unspeakable joy of being useful" probably struck a responsive chord, validating and valorizing their work. The idea that everyone has to make sacrifices in war is expressed earnestly in Yankee Point, even if a few references to wartime hardships are lighthearted, such as Miss Higgins proclaiming her dog McTavish has "been so disgruntled ever since he lost all his rubber toys to the scrap drive" (I-28). Comedy is not necessarily about trivial things, but a genre that makes serious points through humor, and Yankee Point exemplifies this.

Comedy is also a genre about relationships, and both Yankee Point and Over Twenty-One are about soldiers and

their spouses. In Yankee Point, Mary and Bob are still very much in love, and the ways that Mary will miss Bob while he is away are referenced often throughout the play. Their mature love is the model and counterpoint to their daughter Jerry's relationship with her boyfriend, Butch. Jerry is the flighty younger daughter in the Adams household, and she swoons over her pilot-in-training sweetheart's photograph and letters. But even Jerry must come down to earth and decide what to do about her relationship when Butch has a close call during a flight school maneuver and realizes his "is a kind of uncertain life." Butch writes that if he and Jerry marry when he graduates from flight school, "Why, we'd have something we could be sure of. I guess you've got to live for the moment. What I figure, four days [the amount of leave he will receive after he finishes his training and before his deployment] is better than if we waited and got none" (I-11). Jerry decides she will marry her fly-boy when he gets his wings, inspired by her parents' exemplary marriage and the knowledge that her mother was a World War I war bride who only had a Woolworth ring and a single day with her new husband before he had to leave. But Jerry is not a complete pie-in-the-sky optimist, either. Although she decides she will not wait to marry, she makes an

appointment to see Doc to learn how she can postpone maternity, declaring, “I think I’m going to wait to see what kind of job we do to keep the Peace. I really wouldn’t want to have a baby just for fighting when I get him raised” (I-23). Jerry’s decision not to have a child until she sees whether or not peace will prevail is a subtle reaffirmation of Bob and Sandy’s pacifist convictions as well as a way of making her rush to the altar seem more thoughtfully considered. In Jerry’s case, marrying her soldier sweetheart is her principal contribution to the war effort, in a play where everyone does his or her part.

The view that women support the war by supporting their men is also a main idea in Over Twenty-One. Author and leading lady Ruth Gordon said in an interview that:

> I wanted to write a comedy with truth in it. This isn’t just a funny play about funny troubles at a training camp. It’s really a love story. When two people love each other they work for each other and stand by each other . . . . It’s a woman helping her man—helping him and pulling him out of his discouragement.[80]

[80] Helen Ormsbee, “Ruth Gordon, Actress, Forgets That She’s Ruth Gordon, Author,” New York Herald Tribune, 16 Jan. 1944.

In the play, Polly helps her thirty-nine-year-old husband to get through officer candidates' school by quizzing him on the voluminous amounts of technical material the Army expects him to memorize (the title comes from the idea that supposedly people over the age of twenty-one are virtually unable to absorb new information), tending house for him, and trying to keep up his morale. In real life, Ruth Gordon gave up her own work—including some film offers—to do similar work for her husband, director Garson Kanin, when he was in Washington with the Army. It was while she was an Army wife that Gordon wrote Over Twenty-One, her first play.[81] Her comedy about "a woman helping her man" is based on her own experiences and those of other military wives. Literary celebrities purportedly inspired some of her characters, too, and many critics saw Gordon's Polly as a fictionalized Dorothy Parker. The Christian Science Monitor reported:

> when some of the reviewers said that she had written a Dorothy Parker part for herself, Miss Gordon is reported to have denied this, saying,

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[81] Many reviewers mention the autobiographical element of Over Twenty-One, including F.R.J., "Ruth Gordon's 'Over 21' Has Premiere," New Haven Journal, 17 Dec. 1943; M.K., "Ruth Gordon's Over Twenty-One Zestfully Written and Acted," Washington Post 28 Dec. 1943; Ray Barrett, "Army Wants 'Over 21' shown to Troops for Education, Laughs," New York Daily News 4 April 1944; and Ormsbee.

> 'I'm tired of playing Dorothy Parker.' When this remark was relayed to Mrs. Parker, her comment was, 'So am I.'"[82]

Whether or not this anecdote is apocryphal, it is similar to the witticisms that Polly drops throughout the play.

Much of the humor of Over Twenty-One revolves around the makeshift housing that officers and their wives inhabit, and the ways that both men and women uproot themselves from their accustomed lives in order to serve their country. Polly, a successful novelist and Hollywood screenwriter, talks about the ways the war has affected her and her spouse, formerly editor of a major newspaper:

> Well look at me. For the last three weeks I have been living here at 26-D Palmetto Court, Miami, Florida—where it is very hot for July. And I stand on a street corner every day with my arms full of Uneeda Biscuits and White Rock and Rinso, watching my husband march by with a lot of other fellows, all singing "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie," just because a guy went nuts in Berlin.

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[82] E.C. Sherburne, "When an Actress," Christian Science Monitor 9 June 1944: 4. Other reviews that discuss real-life counterparts to some of the characters include "Ruth Gordon's Over Twenty-One Zestfully Written and Acted," Washington Post 28 Dec. 1943 and "Over Twenty-One," Billboad 1 Jan. 1944.

For an upper-class couple like the Whartons, Polly's daily shopping expeditions for everyday consumer items and Max's marches in the Florida summer heat are extraordinary in their wartime ordinariness. The Whartons were not compelled to do these things, but Max decides he must do his part by enlisting out of love for his country, and Polly decides she must follow Max out of love for him. Their decisions mirror those made by thousands of other American couples of all classes.

The physical humor of the play depends upon the eccentricities of the tourist cottage that has been pressed into service as the couple's abode. The kitchen has no sink and a cranky refrigerator, the light switch for the living room is outside the cottage, an obstinate window can only be opened by stamping on a particular spot on the floor, and so forth. When the Whartons entertain the Colonel and his family, farcical gags involving stuck ice cube trays and similar devices overshadow their sparkling conversation. The tone of much of the play's dialogue is like a drawing room comedy, but it is set in a run-down tourist court. In production, the play was played for laughs. One critic, for example, said the play was "thin, but so generously laden with laughs—good

humored, malicious, satirical, and plain howlers—that you don't mind in the least the slightness of the story."[83]

Towards the end of the play, Max manages to pass his examinations and become a second lieutenant, and even inspires his publisher boss, Gow, to emulate him and enlist. Polly is visited by representatives of the Hollywood picture she abandoned to be with Max, and they beseech her to help fix the historical movie she wrote. When Polly is told that the Molly Pitcher sequence she has written is "unbelievable," (Pitcher is a mythohistorical Revolutionary War figure who supposedly took over firing her husband's cannon when he was hit) she asks what is "unbelievable about a woman in the midst of battle taking over her husband's . . .?" (134) and gets the idea to run Max's paper as its new editor since both Max and Gow will be in the Army now. She convinces Gow she can do it and resolves to start her new job—in six weeks, after Max's final stateside assignment is over. In the meanwhile, she will be going with him to an out-of-the way Army air base in Arkansas to continue to be with him as long as she is able.

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[83] "Double-Threat Gordon," Cue 8 Jan. 1944.

Throughout the play, Polly is characterized as witty, privileged, and successful, but all of the choices she makes are to serve as her soldier-husband's helpmeet. This was a common theme in 1940s popular culture, and a widespread rationale for why women were doing unaccustomed jobs during the war—that they worked in factories or ran railroads to help win the war and bring their husbands and sons home sooner. In this way the radical new freedoms and responsibilities women experienced in wartime were constructed as simply a variation on their traditional roles as supportive spouses.[84]

In all of the plays in this chapter, women are depicted as primarily wives, mothers, mistresses—as people defined by their relationships with the men in their lives. In Watch on the Rhine, Fanny is an indomitable woman, but her departed husband shaped all her political views.[85] Her newfound conversion to active anti-fascism is in reaction to her son-in-law's actions. Sara is simply

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[84] The ways that women were conceptualized as they took and relinquished war jobs are discussed at length in Leila J. Rupp's Mobilizing Women and War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978. See especially 138 for a discussion of war workers helping male relatives and 152 regarding American propaganda that equated factory work with housework.

[85] Patraka 80.

an adoring, dutiful spouse. Emily and Cassie in The Searching Wind are interesting characters, but they are almost always shown in their competing relationships with Alex rather than with each other, and Alex is the only one with any serious input into world affairs. One critic observed, "The flaw in the play, then, is that it is Cassie who interests us, and her story is not told.[86] In fact, Hellman alludes to the idea that Cassie did not marry Alex when she had the chance to because they quarreled about her disapproval of the way he performed his jobs as a diplomat, but the scene is underdeveloped and denies Cassie a chance to express her own convictions. The women in Yankee Point are some of the most capable, can-do characters in any of these plays, but the author still includes numerous references to the way they need men to care for them. Mary Adams is particularly responsible and is always shown on stage as competent, but in her conversations with her husband she is described as unable to fix the plumbing or even turn on a gas stove without him (I-8, I-35). Bob asks other men in his community (even "Uncle Pete" a comical, delusional old geezer who thinks Wilson is still president) to look after his family while he is gone, and when Sandy wonders if her

[86] Lederer 61.

unborn child will be “awfully spoiled” if he “arrives in a world without men”, Mary replies “Not at all—he’ll have to take care of us—right from the start” (III-18). These references to women needing their husbands and sons were probably included to reassure male spectators that if they left their families behind they would not be rendered obsolete when the war ended. Finally, Paula in Over Twenty-One is the one who facilitates her husband’s success in officer training school and will assume his job for the duration, but she is still depicted as a wife just like all the other military spouses who are “hanging on to what they love just as long as they can” (31). The anxiety over women’s roles in a changing world that many of these plays embody—even as they celebrate female participation in wartime activities—would be even more acute when the war ended, and some of the plays in the next chapter will continue to address this theme.

To see the ways that gender is sometimes treated regressively even in plays that advocate political progressiveness or laud women’s new wartime activities is of course more obvious six decades after their creation. These plays were provocative and, for the most part, popular in their own time. Three of the four plays discussed in this chapter’s case studies had respectable

runs on Broadway and were also made into films. Only Yankee Point was less than successful, closing after only twenty-four performances on Broadway. Its failure might be, as many critics wrote, due to its unskilled mixture of melodrama and comedy, but it could also be explained by other means. Audiences who saw the play's out-of-town premiere in Wilmington, Delaware received the play enthusiastically, applauding through multiple curtain calls.[87] However, the actor originally playing Bob Adams had to be replaced just as the play opened in New York and the director assumed his role, earning mixed reviews for his performance. It is also very possible that this play was something audiences might have enjoyed but that was killed by its reception by the majority of New York critics. Burns Mantle defended Yankee Point, writing, "Experts have accepted it with friendly pats on the head and superior shrugs, as one might say, 'Of course, this is the sort of thing that audiences like, but I, being experienced in the theatre, know it is just another

[87] One reviewer documented Yankee Point's initial reception with its Delaware audience, "The final curtain fell; the actors were recalled again and again; the house lights went up. But the audience continued to applaud until the house lights downed and the curtain was raised again and yet again." "New War Drama Well Received" Wilmington Morning News 14 Nov. 1942

play.'"[88] Yankee Point also opened around Thanksgiving, and it is very possible that a war play was not what people wanted to see during the holiday season. But even if Yankee Point is simply a poorly written play whose New York production deservedly failed, it still offers cultural historians and feminist scholars an illuminating example of 1942 attitudes towards women's work and family participation in the war effort.

The importance of theatre as a tool to help win World War II is suggested by the fact that two of the plays discussed in this chapter's case studies were even selected for "deployment" overseas, as propaganda or edifying entertainment for troops. Watch on the Rhine was used in several ways. Even before the United States officially entered World War II, a German adaptation of the play was broadcast to Germany via short-wave radio.[89] The regular Watch on the Rhine audience at the Martin Beck Theatre was invited to stay after the play's performance to witness the making of German version's broadcast—making those who chose to remain participant-observers to an international anti-fascist act. After the United States

[88] Burns Mantle "Burst of New Drama Favors White List and 'Yankee Point'" [New York Daily News], n.d. NYPL Clippings File on Yankee Point.

[89] "Anti-Nazi Play for Nazis to Hear." New York Post 24 Oct. 1941.

entered the war, Watch on the Rhine was one of the plays selected for publication and circulation to American soldiers in Europe and was also used by the Army for reeducation purposes after the war ended. The film version was also shown in 1943 to American troops in Europe. Over Twenty-One was performed for soldiers at Camp Meade, Maryland then went abroad as part of the USO-Camp Shows. According to the New York Daily News, General Marshall said that he wanted soldiers to see the play because it "depicts the hardships undergone by officer candidates, and makes you laugh in the bargain."[90] One USO unit toured Italy and North Africa for six months in 1944 playing Over Twenty-One to "the most responsive audiences in history" and providing what one critic called "an outstanding exception to this rule of mediocrity" that held for most USO shows in Italy.[91] Like the families that Watch on the Rhine and Over Twenty-One depict as converting to anti-fascism and active participation in the war, the plays themselves were enlisted by the military to

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[90] Ray Barrett, "Army Wants 'Over 21' Shown to Troops for Education, Laughs," New York Daily News 4 April 1944. Lowell Matson also mentions Over Twenty-One in "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II, Educational Theatre Journal 6.1.

[91] John Hobart, "In Retrospect: The Italian Safari of 'Over 21,'" San Francisco Chronicle 2 Dec. 1945.

help further the war effort through education and recreation.

The plays that make up the case studies in this chapter exhorted Americans to fight fascism, condemned them for doing nothing when fascism was growing, and encouraged women and men to support the war once the United States entered the conflict. None of these are antiwar dramas, even though some of them show men like Kurt Müller and Bob Adams deciding to fight in spite of their abhorrence of violence. With the exception of the older characters in The Searching Wind, who are criticized for their lack of strong convictions, these plays depict women and men as courageous, stalwart, and filled with faith in their nation and love for each other. In an extremely patriotic era, these plays celebrated sacrifice and hard work as necessary virtues. At a time when women were taking on unfamiliar jobs, these plays praised them for the new roles they embraced but also reminded them of their traditional duties as wives and mothers. These war plays written in the early forties are both forward thinking *and* conservative, particularly in their conceptions of women and wartime roles. In the next chapter, this tension between progressiveness and regression will be examined in plays about women's roles

in postwar America along with other dramas that debated what type of society should be (re)constructed in the aftermath of World War II.

Chapter Five:
"A Period of Retrogression": Plays to Reconvert and Reconstruct Postwar Society

> I can understand why some of the critics gave this play bad reviews, but none of the reasons which they gave will be the real reasons why it will not play to full houses. We the people are today in a period of retrogression. We do not want to face up to the big problems that we have to meet as a great people if we are to accept our place of leadership in the world.[1]

After attending a benefit performance of Maxine Woods' play On Whitman Avenue (1946), Eleanor Roosevelt wrote about it, alluding to its reception by critics and audiences. On Whitman Avenue is a play about a returning African American soldier's struggle to find adequate housing for his growing family and white neighbors' determination to keep him out of their community. The same prejudices that kept the fictional black war hero out

[1] Eleanor Roosevelt, "Racial Problems," New York World-Telegram 18 May 1946.

of a white neighborhood may have also influenced some critics' negative receptions of the play. What is notable about On Whitman Avenue is that people associated with the production, audience members, African American leaders, and others "talked back" to the critics, challenging their judgments of the play. Roosevelt's comment that "We the people are today in a period of retrogression," is an acknowledgment of the conservatism and fear that emerged as World War II ended, and she urges Americans not to ignore "the big problems" facing the country in the war's wake.

This chapter's case studies are plays that either confirm conventional morality and sanction the status quo *or* exhort Americans to confront new problems and anti-progressive politics. The first section treats the problem of the discharged soldier's return to civilian society. Rose Franken's popular comedy Soldier's Wife (1944) argued "a man's entitled to come back from the war and find his world the way he left it."[2] This play treats the anxiety of homecoming for both veterans and the ones who wait for them and tends to reify traditional gender roles. The other play in this section, Foxhole in the

[2] Rose Franken, Soldier's Wife: A Comedy in Three Acts. New York and London: Samuel French, 1945 : 16. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically

Parlor, is a sympathetic portrait of a veteran suffering from "combat fatigue" and the part women play in rehabilitating such soldiers. On Whitman Avenue is the subject of the second case study, and like Soldier's Wife and Foxhole in the Parlor, this drama also has a young white female character who tries to help a returning veteran. In this play she is not romantically involved with the soldier (who is her boyfriend's buddy and a happily-married African American man), but offers her family's upstairs apartment for rent to him and his family, setting off racist protests from her neighbors. All three of these plays address the difficulties facing demobilized soldiers and the ways that reconversion was a social issue, not just an economic and industrial problem.

The third case study in this chapter is a docudrama about the dawn of the nuclear era, $E=mc^2$: A Living Newspaper About the Atomic Age by Hallie Flanagan Davis, assisted by Sylvia Gassel and Day Tuttle (1947). The dropping of atomic bombs on Japan not only brought the war to a quick and dramatic end; it also unleashed massive anxiety over the future of the world. This play is the only one of this chapter's case studies that was not on Broadway; instead, it premiered at Smith College and was a way to teach students and local citizens about the issues

surrounding atomic weapons and energy. Together, the plays in this chapter consider some of the most pressing concerns of the demobilization era: veterans' readjustment issues, housing, the nature of women's work, segregation and the failure to win a "Double Victory" for African Americans, the threat of nuclear annihilation, and coping with soldiers' physical and psychiatric traumas.

"What do you need me for?": Plays About Returning Veterans and the Women Who Love Them

JOHN: (*rises from sofa, bitter and accusing*): Both you and Florence let me rant on about what happened to me—and neither of you said a word about what happened over here. Just a couple of strong women.

KATE: (*as a simple statement of fact*) Women have to be strong these days.

JOHN: And it scares the bejesus out of a man. We're coming home to women who have gone through their own kind of hell and can take it same as we have. Suppose I don't go back to fight? What do you need me for? The war's made a man of you.

KATE (*battling his hysteria*): John, it's sick for you to talk like that. I didn't want to learn to do without you, I *had* to! (44-45).

John and Kate are a newly reunited young married couple struggling to reconnect with each other when he is invalided home from the war in Rose Franken's Soldier's Wife (1944). He is shocked to learn that Kate has learned to fend for herself and that she and her sister have shielded him from unpleasant news, like Kate's brush with death during childbirth and Florence's new widowhood. John is terrified by Kate's newfound strength and anxious about his place in civilian society and his home. Franken's comedy and another Broadway play, Foxhole in the Parlor by Elsa Shelley (1945), both anticipated the difficulties facing soldiers and their families and neighbors when "G.I. Joe comes marching home," possibly in pieces.[3]

In "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans," Susan M. Hartmann argues that the demobilization period reinforced traditional gender roles and that a "substantial body of

[3] Linton Martin, "'Soldier's Wife' Opens at Locust St." Philadelphia Inquirer 5 Sept. 1944.

literature appeared" that highlighted the challenges ex-servicemen would face and "prescribed appropriate behavior and attitudes for civilians."[4] Hartmann identifies three themes that were common to most of this writing: "the critical nature of the veteran's readjustment, the enormity of his sacrifice, and the crucial role for women in the social aspects of demobilization." All of these ideas are found to some degree in Soldier's Wife and Foxhole in the Parlor, and these plays may be read as dramatic manifestations of ideas that were extremely popular at the end of World War II and were explored in many types of literature and media.

Unlike plays created only a few years earlier that urged mobilization of American families into war work, Soldier's Wife and The Foxhole in the Parlor both admonish women to focus their energies on caring for their wounded men. In Rose Franken's Soldier's Wife, Captain John Rogers comes home from the South Pacific with a belly wound, eyes that have "changed,"(21) and his first gray hairs, to a nine-month baby son he has never seen before and a wife whom he suspects no longer needs him. John's masculinity and pride are also injured in action: he is disappointed

[4] Susan M. Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope: Literature on Women's Obligations to Returning World War II Veterans," Women's Studies 5 (1978) : 224.

with himself for getting wounded and “pooping out” (66) on his comrades-in-arms and he is uncertain how to act around his spouse. He wonders if “maybe the war’s done something to me. Maybe I should be a little more of a man, or a little less of a man” in his interactions with Kate (126).

The stakes are raised for John and Kate because the war has also made a celebrity of her: while he was recuperating, John shared Kate’s beautiful letters to him with his dying best friend, Steve, who urged him to let the letters be made into a book. Now Kate is besieged with publicity engagements, job offers, and the (unreciprocated) attentions of another man. Kate chooses marriage and motherhood over her blossoming writing career and fame, deciding to devote herself to John and determined to start enlarging their family.

Most critics found Soldier’s Wife to be obvious in its message but charming in its execution. Billboard’s review of the Philadelphia try-out was typical since the critic thought “the problems faced by the returning GI’s are reduced to fairly simple proportions” but praises the play nevertheless as “socko stage fare.”[5] The play’s chance at success was enhanced by the fact that Rose

[5] Maurie Orodenker, “Soldier’s Wife,” Billboard 4 Sept. 1944 : 23.

Franken was well known to audiences as a writer and she had a large, mostly female fan base. Franken was best known for her serialized "Claudia" stories that were also made into novels and a play. Her Claudia heroine was a childish but appealing young bride who matured when circumstances demanded it of her. Similarly, Kate in Soldier's Wife is a girlish woman who sometimes seems fluttery and defenseless but who displays unexpected competence and flashes of insight other times.

A revealing glimpse into Kate's relationship with her husband occurs early in act one as Kate chats with her sister Florence. Kate has been painting a kitchen stool inexpertly when Florence arrives and breaks the news that John is coming home. Kate reminisces about another time she attempted to paint furniture, an old chest of drawers she found for John:

> I forgot to warn him about it [the wet paint on the bureau] and he opened it, and the knobs were wet—you know how sticky enamel is—He gave one yell. He turned me right over his knee and let me have it—*hard*—(*Finishes softly.*) It was one of our nicest times.

Presumably, this speech is meant to be funny, not a confession that John is abusive towards Kate. Kate accepts

and even enjoys the spanking her husband gives her when she “misbehaves.” The sexual innuendo contained in the anecdote is reinforced when Florence’s next line is to ask Kate about her baby. This story establishes John as the paterfamilias and Kate as a mischievous girl. The gender roles and marital dynamic established through this exchange will be overturned later in the play when John realizes that Kate has grown more capable and independent during his absence and he starts to feel threatened by her new earning power.

Franken contrasts John and Kate with another couple, Peter (a woman) and Craig. Peter is a successful editor and Craig, one of her ex-husbands, is a playwright who churns out formulaic items for Peter’s Women’s Page when he needs ready money. Peter and Craig are witty, worldly-wise sophisticates who threaten Kate and John’s domestic life on a number of fronts. Peter wants Kate to write a daily column for her paper and oversees Kate’s makeover from housewife to Hollywood celebrity. She is also attracted to John and subtly tries to start an affair with him. Craig is appointed to squire Kate around to parties, dinners, and the theatre—an assignment he initially resents but later relishes. Peter and Craig are childless, much divorced, cynical, and of a “different

world" than John and Kate. John tells Peter disapprovingly that her society seems to be a place where "everybody kisses everybody else, everybody gets married to everybody else's husband and everybody says everything stinks" (129). The dual-career ex-couple is presented as the kind of people Kate and John are in danger of becoming, until Kate decides to abandon her literary career and asks John if they can move to the country, buy a dog, and have another baby instead.

As Yvone Shafer observes, Franken's writings as a whole and the way she constructed her identity in interviews display contradictory attitudes towards women and careers.[6] Although some of Franken's works, like her 1932 play Another Language, argue that women are stifled by social conventions and customary gender constructions, her Claudia stories and Soldier's Wife reaffirm traditional roles and argue that marriage and motherhood matter more than careers. Shafer writes that Franken "liked to give interviews in which she presented herself as a featherbrained, impractical housewife who only started writing because her husband bought her a typewriter and

[6] Yvone Shafer, American Women Playwrights, 1900-1950 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 116.

she thought she should do something with it."[7] One such interview quotes "Mrs. Franken" as asserting:

> I do not write for money . . . my husband is a successful professional man and it is not necessary that I pen plays unless I am driven to it by ideas that simply must be dramatized. Honestly, I don't know whether I shall ever do another play. I am interested in entertaining my friends and making a home for Dr. Franken and the children [she had three sons].[8]

Franken did write other plays, stories, and novels after this 1932 interview, and she was well paid for much of it. Perhaps the death of her first husband in 1934 led her to reevaluate the importance of financial self-dependence. But even after Franken remarried she earned a sizable fortune for herself primarily by writing about artless, selfless wives and mothers, and she was probably savvy enough to package herself as just such a heroine when she gave interviews, airily describing her literary successes as happening almost accidentally.

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[7] Shafer 102.

[8] Robert Coleman, "Woman Author of Hit Is Amazing Figure," New York Mirror 8 May 1932: 20.

Franken's interview persona may also be a construction not entirely of her own making. Soldier's Wife hints that perhaps Franken's literary portraits were framed by journalists according to their own prejudices and the norms of the times. In the play, Craig arrives to conduct an interview and tells Florence "I've perfected a system. Efficient, quick, and painless" (75). As he "interviews" Kate he dwells on her domestic life and makes belittling assumptions, such as "you adore him [John]. You take out his pajamas every night and open his eggs every morning" (79), and pretends not to notice that she responds to him "*in cold fury*" (82). Information about female authors' private lives overshadows descriptions of their work in many articles and interviews from the first half of the century, and interviews with titles like "Rose Franken Says Playwriting Like Piecrust Needs Light Hand"[9] were probably designed to appeal to the (presumed) tastes and interests of women subscribers.

Rose Franken directed Soldier's Wife herself, and she makes another comparison between homemaking and playmaking: "For an author to write a play and not cast and direct it is a little like having a baby and turning

[9] Helen Ormsbee. "Rose Franken Says Playwriting Like Piecrust Needs Light Hand." New York Herald Tribune 28 Nov. 1943.

it over to a nurse as soon as it's born."[10] Soldier's Wife found an appreciative public and was a hit play, running for 253 performances. It is also notable that Soldier's Wife "received from Samuel French the highest advance ever paid [at that time] for stock and amateur rights"[11] and was performed in many little theatres.

Franken's play apparently struck a chord with many female spectators, as a reviewer for Cue wrote:

> Should a woman give up a job as a wife and mother to seek fame in 'a career'? is answered by successful career-woman Franken with a roaring and resounding 'No!' to the huge and obvious satisfaction of her predominantly feminine audiences.[12]

Many reviewers mention the audience members at Soldier's Wife were principally female. Some critics, like Edwin H. Schloss found the play predictable and trite but nevertheless thought it would succeed. After grousing that the play was not really "warborn" and that "John

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[10] Rose Franken, "An Author's Slings and Arrows," New York Times 21 Nov. 1943, sec. 2: 1. Also qtd. by Shafer 120.

[11] Leo Freedman, "'Soldier's Wife' Sets New High for Stock Rights," Press Release 27 Oct. [1944]. NYPL Clippings File on Soldier's Wife.

[12] "Soldier's Wife," Cue 14 October 1944.

might just as well returned from a business trip to Scranton as from combat in the South Pacific," Schloss criticizes the play as a thinly-disguised remake of her Claudia comedy with a banal premise:

> 'Soldier's Wife' revolves around a rather well-worn axis—'Is a young wife happier with a husband and babies or with fame and a career?' And one of the troubles is, that knowing Miss Franken of old, one can guess her solution long before she has unwound the pink ribbon and shiny cellophane and presented us with the answer neatly wrapped up in a conjugal clinch.[13]

Although Schloss found the play unsurprising, he thought the play's message would appeal "to Miss Franken's large feminine following, some of whom may need to be assured that husbands and babies are the sum of all worldly happiness." This criticism is telling because it acknowledges that some women may not view domesticity as satisfying and that Franken is trying to persuade them of its value.

Rose Franken said she thought about her son, a young officer fighting in the South Pacific, as she wrote her

[13] Edwin H. Schloss, "Soldier's Wife' Wears Mantle of Claudia," [Philadelphia Record?] 10 Sept. 1944. NYPL Clippings File on Soldier's Wife.

play. She asked herself "How can we women make it easier for them when they do come back?"[14] Soldier's Wife, then, is less about what Franken thought women wanted or needed and more about the ways that they could help returning soldiers transition back to civilian life. Like many other writers in the waning days of the war, Franken told women that they needed to repay part of the debt they owed to men who fought for freedom in the war by relinquishing some of their own independence in their families.[15] In the popular discourse of 1944-46, a woman who showed patience and devoted herself to her demobilized husband's needs was presented as doing her duty in both a marital and a patriotic fashion.

Elsa Shelley's 1945 Foxhole in the Parlor argues for the need to create a lasting peace after World War II ended, but is more successful as a plea for understanding towards "psychoneurotic" soldiers (those suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome) and as an assurance to single women that such men are worth loving. Foxhole in the Parlor was Shelley's second Broadway play, and both

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[14] Donald Kirkley, "New Comedy at Ford's," Baltimore Sun 18 Sept. 1944 : 10.

[15] See Hartmann 226-229 for a discussion of the ways that literature aimed at women stressed that they had an urgent job to perform in "the personal side of reconstruction" (227) and counseled women to embrace self-abnegation and submissiveness.

were dramatizations of current problems. Her first drama was Pick-Up Girl (1944), about a "juvenile delinquent" girl, based upon Shelley's observations in children's court. Pick-Up Girl's fifteen-year-old protagonist was a girl who had casual sex with men, including sailors on shore leave. Shelley posits that teen promiscuity is linked to poverty and child neglect. Although Pick-Up Girl can be read as treating a wartime social problem (some teens called themselves as "Victory girls" when they dated men in uniform), Shelley believed that "juvenile delinquency, so-called, existed before the war and it will exist after the war."[16] Foxhole in the Parlor, however, centers around the impact war has on veterans and civilians. Shelley was inspired to write it after visiting patients in an Army psychiatric hospital, leading critic Wilella Waldorf to label Shelley a "theatrical opportunist" since "[l]ast season . . . she amassed an alarming collection of court records and proceeded to compile a case history called 'Pick-Up Girl'" and now has "done some research among psychiatrists at Army hospitals and emerged with 'Foxhole in the Parlor'".[17] Both Pick-Up

[16] Elsa Shelley, "Author of 'Pick-Up Girl' Ex-Actress, Boston Post 22 Apr. 1944.

[17] Wilella Waldorf. "Foxhole in the Parlor Never Gets Below the Surface." New York Post 24 May 1945 : 24.

Girl and Foxhole in the Parlor are examples of using theatre to examine contemporary issues, and young women's sexuality is an important motif in each play.

Shelley treats the "pick-up girl's" sexual activity as a problem, but her slightly older heroine in Foxhole in the Parlor uses her body and her love to try to rescue an injured soldier. Vicki King, described as "about 20," is a sexy artists' model who falls in love with a returning soldier sent home from the war to recover. The veteran, Dennis Patterson, is not physically wounded, but psychologically scarred after spending six weeks in a German POW camp, witnessing the death of his best friend, and being ordered to abandon his friend's corpse under heavy fire. Dennis, who was formerly a professional pianist, is a sensitive man who had a battlefield breakdown. Dennis is obsessed by the need to try to articulate his conviction that war must never happen again, in a way that will persuade leaders to listen. His chances at recovery and resuming a normal life depend upon the women in his life: Vicki and neighbor Ann Austen. Vicki and Ann are patient, caring, and understanding in the face of Dennis' anguish, while his sister, Kate, is mortified that her brother is "insane" and seeks to commit him to an asylum. Vicki believes that "if you *love* a

person you're a better nurse for him than if you have years of training and *don't* love him."[18] Although she is shocked to hear "Dennis was in a hospital for *mental* cases only" Vicki's belief in his sanity and her love for him are unwavering, and she listens when Ann urges, "You must save him!" (76). Vicki asks Dennis to go away with her to her parent's house in the countryside as a way of eluding Kate and her plans for involuntary commitment. Vicki stops short of asking Dennis to marry her, but assures him that she loves him and wants to be with him. Commitment—both in terms of threatened hospitalization and in terms of transforming a sexual relationship into a partnership—is a potent force in this play.[19]

Critics who commented on Shelley's handling of Dennis' struggle to communicate his vision for the future were generally dismissive of the play. The New Yorker critic, for instance, thought Shelley "has made an earnest and certainly commendable plea for a really permanent

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[18] Elsa Shelley, Foxhole in the Parlor (New York: Dramatist's, 1946) 41. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

[19] The plot discussed above comes from the 1946 published version of the play, which Shelley revised to reflect the way the war actually ended—with references to atoms bombs and Japan's surrender that were still three months away when the play opened in May 1945. In the original production, Dennis escaped his sister's plans for him by accompanying Senator Bowen (Ann's father) to a peace conference. The Senator is also a character in the published version, but he does not serve as a device to deliver Dennis from Kate.

peace," but that "her political theory is either dreamy or elementary."[20] On the other hand, some critics recognized that the value of this play was not its political message but its personal one. Writing in his "These Days" column about Foxhole in the Parlor, George E. Sokolsky wished:

> . . . every parent and wife and sweetheart of a returning soldier would go to see this play, because they must realize that this soldier is normal as their kin will be normal. . . . I watched half a theater full of soldiers. I listened to their talk between the acts. I heard one describe to another his own experience with combat fatigue . . . . And the moral of it all is that we need to learn to let these boys have their say no matter how silly what they say may sound to our inexperienced ears.

Sokolsky's hope that "every parent and wife and sweetheart of a returning soldier" would see Foxhole in the Parlor attests to ways that the problems of veterans' adjustments would necessarily involve their families and he exhorts his readers to take seriously things that the veterans (or the playwright) say that might "sound silly."

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[20] Untitled New Yorker clipping, 2 June 1945, NYPL Clippings file on Foxhole in the Parlor.

The reviews of Foxhole in the Parlor were tepid, generally praising Montgomery Clift's performance as Dennis (he had also played the wounded soldier-son in Lillian Hellman's The Searching Wind the year before) but handing few compliments to its author. Foxhole in the Parlor ran for 45 performances on Broadway (at a time when 100 performances was the benchmark for a "hit" show). Like Yankee Point in the last chapter, Foxhole in the Parlor is not an important work of literature or a play with a significant production history, but rather an interesting example of a play that illuminates a specific moment in history. Foxhole in the Parlor counseled understanding towards veterans and the emotional baggage they would unpack in homes across the country.

At first glance, Soldier's Wife and Foxhole in the Parlor seem similar in the ways they urge women to devote themselves to their shattered men. A major difference, however, is that Soldier's Wife is even more conservative in its construction of male/female relationships. When Kate decides to abandon her burgeoning career, John comments that she "put her nickel in the slot and hit the jack-pot and all you want back is your nickel," to which Kate answers, "And my husband if you don't mind" (163). The play closes with Kate mending and handing John a lamp

to fix—the same one she proudly repaired in his absence. The gesture reinscribes the gender roles that John and Kate each played before the war. In Foxhole in the Parlor, Vicki never decides to abandon modeling, and she sleeps with Dennis without asking for a ring. She gives him "love-therapy" (41) and listens to him, and her attentions allow Dennis to break through his artist's block and play the piano again. Instead of trying to make a baby with Dennis, Vicki is helping him make art. In both plays women choose supporting roles, but Foxhole in the Parlor is somewhat less conventional in its treatment of relationships between women and men.

While Soldier's Wife and Foxhole in the Parlor explored changing gender dynamics, the anxiety surrounding women's greater independence, and returning veterans' problems, other plays of the era questioned prevailing norms in race relations and the added difficulties African Americans veterans faced when they were demobilized. The next case study examines a play that argues that America lacked a plan to reconvert black soldiers and grant them the basic liberties they had supposedly been fighting for in World War II.

Racism and the Returning African American Soldier: On Whitman Avenue

> ED: I don't know a nice way of saying you can fight for your country but you can't live in it.[21]

Ed Tilden is a nice middle-aged white liberal in Maxine Wood's 1946 Broadway play On Whitman Avenue who thinks he believes in equality for all Americans but finds his principles tested when he returns from a trip to discover his daughter, Toni, has rented their upstairs apartment to an African American veteran and his family. Tilden recognizes the hypocrisy between believing in ideals and failing to act upon them, and has the decency to be ashamed of himself for wishing Toni had not decided to make their home the front line of an integration battle in the "all-white, all-American community of Lawndale, a Midwestern suburban development (66).

When On Whitman Avenue opened, it was characterized as a play about tolerance and/or the postwar housing shortage rather than a war play per se. Yet the fact that

[21] Maxine Wood, On Whitman Avenue, Acting ed. (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948) 56. All further references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

the leading African American character is an ex-serviceman is crucial to the plot. The character of David Bennett is a former Seabee who saved the life of Toni's fiancé, Bob, in the Pacific, earning him a Purple Heart. Throughout the play the patriotic rhetoric of American wartime objectives is juxtaposed against the threats, racial slurs, and hysterical fears of Lawndale's "upright" citizens. The gaps between American idealism/professed Christian values and actual practice is constantly highlighted. Even the street where the Tildens live is named after poet Walt Whitman, whose line "Thunder on! Stride on, Democracy! Strike with vengeful stroke!" is ironically quoted in the play during a scene when angry neighbors gather to persuade the Tildens to evict their new tenants (36).

Maxine Wood (the pen name of Maxine Finsterwald) was not an African American herself; instead, she was a progressive-minded white Northern woman, much like Toni Tilden in her play. She grew up in Detroit and was inspired by events in her hometown to write On Whitman Avenue:

> At the time of the race riots in Detroit I was working on a characterization for a play I wanted to write about what would happen after

> the war, when the men who went out to fight for the four freedoms came home to find existent the very things against which they thought they were fighting.[22]

On Whitman Avenue is full of examples of mainstream society's hypocrisy towards African American soldiers. Not only do the soldiers who fought for "the four freedoms" find that society as a whole has changed little, but they also discover some of their military benefits are unavailable to them. For example, the shortcomings of the GI Bill are part of the play. David tries to register at his local university only to be told, "So sorry, our quota of Negroes is filled" (42). David wants to study architecture and help to build a new world, but instead takes a job as a laborer demolishing his old neighborhood.

Wood's play was criticized for its inability to offer a concrete solution to restricted covenants, segregation, and racial hatred. Yet she does offer hope that young people might make change possible. Toni Tilden is depicted as an idealistic college student who believes, "You can't think one way and act another" (24). David Bennett, played by Canada Lee (who also produced the

[22] Eugene Fields, "Author of Broadway Hit Asserts Intolerance Number One Problem," Examiner [city?] 17 May 1946.

play), is portrayed as a potential leader of future Civil Rights struggles. One of the most poignant parts of the play is the spontaneous friendship that starts to blossom between Toni and David's younger brothers over a mutual enthusiasm for model airplanes until the white boy, Johnnie, is called a "nigger lover" and roughed up by five of his supposed friends. Forced to prove his loyalty to his cohorts and his race, Johnnie not only breaks off his friendship with Owen, but also stomps on the other boy's prized handmade model plane. The author suggests that cross-racial friendships such as the one enjoyed by Toni, Bob, and David, or the initial camaraderie of the two young boys, are the first steps towards mutual understanding and alliance building.

When On Whitman Avenue opened in May of 1946, it was the last of several "tolerance" plays presented that season in New York.[23] Although it had received excellent notices during a try-out in Detroit, most New York critics panned the production, complaining that Maxine Wood's good intentions did not equal good playwriting. One critic

[23] Magnum includes Deep Are the Roots by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow (1945), Arthur Laurents' Home of the Brave (1945), Jeb by Robert Ardrey (1946), and Don Appell's This, Too, Shall Pass (1946) along with On Whitman Avenue in her discussion of plays from this season about racial prejudice; some of the plays listed above are actually about anti-Semitism. Valerie Beth Mangum, "American Attitudes Towards War as Reflected in American Drama, 1773-1946." Diss., U of Texas at Austin, 1947: 520-526.

found the piece "too talky for Mr. and Mrs. Average Playgoer."[24] Even the generally supportive critic of the Daily Worker observed that he "should have liked to see the Negro family have more of an impact on the action; it remains, dramatically, too much on the receiving end."[25] Admittedly, this white-authored script is not a Civil Rights play from an African American point of view, as Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun would be in 1959. The set design for On Whitman Avenue's Broadway production even underscores this: the Tilden's living room has its fourth wall removed, allowing audience members to see into their home, but the Bennett's apartment upstairs has an intact exterior wall, making invisible details of the African American family's life.

Yet a few critics realized that dramatizing *white* fears was this play's real intent. Arthur Pollack of the Brooklyn Eagle said the drama:

> . . . will more often than not be described as a play on "the Negro question," but it is really a play on the white "question." It is the white mind and white way of thinking about Negroes

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[24] Robert Coleman, " 'On Whitman Ave.' Misses Target, New York Mirror 9 May 1946.

[25] Samuel Sillen, " "On Whitman Avenue' Hits Jim-Crow Hard," Daily Worker 10 May 1946.

> that are graphically dissected. And the scene is not the South . . . . [but] a very nice, respectable community in the North. The play is about us.[26]

Another reviewer related how "I overheard a man say to his companion, as he stood and applauded, for four curtain calls, 'Seeing this play makes me feel ashamed I'm white.'"[27] Reviews such as these were in the minority, however; most critics gave the play negative notices despite an enthusiastic response from audience members on opening night. For example, Ward Morehouse of the New York Sun called On Whitman Avenue "too much of a preachment for good theatre" and Wood's playwriting "naïve and obvious," and PM Daily's Louis Kronenberger titled his review "A Vital Theme Is Ill Handled."[28]

The negative reviews to On Whitman Avenue prompted a flurry of retorts by some African Americans and liberal or socialist whites, such as Roosevelt's column quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Eugene Konecky, a leader of

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[26] Arthur Pollock, " 'On Whitman Avenue' at the Cort Theatre Provides Exciting Evening," Brooklyn Eagle 9 May 1946.

[27] Ralph Matthews, "'Whitman Avenue Lands Solid Punch Against Hate," unsourced article in NYPL scrapbook on On Whitman Avenue.

[28] Ward Morehouse, "The New Play," New York Sun, 9 May 1946 and Louis Kronenberger, "A Vital Theme is Ill Handled," PM Daily [New York] 10 May 1946.

the International Workers Order, took out a full-page advertisement on May 17 in the Daily Worker, responding to Kronenberger's review and claiming that the audience's reaction to On Whitman Avenue rivaled the opening night of The Cradle Will Rock. A few days later PM printed nearly a dozen letters from audience members either applauding or condemning Kronenberger's review. Ludlow W. Werner, writing for the New York Age pointed out that in many instances "dramatic productions displaying Negroes in roles other than menials or clowns are being regarded as 'below standard'[29] by mainstream critics.

But perhaps the most scathing critique of the professional theatre critics came from African American actress and People's Voice Theatrical Editor Fredi Washington:

> I am coming to the conclusion that most of the boys have become cynical, or downright lazy, or tired of going to the theatre, or . . . in the best fascist tradition, have agreed on an unwritten plan to kill with a stroke of their pens any play which tends to dramatize the problems of the people and in particular the problems involving the Negro.

[29] Ludlow W. Lerner, "Across the Desk," New York Age 18 May 1946.

Washington offered her "sympathy" to Ward Morehouse, saying it must have been painful "to sit and watch yourself stripped of your phony liberalism," and concluded her column with "You've made us mad, boys, and we don't intend to sit by and see you close to us an avenue which might very well serve to cure some of our ills."[30] Washington's column is a triple inversion of the usual critical and social conventions: she is an actor criticizing the critics' performance, a woman standing up to men, and an African American calling grown white males "boys."

On Whitman Avenue did not close quickly after it received poor press reviews; instead, the controversy created by the critics and their respondents probably helped to extend the run. African American and Labor presses urged their readers to see the play, and producer Canada Lee plugged the show during radio interviews and generated publicity by offering free tickets to people who openly supported restrictive covenants. A public forum to discuss the play with the author, director Margo Jones, and African American leaders such as NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall was held in Harlem. The production ran for 148 performances before closing.

[30] Fredi Washington, "Fredi Says," People's Voice 18 May 1946.

In On Whitman Avenue, Toni is distraught that her family and neighbors have participated in a "lynching bee, Northern style" (43) by forcing David's family to move out. Towards the play's end, David tells her to "Cheer up. There are plenty of battles ahead. This was just a skirmish" (72). Wood's play may not offer solutions to deep-seated racial problems, but it accurately predicts that many battles for equality still lay ahead. The final case study in this chapter is also a prophetic play that anticipates another major social issue of the postwar period: the challenge of controlling the atom.

Pedagogy and Prophecy: E=mc²: A Living Newspaper About the Atomic Age

> ATOM: (*Atom breaks into maniacal laughter.) Pause*) Oh dear, I'm so awfully sorry—that happens all the time. There's nothing I can do about it, either. You see I'm a dual personality. Hyde and Jekyll, you know. I can't control myself. Other people have to do it for me—But will they? That's the question. You want to see what I look like? Well you can't—it would be against nature.

STAGE MANAGER: Now just a moment, Atom. It may be against *nature* for you to show yourself, but it's against *theatre* for an actor to stay cooped up in a box all night. Actor's Equity wouldn't allow it, in the first place. And an audience—(this audience—any audience)—wouldn't stand for it.

ATOM: Then what are we going to do? All these scientists out there will get up and leave the minute I pop out—because *they* know I'm *invisible*.[31]

This exchange from Hallie Flanagan's 1947 Living Newspaper E=mc^2 contains both of the play's central conceits that allow atomic energy and the issues concerning its uses to be dramatized in an unabashedly theatrical way. The first is the personification of the atom as an engaging but out-of-control schizophrenic, capable of unleashing death and destruction on a global scale *and* of creating utopia—a world with plentiful, inexpensive food and energy and miraculous new medical

[31] Hallie Flanagan Davis, assisted by Sylvia Gassel and Day Tuttle, E=mc^2: A Living Newspaper About the Atomic Age (New York: Samuel French, 1948) 25. All subsequent references to this script will be cited parenthetically.

advances. As imagined by Flanagan and her collaborators, Atom is anthropomorphized as an unruly young woman who might either eradicate the planet or marvelously transform it and whose actions must be controlled. (The sexism inherent in this depiction will be discussed later in this section.) Second, Atom and the complex social and scientific issues that surround her will be portrayed in a frankly theatrical way that calls upon audience members to suspend their disbelief (in things like visible, talking, cartwheeling Atoms, for instance) in order to understand the barrage of facts and concepts the play presents. The Stage Manager is both narrator and pageant master, acting as a master of ceremonies and facilitating many of the play's effects. When Atom is first brought onstage she is hidden in a box, and the Stage Manager tries to convince her that it is anti-theatrical to remain invisible (even if technically correct) and he calls to a stagehand to haul away Atom's box, saying "there's more than one way of releasing atomic energy—and this is the theatre way!" (26). The box is raised into the flies and Atom emerges, turning cartwheels and handsprings as she explains in layman's terms the theories of atomic structure that earned Niels Bohr the Nobel Prize (27).

Taking complicated ideas and contemporary issues and presenting them in an accessible, appealing theatrical context is part of the pedagogical intent of Living Newspapers. The form was used by groups like the Blue Blouses following the Russian Revolution to teach ordinary citizens about important issues, and its adoption in Depression-era America was one of the most noteworthy (and notorious, according to some conservative critics) innovations of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) during its four-year lifespan (1935-39). Hallie Flanagan was the head of the FTP and had also dramatized (along with Margaret Ellen Clifford) an agitprop play about farmers entitled Can You Hear Their Voices? in 1931 while she was teaching at Vassar College.[32] After the FTP's funding was withdrawn, Flanagan returned to Vassar and soon joined the faculty at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Given Flanagan's previous work with agitprop drama and the American public's voracious appetite for information about atomic matters following the drop of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the creation of a Living Newspaper about atomic energy must have seemed like a logical step. According to an interview with Sylvia

[32] Rachel France, ed., A Century of Plays by American Women, (New York: Richards Rossen, 1979) 87.

Gassel (who is credited with assisting Flanagan on E=mc^2) however, she, not Flanagan, came up with the initial concept. Gassel said she had read Hiroshima by John Hersey (a bestselling journalistic book that first appeared as the entire August 31, 1946 issue of the New Yorker) just before she came to Smith, and that she proposed a Living Newspaper on atomic energy. Flanagan apparently liked the idea and told her to devote her office time (Gassel worked part-time as Flanagan's secretary) on the project, which Gassel did throughout the summer of 1947. Gassel said that Flanagan later took control over the script because she "felt it had potential value as a producible play, possibly on Broadway."[33] Flanagan received primary credit for the play when it was produced and published, and Gassel, along with Day Tuttle, was listed as an assistant. Issues of authorship and ownership were likely contested, however, because Gassel apparently rejected her initial allocation of royalties and insisted, as a condition of signing her contract with publisher Samuel French, that she receive half, with

[33] Robert David Hostetter, The American Nuclear Theatre, 1946-1984," Diss., Northwestern University, 1985: 91. The information he cites about the genesis of the play and Flanagan's possible motives for assuming control over the play are according to a personal interview he conducted with Sylvia Gassel on 6 Jan. 1984 and should be read in that light.

Flanagan and Tuttle dividing the other half.[34] Throughout this section E=mc^2 is referred to as authored by Flanagan since she was listed as the primary creator, but it should be acknowledged that researching and writing the play was a collaborative project.

As a Living Newspaper, E=mc^2 was constructed from and informed by many different types of sources. The program from its original Smith College production notes that the information used was "gathered from books, magazines, and newspapers, Army and Navy correspondence and interviews with public officials and others who have been in the spotlight of the news events portrayed," along with a selective bibliography and the promise that a detailed bibliography was available for consultation in the theatre department's office. The vast amounts of source material were distilled down into an episodic play that explained atomic theory, provided a history of the atom, and explored some of the most urgent issues facing both national leaders and ordinary citizens concerning atomic weapons and energy. In addition, portions of two other plays are found in E=mc^2: an excerpt from Wings Over

[34] Carbon copies of correspondence regarding the French contract are in the Hallie Flanagan papers in the NYPL Performing Arts Library.

Europe, a 1928 play that anticipated the invention of atom splitting technology, and a condensation of Pilot Lights of the Apocalypse (1946), a short cautionary one-act by physicist Loius N. Ridenour about a projected global atomic arms race. As Hostetter observes, $E=mc^2$ is structured around two broad topics: "the history and nature of atomic energy (Act I) and the question of who shall control it (Act II)".[35]

Living Newspapers usually had a "little man" character whose questions about a contemporary problem provided the pretext for discussing the issue's causes, history, human costs, and potential solutions.[36] $E=mc^2$'s "little man" was a boy named Henry whose interest in science fiction magazines and radio shows provided him with a rudimentary understanding of atomic physics; much of the play is framed as the education of Henry. A few other characters provide continuity throughout the play: Atom; the Stage Manager; a Professor; and Clio, the Muse of history, depicted as a vibrant young woman on roller skates. The rest of the roles are small and played by a large flexible cast of actors.

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[35] Hostetter 101.

[36] Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, History of the Theatre, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon 2003) 462.

Perhaps the most interesting and problematic characterization was the depiction of Atom as an appealing but unruly young woman who needs to be "controlled." Atom's dual personality was designed to invoke the bomb's capacity for massive destruction as well as the promise of miraculous new technologies that could be developed from atomic energy. Charles A. Carpenter is especially critical of "this frenetic, comic-book figure," and believes "its striking lack of congruity with the concept it represents would disturb discriminating spectators and hamper the teaching function of the play." [37] Carpenter's difficulties with the Atom's concept springs from the fact that she describes herself as having "hypomanic moments" and threatens to "go into fission at any minute," (74) when real atoms are static unless set in motion.[38] Contemporary critics who saw the Smith production, however, were more inclined to like the depiction of Atom. The critic for the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram found "The choice of a dynamic girl to represent the atom was a most happy one, and the portrayal of Atom, the split

[37] Charles A. Carpenter, Dramatists and the Bomb: American and British Playwrights Confront the Nuclear Age, 1945-1964, Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies 91 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999) 36.

[38] Carpenter 35.

personality girl, by Sylvia Short, is one of the factors in the play's incredible liveliness," and a New York critic thought Atom was "a most charming if diabolic young lady, ebulliently acted.[39] Quite probably the actress' performance of her role rather than the way it was written made this character appeal to spectators in a way that cannot be assessed by merely reading the script. When E=mc^2 was performed in 1948 by the Experimental Theatre, reviewers were less enthusiastic about the Atom character and the actress who portrayed her. One of the critics said of the Experimental Theatre, "Where they go wrong to begin with is in trying to popularize their subject by a device that often vulgarizes it—the personification of the atom as a beautiful blonde about to burst her acrobat's tights."[40] This description suggests that Atom in the Experimental Theatre production was particularly voluptuous or sexual, or at least that the reviewer found her to be so.

Hallie Flanagan wrote in her "Notes to Directors of *E=mc^2*" (at the end of the Samuel French Acting edition)

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[39] "Smith Theatre Dept. Does Good Job With Tough Assignment," Holyoke Transcript-Telegram 12 Dec. 1947 and George Freedley, "Hallie Flanagan Davis' Newest Idea Adds Up to Terrific Night in Theater," New York Morning Telegraph 15 Dec. 1947.

[40] L.B., "Experimental Group Offers 'E-mc2,' Dealing With Challenge of Atomic Energy to Survival," New York Times 16 June 1948. Also qtd. by Hostetter 103.

that “For the initial production it seemed best to have Atom played by a girl, but the part could be played with equal effectiveness and with few changes of text, by a man” (84). Hostetter challenges this statement by pointing out ways Atom’s characterization is “part of the whole fabric of the play . . . . based on sophomoric cuteness,” and that “to simply cast a man . . . could work against the tone of most of the show.” Another part of the play depicts a beautiful female allegorical character called Power who is eagerly courted by a bevy of suitors: Army, Navy, Business Man, Politician, and Professor, most of whom remind her how much money they spend on her as they dance to honky-tonk music. Besides the ways that the script specifically constructs Atom as a vivacious young woman and Power as a glamorous mistress, atomic things were often depicted as feminine or even erotic in other popularizations of the time. Spencer Weart discusses how historically “alchemists had specifically symbolized matter as female,” and that later men like Francis Bacon spoke of trying to “’master,’ ‘disrobe,’ and ‘penetrate’ a feminine Nature, and that such innuendos and “metaphors of aggressive pursuit” transferred to twentieth century descriptions of atomic research, such as “probing” the

atom's "innermost secrets."[41] Other sexy "atomic" associations included a swimsuit model captioned in Life as the "Anatomic Bomb," and the Bikini swimsuit, named after an island where atomic weapons were tested.[42]

If Atom is gendered as female in $E=mc^2$, another characteristic she shares with real and fictional women of the era is that many people try to demilitarize and domesticate her, deploying her from her wartime job, but employing her in constructing a new future. Atomic energy is enthusiastically described in the play as having the potential to give the world plentiful power, bountiful crops, and lifesaving medical treatments—if only she can be controlled. $E=mc^2$ posits that atomic energy is too important to be left up to a few military and political leaders to control and that learning about and taking responsibility for the atom is everyone's business.

The Smith College production of $E=mc^2$ involved students, professors, and townspeople in its large cast and it likewise attracted both college and community members to its performances. The Smith Alumnae Quarterly reported that unsolicited letters from all types of

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[41] Spencer R. Weart, Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 57-58, 125.

[42] Paul Boyer, By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age. (New York: Pantheon, 1985) 11-12.

audience members (such as college students, professors, and scientists) arrived after the show and attested to the importance and appeal of the show. Another audience member's reaction was published as a short item in the New Yorker "Talk of the Town" section:

> A lady who saw the Smith College play about atomic energy, 'E Equals MC Squared,' reports it to be illuminating. She said she never understood the tremendous energy potential of a chain reaction until she saw a group of Smith girls illustrating it in a ballet."[43]

$E=mc^2$ used dance, humor, and energetic performances as well as didactic demonstrations to educate its audiences about atomic energy in an entertaining fashion. The idea that atomic energy could be used for non-military uses was a message that was just beginning to be spread through public information and education drives, making this play somewhat in the vanguard of the "Atoms for Peace" campaigns that took place in the late forties and early fifties.

[43] "Talk of the Town," New Yorker, otherwise unsourced clipping in Hallie Flanagan Papers, NYPL.

> STAGE MANAGER: The war ended—and almost at once the threat of another war began (43).

At the conclusion of the first act of E=mc^2, the Stage Manager alludes to the start of the Cold War as well as to struggles over the atom's possession and control. By 1950, the United States was involved in the Korean conflict. Unlike the generation following World War I, the post-World War II era allowed little time for reflection. Writing in early 1947, Mangum argued that the World War II would probably generate its best play(s) in a few more years:

> A man who has been through a holocaust does not care to see its flames sustained so that others may understand his pain. Instead he would let them cool and his burns heal so that he himself may look back and arrive at some understanding of those who set the fires and their reasons for setting them, at some explanation of what has been cleansed or left sooted by the white heat of the flames.[44]

Arguably, the political events that followed hard on the heels of World War II left little time for flames to cool,

[44] Mangum 527-8.

burns to heal, and new plays to get written. Other than The Diary of Anne Frank (1956), adapted by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, and a handful of lighter works like Rogers and Hammerstein's musical South Pacific (1949), few World War II plays were written (by either male or female playwrights) in the United States in the first decade after $E=mc^2$.[45] Most Holocaust plays written in the United States appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Hollywood, not Broadway, told most of the soldiers' battle stories.

Yet the three case studies in this chapter do address ideas that would become major social and political issues during the next generation. While Kate in Soldier's Wife happily chooses to devote herself to her husband and home instead of her career, questions about women's rights and roles continued to linger and exploded back into mainstream discourse with works like Betty Friedan's 1963 book The Feminine Mystique. David Bennett's family might have been forced off Whitman

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[45] A few plays after 1947 like Mister Roberts(1948), Billy Budd (1951), Hatful of Rain (1955) and Time Limit (1956) have troubled veterans as characters. Bruce McConachie argues in American Theatre in the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962, Studies in Theatre History and Culture (Iowa City: U of Iowa P) that after 1950 most of the characters he terms "Empty Boys" were not military veterans but survivors of other types of stressful situations (66).

Avenue, but the character's observation that "there are plenty of battles ahead" in the struggle for Civil Rights anticipated watershed events in the next decade like the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision and the murder of Emmett Till the following year. Both of these plays can be seen as artifacts of the "period of retrogression" that followed the war. $E=mc^2$ documents the vacillating optimism and anxiety about the future that unleashing the atom wrought, and suggests ways nuclear weapons would alter future discussions about war and peace. None of the plays in this chapter are literary gems, but all of them grappled with issues that mattered in the mid-1940s and well beyond.

Conclusion

Although few of the plays in this dissertation are likely to be prime candidates for revival, reading them today can be startlingly relevant. I began this project before the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Now as I write this, the United States is engaged in a broadly defined "War on Terror" and has invaded both Afghanistan and Iraq. As I was taking notes on E=mc^2, I was struck by the following passage:

> STRANGER: Are we sticking to the machinery that nations set up for national accord? Or are we only half-heartedly trying to make it work while at the same time we keep saying it never will? Are we thinking of oil in Iran? Bases in the Pacific? Are we trying to understand the way we look to other nations or are we thinking only of the way other nations look to us? (72).

When I looked down at my notes I realized I had typed "oil in Iraq" instead of "Iran," and I think this was more than just a typographical error: it represented the imaginative leap I made as I read this play from my vantage point over a half century later. War plays, like most political

performances, have the potential to speak to us in our own times as much as they reveal the anxieties or hopes of people in earlier times.

For a feminist scholar, the journey from War Brides to Soldier's Wife may be depressing or devolutionary. However, feminist scholarship should not only concern itself with exemplary examples from the past, it also needs to include consideration of women's writings that are not feminist, since such works can at the very least illuminate the status quo that feminists sought to change. In general, World War I plays by women are more pacifist and more progressive, while World War II plays are more supportive of the war effort and tend towards conservatism. However, comparing characters, ideas, and themes across chapters reveals other patterns as well.

Several war plays have defiant women as protagonists. Joan's rejection of maternity in War Brides, Madeline's determination not to keep silent in the face of injustice in Inheritors, and Toni's single-handed attempt at integration On Whitman Avenue are all examples of young women fighting to make a better world. None of these characters is rebelling against an individual man; they are all fighting systemic injustices. Traditional women people many of these plays as well. Supportive spouses

include Sarah in Watch on the Rhine, Polly in Over Twenty-One, Kate in Soldier's Wife, and Ann in Foxhole in the Parlor. Some women are depicted as suffering mothers; the Mother in War Brides, Katherine in Moloch, Nan in Mine Eyes Have Seen, and the Widow Cagle in Sun-Up all lose their children to war in a literal sense, and Emily in The Searching Wind and Kate Tilden in On Whitman Avenue are dislikable characters who estrange their children.

Gender is not the only category of analysis that may be applied to these plays. Many treat soldiers' disabilities with sympathy. Sam in The Searching Wind and John in Soldier's Wife are both physically wounded. Others come home from war with invisible traumas, like the shell-shocked Straggler in Stragglers in the Dust or Dennis in Foxhole in the Parlor. Dennis, with his burning need to tell the world to make a permanent peace is like the Across the Border soldier, but he lives to tell his story. Issues of race and class are found in several of the plays, too. The rights and responsibilities of African American soldiers or veterans are central to Mine Eyes Have Seen, Aftermath, Stragglers in the Dust and On Whitman Avenue. Like many African American soldier characters, the rural white Rufe in Sun-Up is poor and

disenfranchised but decides to fight for his country anyway.

Many of the World War II plays are concerned with women and wartime work—Yankee Point, Over Twenty-One, Soldier's Wife, and to a lesser extent, Foxhole in the Parlor. These four plays resemble general trends in advertising, films, and government publications that urged American "Rosies" into war work for the duration of World War II and exhorted them to return to their families when their husbands came home. But the heroines of these plays have careers or avocations as writers, editors, plane spotters, and models, while most women who entered the workforce during the war had decidedly less glamorous occupations. Not all of them were white, middle-class, patriotic homemakers prior to the war, either; as Maureen Honey observes, most women war workers tended to be working class women, grateful that the lack of good job opportunities for women during the Depression years were over. Only one-third of the female employees of war manufacturing plants described themselves as having been housewives prior to the war.[1] These plays may not reflect the realities of war work and its impact on actual women

[1] Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984) 19-20.

and men, but they do capture a sense of the excitement and apprehension about women's work and men's military service during the war years.

Stylistically, most of these plays are realistic, although many of them would probably seem melodramatic to a twenty-first century spectator. A few plays experiment with newer or avant-garde styles: Across the Border has dream elements, Aria da Capo is a modernist allegory, and $E=mc^2$ is an agitprop docudrama. Most of these plays are serious examinations of issues, but both Soldier's Wife and Over Twenty-One are witty comedies with madcap heroines, and Yankee Point is a domestic comedy. They were produced in a variety of venues, from Broadway to little theatres and educational theatre to vaudeville.

Besides advocating peace or supporting war efforts, these plays also addressed a wide range of secondary issues. Some advance equality: for women, for all races. On Whitman Avenue argues that decent housing and educational opportunities should be available to all Americans. Some are more complicated politically, like Watch on the Rhine's anti-fascist message or The Searching Wind's indictment of appeasers. J. Ellen Gainor says of Inheritiors "one could argue that only Tony Kushner's two-part Angels in America (1991-92) has since attempted the

scope, sweep, and political force of Glaspell's writing in this play."[2]

Some of these play's productions became events that far exceeded the performances themselves. War Brides' popularity and its themes of peace and suffrage made it a much-discussed event, and author Marion Craig Wentworth read her play and addressed Ladies' Clubs all over the country while the show played to vaudeville audiences. Watch on the Rhine was enormously persuasive as an anti-fascist lesson, and Roosevelt's first public appearance after Pearl Harbor at a command performance of this play was probably a very deliberate political move. On Whitman Avenue became a tool to publicize redlining and restrictive covenants and the fight to keep the play from closing was probably much more about this political value than its artistic merits. In short, these plays were vehicles for dramatizing war and peace, but they could also advocate other contemporary issues.

There are several other areas related to war, theatre, and gender that could be the subjects of future research. International comparisons between war plays in the United States and elsewhere could provide a more

[2] J. Ellen Gainor, Susan Glaspell in Context: American Theater, Culture, and Politics, 1915-48 (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001) 141.

global outlook on issues. Women wrote plays about Vietnam and other fronts in substantial numbers in the last third of the twentieth century, and their work deserves more attention. Women in theatre played other roles in wartime besides playwriting, too. Topics such as the activities of the Stage Women's War Relief in World War I or the contributions of female USO performers in World War II could be fruitful avenues for further inquiry into women and theatrical war work.

Most women who wrote plays about the World Wars used art to engage in political and social activism. Many asserted their right to speak about issues usually perceived as outside of their authority and experience. These playwrights channeled their passions for peace, their patriotic convictions, and their desire for change into their work. Through the public performance of their plays they challenged audiences to think, act, and fight for a better world.

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