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WRITING FROM THE INTERIOR: EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY
ONE-ACT PLAYS OF DOMESTIC REALISM BY AMERICAN WOMEN

by

ANNE ELIZABETH BECK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York

1999

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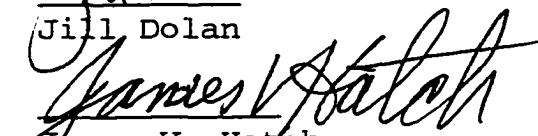
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Abstract

WRITING FROM THE INTERIOR: EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ONE-
ACT PLAYS OF DOMESTIC REALISM BY AMERICAN WOMEN

by

Anne Elizabeth Beck

Adviser: Professor Judith Milhous

This study examines twenty-six one-act plays by women published between 1915 and 1938, most of which were written for production in amateur venues--such as university and little theatres and farm clubs--where women dominated as both participants and audience members. The plays I discuss are now out of print and most of the playwrights unknown, but at the time they wrote, the women had modest success. The dissertation focuses on how the writers used plays set in the home to comment on issues concerning them and their audiences.

The plays divide between those about women of the lower-class, written to remind audiences about their responsibilities to others, and those about middle-class women with whom the audience could identify and often commiserate. The plays evidence the writers' concerns about families living in poverty, a housewife's isolation, the

nature of marriage, and the result of women's economic dependence. Despite the legal advances for women made possible by the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the plays document how much still needed to be accomplished. The intense struggle between a woman's traditional role as conservator of home values and the desire to flee the home recurs throughout this period. Unable to dramatize change, the one-act form fit the thematic focus of home-bound stasis, framing as it did the circumstances that defined the lives of many women.

Chapter One treats the influence that Progressive Era reform had on amateur writers, whose realistic social dramas fit with the democratic principles espoused by many artists active in the early years of the Little Theatre movement. Chapter Two contrasts the characterization of middle-class women as invidious parasites as depicted in a few plays by men with those by women, which show housewives entrapped by domesticity. Chapter Three discusses folk plays dramatizing the plight of farm women that correlated to conditions that concerned rural reformers in the Country Life Movement. Chapter Four considers the growth of community theatre in the 30s and the opportunity it afforded amateur writers.

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Finally, I appreciate the support of my parents, Gordon and Elizabeth, and the rest of my family, Susan, Stephen, John, Erica Guttman, and Jim Scanlon, and my friends Liz Cook, Jean Shaffer, Evelyn Shepard, Dana Sutton, and Shari Troy.

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Introduction: Toward a Definition of Domestic Realism

The women dramatists of America have their ears close to the ground and they can hear very clearly....They may not present those 'eternal verities' which seem to be granted to only a blessed few; but they know how to reconstruct for us on the stage our own little houses.

The epigraph is from Joseph Mersand's essay, "When Ladies Write Plays," in his book The American Drama Since 1930. (1) Mersand credits successful women writers for their facility to chronicle daily life in plays that appeal to audiences who attend the theatre for relaxation. Mersand considers Rachel Crothers, Rose Franken, and Clare Boothe, to name a few, as valuable realists of the drawing room, and contrasts their work with Eugene O'Neill and Maxwell Anderson, whose imaginative, poetic plays, he concludes, though scarcely as accessible, are securely lodged in the major collections of world drama. Mersand's brief chapter on women writers is limited to those who had plays produced on Broadway between 1919 and 1944, and he does not mention that during the same

period many women were writing plays for the non-commercial theatre. (2)

Mersand claims that though women excel in recounting overheard conversations, which "make [them] good reporters for the stage....their social consciousness is rarely apparent; they don't preach sermons." (3) This is contradicted by many of the plays women wrote for Broadway and most certainly by many of the one-act plays that women wrote for production in amateur venues where they dominated as both participants and as audience members. The writers in this dissertation, whose play topics ranged from the suffering of the poor to the inequity between men and women, chose them with the intent to engage the conscience of their audience. In little theatres, women's groups, university stages, and farm clubs, where amateurs were encouraged to submit their work, many women wrote about home life. Though I discuss only a sample of women's plays written at this time, the range of issues dramatized included, but was not limited to birth control, prison reform, and the peace movement. (4)

Amateur playwriting was part of the American Little Theatre movement, which began in the first decade of the twentieth century. Socially-relevant drama was considered an

essential part of the reformation of the American theatre, too long in the hands of New York businessmen. Both professional and amateur playwrights were called upon to help develop the social and artistic awareness of their audiences. Thomas Dickinson, who started the Wisconsin Players in 1911, reflected the spirit of the period in his 1915 essay in Forum, "Dramatic Art and the Great Society," when he called upon writers to be citizens first and artists second. (5)

Concurrent with the developing non-commercial theatre was the interest in the one-act play, particularly as represented by the Irish folk plays of J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory, and W.B. Yeats. Initially the one act was heralded as the form favored by artists writing for experimental theatres. After World War I some of the most renowned one-act playwrights, O' Neill, Susan Glaspell, and Zona Gale, moved on to writing full lengths for Broadway. An impetus for the continued popularity of the one act, after it was abandoned by "artists," was its use in college playwriting classes.

Frederick Koch, at the University of North Dakota (1912-1918), and then at the University of North Carolina (1918-1944), influenced by the Abbey Players, promoted the production of student-authored one-act plays on "folk"

subjects. American folk plays were often about mountaineers or farmers--"people of the soil"--but Koch's interpretation of the form was broad enough to include any life familiar to the playwright. In Koch's view a writer who lacked experience was not just excused, but prized. He extolled their merits in a 1919 article in Drama, "The Challenge of the Theatre Today": "The future of the theatre and drama in America today is in the hands of the amateurs." (6) Koch's respect for amateurs' fresh perspective and the value he accorded their short plays assisted the "great awakening" of many people to the fact that they too could write and produce drama.

George Pierce Baker, founder of the 47 Workshop at Harvard, surveyed the continued use of the one-act form in his 1927 essay, "The One-Act Play," which introduced an anthology prepared for drama classes in high schools and colleges. Baker noted that producing groups passed over established plays in search of original work, "whatever its source," and that playwriting contests were held to entice dramatists to submit their work. Baker wrote:

What has in the last years particularly helped the one-act play has been the stimulation to writing it given by many local, state, or national competitions with definite promise of adequate production by some Little Theatre group. Also the desire of these same groups to

present work as varied and as original as possible has done much to stimulate prospective writers of the one-act play to experimentation and fearless expression of their own individualities in the work. (7)

The combination of humble form, local subject, and a demand for one acts to stage, served to launch a tide of amateur plays. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this enormous yield is the energy behind it; not waiting on talent nor the mastery of skill, amateurs took their cues from each other and wrote with a lack of inhibition.

The number of woman-authored one-act plays published before World War I and up until World War II is daunting and impressive. Some women wrote only one play and some won contests; others had a volume of plays, while most had their plays published in magazines or one-act anthologies. I have selected twenty-six one acts published between 1915 and 1938, all of which have a woman as the main character and which dramatize a specific domestic problem. Because of this concentration on one-act plays, I have excluded a discussion of pageants, which were also produced by amateurs in the early part of the century. Also left out are one-act plays by African American women and better-known white women playwrights. (8) The women's plays I examine have not yet

been the subject of an extended study. Though the plays are now out of print and most of the playwrights unknown, at the time they were writing these women had modest success. My aim in part is to bring attention to "lost" plays and playwrights, and discuss their plays in relation to contemporary social history. In addition to recovering writers and plays, this dissertation focuses on how women playwrights used one-act plays set in the home to comment on issues that concerned them and their audience.

The plays roughly divide into those about women of the lower-class, written to remind an audience about their responsibilities to others, and those about middle-class women with whom their audience could identify and often commiserate. Plays about the urban lower-class set in tenements, and about the rural poor set in cabins and farmhouses, underscore the homes' wretchedness. Plays set in middle-class homes often concern the conflict between what a woman wants for herself and the demands made of her as a wife and mother. What can be gathered from the plays about the status of women in this period and of women's attitude toward one another? These plays evidence the writers' concerns about families living in poverty, a housewife's isolation, the nature of marriage,

about whether a woman has to sacrifice her life for her family, and the result of women's economic dependence.

The time period of my dissertation begins when the coalitions constituting the Progressive Era were splintering. Yet many of the plays concerning social problems indicate that the commitment to reform society did not stop, but continued throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. (9) Despite the legal advances for women made possible by the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, these plays document how much still needed to be accomplished. They demonstrate the range of issues concerning women that included, but were not limited to suffrage. After the vote was won there were problems affecting women that the plays specifically target. Often they were the least fashionable issues, concerning those who never became "new women." In this time-frame, the woman-centered site recedes in value; the term "domestic sphere" becomes one of derision; and increasingly, the youngest, brightest, most energetic women yearn to become "new," and reject being grouped in the increasingly devalued class of woman for full participation in the general culture.

Progressive reformers, such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelly, carrying on the tradition of nineteenth-century

activists, placed female liberation within the fight for systemic and cultural changes that far exceeded the demand for a change in laws. As Gerda Lerner points out in her 1971 essay, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," the fight for legislative changes is only one part of the broader movement "embrac[ing] all aspects of the emancipation of American women." (10) The plays I categorize as domestic realism correspond to this bipartite struggle as they affirm the incremental progress made for all women, yet dramatize the ongoing negotiation of each woman's home life. Despite important political gains, the intense struggle between a woman's traditional role as conservator of home values and the desire to flee the home recurs throughout this period.

Utopian dreams serve an important function for these playwrights, especially in terms of imagination, but because these imaginings are often dramatized in the plays through the depiction of the home as a place of absence, loss, and isolation, hope lies in the future and not in a retrieval of an illusory past. A recurring narrative of this vision is the plot of the daughter leaving behind a mother, who must stay put. These daughters are envied and enviable; their future is uncertain, but they at least know what they are escaping, and

for that they are thankful. However, what becomes of those left behind? Those who get away are rewarded, while those who are stuck at home remain impoverished, deprived, often reviled and ridiculed, and dependent on men.

With a few modifications, the plays follow the basic tenets of realism as outlined by George Becker, in his essay, "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," who posits its main points to be that the subject matter is based on the commonplace; that the story appears to begin in the middle and follows a sequence of uninterrupted actions; and that though the writer remains a detached observer, there is a distinct philosophical viewpoint expressed. (11) The writers for the most part adhere to Becker's definition, yet, following the formal demand of the one act that was limited to a single episode, the plays begin near the climax of the story. Sometimes it is death, but in addition there are cataclysmic life changes, such as displacements, losses of friends or hope, and in a few cases a new chance for the future.

One of the ways realism is used most effectively by the women writers of short plays is to get inside the fourth wall. The playwrights share with many other dramatists of this

period the assumption that a reader learns about a woman's character by way of her home. Psychological clues to a woman's personality can be found in the description of her drapes, the pattern of her carpet, or the clutter of knick-knacks scattered about her room. In plays about the lower-class there is usually a detail that signifies faith, hope, strength, some attempt to convey that even if a woman is poor, her character is not. The playwrights often include the specific region where the play takes place: how close or how far the nearest neighbors are, the view outside the windows, and if there is a view. All of these details, which aid in the understanding of what the character can see, also indicate the limit of her horizon.

The playwrights' use of drama to identify problems centered in the home as originating in a repressive society calls upon specific, material solutions for their amelioration. In doing so the home is politicized and the onus is taken off individual maladjustment. As Patricia Schroeder writes, in The Feminist Possibilities of Dramatic Realism, "in the hand of a feminist...the strictures of stage realism can work to emphasize the entrapment of women." (12) The "closed text" of realism, which limits a reader's

interpretation of a play, fits with the purpose of the writers to expose the abject and to mitigate, when necessary, the failure of their women characters to escape the confinement of the home. (13) Many of the plays, which depict rural or urban poverty, call upon a change in laws or men's behavior, while plays about middle-class households often show the consequences of a woman's decision to give up a job after marriage. In these plays of the latter type, the writers do not offer solutions, but lay out the problems in such a way as to make an audience of women and amateur actresses consider their own situations.

Chapter One treats the influence that Progressive Era reform had on amateur writers, whose realistic social dramas fit with the democratic principles espoused by the first generation of Little Theatre workers. Chapter Two contrasts the characterization of middle-class women as invidious parasites as depicted in a few full-length Broadway plays written by men with one acts by women, which show housewives trapped by domesticity or discovering ways to circumvent entrapment. This chapter also discusses middle-class women's support of local theatre, which they undertook in a spirit of community service, but was often viewed as another vacuous

activity to fill the days of the unemployed housewife. Chapter Three focuses on plays dramatizing the plight of farm women that correlated to actual conditions that concerned rural reformers involved in the Country Life Movement. Some of the farm plays were written by college students following the precepts of Frederick Koch's folk play instruction, while others were written by housewives, who submitted their work to contests. This chapter also covers the spread of community theatre in rural areas, under the auspices of the Agricultural Extension divisions of state colleges, to encourage community development. Chapter Four considers the growth of community theatre through the 30s, and the continued opportunity it afforded amateur writers. In this chapter I have included a one act by a man involved in the Country Life Movement, whose play about farm women further illustrates the extent to which this issue was central to rural reformers.

One of the most attractive features in the writing of realistic one-act plays for amateurs was the accessibility of its form. Literary critic Mary Colum dismissed realism precisely because it "admitted to writing a new world of men and women who, without any special talent, if they were literate, persevering, and carried a notebook...could write a

passable novel or short story." (14) Colum's remarks, made in 1937, could easily have been applied to many who wrote for the non-commercial theatre. The door of admittance shut quickly after the interest in publishing one acts waned in the late 30s, but not before many writers had used drama to call attention to the dilemma of middle-class women and the predicament of poor women.

The playwrights put on stage scenes usually kept hidden and characters often ignored. Unable to dramatize change, the one-act form fit the thematic focus of home-bound stasis, framing as it did the circumstances that defined the lives of many women. In their plays about lower- and middle-class housewives, spinsters, and widows, the writers have recorded experiences most women wanted to put behind them. The devaluation of women's culture that occurred throughout this period is the backdrop against which the plays were written. The writers' short plays, which document the conflicts and contradictions of women's home lives, also illustrate the great difficulty most women had in freeing themselves from it.

Endnotes

1. Joseph Mersand, The American Drama Since 1930: Essays on Plays and Playwrights (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1968), 166.
2. For a comprehensive list of writers see Frances Diodato Bzowski's American Women Playwrights, 1900-1930: A Checklist (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1992). For another list of writers, including those who published after 1930, see Hannah Logasa and Winifred Ver Nooy's An Index to One-Act Plays. Supplement (Boston: F.W. Faxon, 1932).
3. Mersand, 158.
4. One-act plays were often used for propaganda. In 1915 Sada Cowan wrote The State Forbids, produced by the Wisconsin Players and the Bruno Players in New York. The play links an anti-war message with an attack on the hypocrisy of laws forbidding abortion and birth control information. A mother loses her healthy older son to war, while left to care for her idiot child who she had wanted to abort as she knew it would inherit defects from his alcoholic father. Mrs. Nash: "After I knew that it MUST come....Oh, how I prayed that it should be beautiful and strong." See Cowan's The State Forbids, in Pomp and Other Plays (New York: Brentano's, 1926). For a play about prison reform, see Louise Burleigh and Edward Hale Bierstadt's Punishment (New York: Henry Holt, 1916). Mary Fagin's Room 226 concerns vagrant women unfairly imprisoned on Ellis Island, see Poet Lore 36 (Winter 1925): 610-614. For a volume of anti-war plays see Peace Plays, ed. A. P. Sanford (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1932).
5. Thomas H. Dickinson, "Dramatic Art and the Great Society," Forum 53 (January 1915): 121.
6. Frederick Koch, "Challenge of the Theatre Today: To the Colleges and Universities," Drama 10 (November 1919): 65.
7. George Pierce Baker, "The One-Act Play," in Types of Modern Dramatic Composition: An Anthology of One-Act Plays for Schools and Colleges, ed. LeRoy Phillips and Theodore Johnson (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1927), xi.

8. For studies on better-known women playwrights see Mary Maddock's "Private Scripts, Public Roles: American Women's Drama, 1900-1937," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1987); Louise Cheryl Mason's "The Fight to be an American Woman and a Playwright: A Critical History From 1773 to the Present," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1983). For one-act plays by African American women playwrights see Kathy A. Perkins' Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and James V. Hatch and Ted Shine's Black Theatre USA: Plays by African Americans from 1847 to Today (New York: Free Press, 1996). For a discussion of women's involvement in pageants see Karen J. Blair's The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

9. Clarke A. Chambers, Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 82-83.

10. Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," The Majority Finds Its Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 48.

11. George J. Becker, "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 23-36.

12. Patricia R. Schroeder, The Feminist Possibilities of Dramatic Realism (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 29.

13. Marvin Carlson, "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance," Interpreting the Theatrical Past, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 12.

14. Mary Colum, From These Roots: The Ideas That Have Made Modern Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 258.

Chapter One: Domestic Drama at the End of the Progressive Era, 1915-1919

This chapter discusses seven one-act plays, all but one of which depict the home lives of poor women. A few of the plays concern some of the period's most serious social problems: the need for protective legislation for working women and children; the necessity of a government-funded pension plan for widows, older and/or injured workers, or those on fixed incomes; and the demand for compulsory education, which would help enforce the often ignored child-labor laws. The domestic drama of this early period, often quite somber, details an individual character's crisis that serves to represent the experiences common to many women. The plays evidence the reform spirit behind much of American literature of the pre-World War I years, written by those who believed that calling attention to the needs of the lower-class was an initial step to a solution.

The settings of the plays serve as a way to categorize them. There are three tenement plays about Irish immigrant families: Mary MacMillan's The Shadowed Star (1915), Mary

Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law (1915), and Mary Katharine Reely's Daily Bread (1919). Louise Driscoll's The Poor House (1917) and Evelyn Emig's The Old Order (1919), both set in small towns, are about older, unemployed women. MacMillan's Honey (1917), set in a mill town, shows the life of women and young girls, who work in a southern textile factory. Reely's A Window to the South (1919) is a rural play about a farm wife brought to the edge of insanity through constant work. Though her husband owns the largest farm in the county, she does not benefit from his prosperity and works as if she is a hired hand. A Window to the South is one of the first of its kind to dramatize the isolation and monotony common to farm women, a situation that first came to the attention of the federal government in 1914. (1)

The set descriptions help to define the tone of the plays:

A small, poor room in a tenement flat....a wash-tub on bench. The room is untidy, and so is Nora. The room is crowded....cluttered with useless objects.

The cabin has but one room, is unplastered and very bare.

A farm kitchen in the Middle West....is spotlessly neat, but is dark. (2)

The play scenarios, such as a family of four women living in a tenement dependent on the two youngest, mothers and

children who labor in mills while the men stay home, and a mother supported by her son, all take place in homes barely able to meet daily demands. A woman's endurance, resourcefulness, and submission are dramatized in terms of her poverty.

The content of the plays correlates to two of the early century's foremost issues: the hardships of the poor and the pursuit of equality for women. Robert Bremner writes in his study, From the Depths, that with America's "discovery" of poverty between 1890 and 1917, came the belief that it could be eliminated. (3) Among those involved were members of women's clubs, who volunteered their time to a variety of causes. The redefinition of a woman's club, from an enclave of culture seekers to political activists intent on making themselves useful "to the world," began in 1900. At its Biennial meeting, the General Federation of Women's Clubs resolved "to work for the legislation for women and children." (4) Amateur plays that boasted both artistic and social merit were avidly supported by middle-class women, as audience members and as participants, who saw socially-relevant drama as a way to engage the conscience of the public. (5)

Dorothy Chansky points out in her dissertation on the development of the Little Theatre audience, "Composing Ourselves," that the reform of theatre melded with other social issues of the Progressive Era with which middle-class women were involved. (6) The Drama League of America, founded by Marjorie A. Starr Best, from an outgrowth of a woman's group in Evanston, Illinois, started in 1910. The Drama League was instrumental in the nation-wide campaign to reinstate theatre as an art and to ensure the entire country had access to higher quality drama. Despite a declared interest in new scenic techniques and formal experimentation, the focus of the organization was on upgrading the content of drama. A sample clipping describing the mission of the League reads:

The Drama League regards the theatre as a social force. It is interested in the methods of the drama, the principles of dramatic art, but it is more interested in the content of the drama, which is life....This is in line with the spirit of our age, in which all things are measured by their value to society, and all institutions are challenged to show cause why they should continue to exist. (7)

Thus, the women playwrights combined their artistic endeavors with citizenship. They participated in the developing Little Theatre movement by writing one-act plays

for amateurs to produce and joined with other artists whose imaginative literature was socially invested. (8) In the preface to her 1915 volume of one acts, Plays for Small Stages, Mary Aldis wrote that it was the "amateur's opportunity" to avoid "resuscitating `plays with a punch', which [had] fared well in the hands of professionals." (9) Describing the productions of the Lake Forest Players, which she founded in 1911 as a place to present her own work as well as translations of European one acts, Aldis said: "We are not afraid of plays with little action and much talk, for is it not the most intense drama of all, the drama of the soul, the struggle between mind and mind, heart and heart?" (10)

As part of the general alarm about the condition of the poor, the one acts informed a middle-class audience about the plight of women of the laboring class; additionally, stories about impoverished women, most of whom supported themselves and their families, served to remind middle-class women of their responsibility to others. The plays about poor women also warned against middle-class complacency. The spectator may have seen her own life as blessed in contrast to the tenement dweller, but tenuous, if, like most

middle-class women, her security depended on someone else. The graphic evidence of a woman's need to be economically self-sufficient reflects, I believe, the uneasiness most women felt about their own economic dependence. (11) The plays set in tenement rooms or in a mill-town cabin, with heroic, yet beleaguered women characters, who support their families, target the demands being made for protective legislation, higher wages, and stricter child-labor laws. The most pathetic characters, on the other hand, are women living in small towns, who, even after years of scrimping can not control circumstances that force them from their homes. Economically dependent, both women are helpless and succumb to their fate with dumb acceptance. The mother's suicide in Evelyn Emig's The Old Order is an extreme example of a woman's capitulation to the notion of being just a housekeeper. When her home is taken from her, the mother sees no reason to live. Although most middle-class women were not wage-earners, many were looking for something important to do outside of the home. Amateur theatricals gave them just such an opportunity; and watching or acting in a play about domestic confinement may have shown them the necessity of their own unmooring from the home anchor.

Woman as dramatic subject was given a new dimension with the appreciation of Ibsen in the early century. (12) However, it was not until the second decade of the twentieth century, when large numbers of plays written by women began to circulate, that the scope of dramatic material about them expanded. By that time women poets, novelists, and playwrights were being called to reclaim this popular topic as theirs. Others, a magazine devoted to new verse, published a "woman's number" in 1916. Editor Helen Hoyt introduced the issue by explaining the need for such a volume and invited more women writers to share their work with each other:

Is there not a great difference, in physical make-up, in psychology, custom and history, between the people called Men and the people called Women? Yes, alas. At present most of what we know, or think we know, of women has been found out by men. We have yet to hear what woman will tell of herself....If only she is able to be sincere enough; and rather brave!
(13)

In 1914, playwright and critic Florence Kiper wrote in an essay for Forum, "Some American Plays from the Feminist Viewpoint," that until more playwrights addressed themselves to problems concerning women, the problems would remain unarticulated. (14)

Most of Kiper's essay discusses recent Broadway plays, but in the first section she outlines her prescription for a woman-centered American drama demanding the participation of both writers and audiences on problems, she believed, that had so far received only a pale, cursory treatment. Kiper wrote that "every play produced on the American stage, with a few...exceptions, has its say on the feminist question."

(15) Yet missing in these plays, Kiper continued, was a dramatist's informed interpretation, and missing from the theatre at large were plays about the range of ideas that were part of the feminist platform. Her list of topics which she believed playwrights should take up included suffrage, working-class girls in industry, divorce laws, and the conditions of women's home lives. As Hoyt wrote two years later, Kiper hoped that women playwrights of the future would "set forth sincerely and honestly, yet with vital passion, those problems in the development and freedom of women that the modern age has termed the problems of feminism." (16)

Kiper cites the playwright as being an important agent for social change, who will, she believes, aid in the development of an enlightened audience. On the one hand,

Kiper's essay is a feminist agenda meant to engage women dramatists, but it also reflects the responsibility many critics placed on both audience and artist in elevating the drama. Her observation that the development of higher standards in the American theatre depended upon an educated audience was echoed by many who were active in non-commercial theatre.

The first part of this chapter treats the opportunities that encouraged amateur playwrights of the early century to participate in theatrical reform by bringing higher quality drama to the public. It is important to note that the women's plays were published because of the many editors willing to print unknown writers in their search for an authentic American drama. Faithful depictions of local neighborhoods, their people and topics, were part of a literature dedicated to the democratic spirit. The increase in play publications between 1905 and 1915 evoked the observation from Archibald Henderson, writing in Drama magazine, that "there are just as many people looking for the great American play as the great American novel, and when it comes it will come in book form." (17) Many writers took advantage of this editorial policy to expose the misery

of lower-class people's lives, and in the process countered cherished ideas about home, family, and marriage.

The writers' plays discussed here have yet to receive the critical attention now being given to a few of their contemporaries, but at one time they were considered a major part of the developing non-commercial theatre. (18) Some of the authors wrote their plays for specific groups. Mary MacMillan wrote for the Cincinnati Woman's Club and the Cincinnati College Club; Mary Aldis was artistic director and primary playwright for the Lake Forest Players, who performed in the Aldis Playhouse, a small house next door to where Aldis lived, which she had converted into a theatre. Aldis also belonged to the Chicago Theatre Workshop, whose other playwriting members included Alice Gerstenberg, Oscar Wolff, and Kenneth Sawyer Goodman. Some of Aldis's plays were produced by amateur groups, including the Hull House Players and the St. Louis Dramatic Club.

Evelyn Emig wrote The Old Order while attending George Washington University, where, in 1919, the play won the University Prize. The same year she became director of the Incubator Players, a group of ex-Harvard 47 students living in Washington D.C. Louise Driscoll, also a poet, served as

chair of the Committee on Poetry for the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs. In addition to two volumes of poetry, she wrote a verse play, Child of God, published in the journal The Seven Arts in 1916. Mary Katharine Reely first worked as a researcher for the H. W. Wilson Company compiling pamphlets on minimum wage, immigration, the peace movement, and the need for community development in rural areas. She was primarily interested in rural reform, and A Window to the South was one of many plays she wrote about farm women. (19)

Within the amateur play circuit, the playwrights were featured among those to watch, and for beginning dramatists, the ones to study. Mary MacMillan's The Shadowed Star and Mary Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law were perhaps the best-known plays of the seven as they appeared early in the Little Theatre movement. MacMillan's The Shadowed Star was anthologized in a 1922 volume of ten one-act plays, which editor A. D. Dickinson introduced as "works of art." Many of the plays, he added, had been written for Little Theatre groups, who performed for their "discern[ing] and understanding" audiences. (20) Dickinson's collection, though dominated by American writers, included plays by John

Galsworthy and Lord Dunsany, showing that with the one-act form the United States was making headway in the realm of dramatic art.

Margaret Mayorga included Mary Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law in her 1919 anthology Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors, the first major volume of one acts culled from prominent Little Theatres. Mayorga defined the Little Theatre as an "organization of earnest workers interested more in the future of drama than in their own pecuniary gains," and selected plays for their literary merit. (21) Aldis's play about a woman unsuccessfully grappling with a violent husband, Mayorga saw as fitting with other one acts of "sincere purpose." Placing American social dramas within the context of those staged in European independent theatres, Mayorga said of the American short play: "With the high ideals of the free theatres and the small number of plays of the Ibsen rank, the one-act play seems the inevitable consequence." (22) In a 1916 review of Aldis's Plays for Small Stages, Theodore Ballou Hinckley, editor of Drama magazine, wrote that Aldis was an exemplar of the Little Theatre movement because her plays were models of simplicity, which amateurs could confidently produce and

young writers should follow. (23) Hinckley added that even if the movement had not yet produced its goal of an "awakened" audience, it had "achieved worthy results in its stimulation of the amateur playwright." (24)

In experimental little theatres Pierrot plays, spirit plays, and "Jack and Jill" plays were a few of the popular types. (25) It was not unusual to read one playwright's volume of six one-acts, each written in a different style. Mary MacMillan, who enjoyed experimenting with form, prefaced her second collection of one acts, More Short Plays, with a mock disclaimer: "These plays are altogether various. If you like one please do not read the others." (26) However, topical, realistic dramas replete with social commentary were particularly attractive to anthologists favoring serious plays and to audiences, who felt that through them they were given a deeper understanding of the poor, which resonated with the period's fascination with and a concern for the lower class.

Theatre as a Social Force

Drama was a major part of the cultural movement to

examine American morality. Many artists believed that America's obsession with industrial capitalism had created a nation of people whose primary moral failure was selfishness. Archibald Henderson wrote, in his 1914 book The Changing Drama, that the "prime function of the dramatist today is to bring man to a consciousness of his responsibility and to incite him to constructive measure for social reform." (27) The Seven Arts, founded in 1916 and terminated a year later, was a literary journal devoted to developing a vital American culture. The editorial view of The Seven Arts, wrote Van Wyck Brooks, who was on its advisory board, was concerned with examining the failure of the older generation "to achieve and to permit others to achieve a normal, healthy life." (28) The plays, poems, and stories the journal published were a celebration of "native" literature, the favored adjective for describing work by Americans about American subjects, language, and characters. Its critical essays attempted to guide others artists and audience members toward recognizing the value of this new literature.

Writing in the first issue, Romain Rolland, author of A People's Theatre (1903), in his essay "America and the

Arts," exhorted American artists to take advantage of their young culture, not haunted by centuries of tradition as were Europeans, and to be responsible leaders to the country:

Do not become slaves to foreign models. Your true model is within yourselves....seek out [the] people's dreams and trials; make them your own....They--the people--whose indifference to art oppresses you, are the Dumb. And since they cannot express themselves, they can not know themselves. You must be their voice. (29)

Critic Waldo Frank, in his essay "Concerning a Little Theater" in the same issue, castigated the Washington Square Players for their program of European plays staged with more mimicry than art, and for their negligible treatment of plays by Americans. (30) Both Frank and Rolland wanted playwrights to create a national drama that would reflect American life in all of its variation and homeliness. To do this successfully, said Frank, artists must not just acknowledge their lack of tradition and experience, but embrace it.

Sheldon Cheney's essay "The American Playwright and the Drama of Sincerity," published in Forum in 1914, connects to Waldo Frank's as both delineate the two major art trends, aestheticism and realism, that America had imported from Europe. (31) Cheney observed that American Broadway

playwrights had done little in aesthetic theatre--nor were there signs they would in the near future--and had failed to produce anything close to the "sincerity" that he saw in plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville Barker, whose social dramas, he wrote, "reflect contemporary life and the spirit of the age [which] is humanitarian." (32) He did see indications that beyond the "melodramatic excesses," many American playwrights were "striving to reproduce a body of drama close to the people." (33) Clearly, though, a "native" drama needed the assistance of a more plastic audience, which was developing in community and experimental art theatres.

In Waldo Frank's view, the major flaw of the Washington Square Players was their appropriation of European symbolism without having the foundation of realism against which to rebel. He believed that they had skipped the necessary steps in the evolution of dramatic art. Their productions of Schnitzler and Porto-Riche, for instance, he called toneless, imitative, and stunts of artifice that had gulled other critics. What Frank eventually concludes in his essay, with echoes of Hippolyte Taine and Ferdinand Brunetière, is that a national literature must go through

historical phases and that leaping over realism is a mistake. We must find our own "realistic roots," Frank wrote, "before dashing off in a spirit of revolt a la Andreyev, Wederkind, Maeterlinck." (34) Frank's final lines are: "We have our own fields to plough; our own reality to explore and flush with vision. Let us do this first; humbly and doggedly as lowly toilers must." (35) This meant staging amateurs' plays and risking failure. The Provincetown Players had also been praised by the critics, yet ignored the acclaim and went their own way with more concern for staging members' plays than pleasing critics. According to the anonymous "Z," writing in The Seven Arts, the Players were known as considering "plays first, audience last, and critics not at all." (36) The very raggedness of the some of the Players' productions and their willingness to forego praise set a standard of forbearance for the work of other amateurs.

In addition to the best-known Little Theatre groups primarily centered in urban areas, the mid-teens was also the beginning of the community theatre movement. Louise Burleigh, in her 1917 book The Community Theatre, defined it not as an art theatre like the Washington Square Players,

nor a settlement theatre like Alice and Irene Lewisohn's Neighborhood Playhouse, but one of democratic composition.

(37) Influenced by the civic pageants of Percy MacKaye, Burleigh outlined the community theatre as an activity that could instill a sense of democracy in a town. Burleigh wrote that this was possible by producing plays that would "awaken" a town's citizenry to an "active participation in a common interest." (38)

Alfred Arvold's Little Country Theater in Fargo, an example of a rural community theatre, which he started in 1911, was founded to benefit the many North Dakota farmers, who lived in stultifying isolation. In 1916 Arvold wrote: "The drama is a medium through which America is coming to express its highest form of democracy." (39) All of Arvold's projects were designed to get farmers active in staging plays for each other. Talent and training were not requisite; the purpose of theatre was to build a sense of community. The distinction between the Little Theatre movement and that of the community theatre can be confusing as both were primarily organized outside of the ranks of theatre professionals. Though differing in specifics, both contrasted their objectives against those of Broadway,

against its capitalistic enterprise and its undervaluing the taste of a mass audience.

Instrumental in the campaign to bring better plays to the people and to use drama for social good was the Drama League. Its founder Marjorie Best thought drama the most significant art for cultural development as it was "the most intimate, most comprehensive and most democratic medium of self-expression of the people" in its capability of addressing the expressed needs of a local community. (40)

In 1914 the Drama League of America began a campaign to bring knowledge of high quality theatre and drama to the entire country, by circulating League pamphlets to rural communities and small towns. Included in each League pamphlet was Best's stated purpose of her organization, which was to:

stimulate an interest in the best drama and to awaken the public to the importance of the theatre as a social force and to its great educational value if maintained on a high level of art and morals; to co-ordinate the work of all associations and individuals interested in educating the public to appreciate and demand the best drama. (41)

Perhaps the single most influential aspect of the Drama League was its belief that an educated public not only deserved better theatre than vaudeville or what they

considered inferior plays that were then on tour, but was capable of evaluating it. All that any community needed to enable it to discriminate between worthy and unworthy drama, in the opinion of the Drama League board, was access to the right models.

The Drama League did not want to eradicate the vaudeville circuit, but wanted instead to offer a community the choice. Not that a Drama League endorsement certified success; many managers discovered that a play advertised by the League as "worthy entertainment" often ruined sales.

(42) However, to ensure the public at least had access to written drama, the Drama League published plays, pamphlets, and its journal, Drama magazine. Best wrote: "Nothing can so improve our national dramatic taste as can the reading of the printed play." (43) The Drama League discovered an eager market in small towns and rural areas that bought the lilliputian handbooks on topics such as "Before and After Ibsen," the "Evolution of Social Ideals," and the largest seller, "Course on the One Act." (44)

In a 1915 Drama League handbook, Plays for Amateurs, editor John M. Clapp noted that "the most important aspect of the amateur drama...is its relation to the audience, to

the community." (45) Accordingly, if a play was to be considered for amateur production, the writer had to create something short, fresh, and intelligent, and any style would be considered as long as it avoided "big and noisy pieces."

(46) Short was better than long, a local setting was preferable to an exotic one, and to assist producers Clapp categorized plays. Clapp listed Zona Gale's The Neighbors as the "local type"; Synge's Riders to the Sea, a tragedy; and Lady Gregory's Rising of the Moon, a "subtly serious study." (47) Although there was a variety of styles, brevity was the key. Alice Brown's prize-winning four-act play Children of the Earth (1913), was relegated to the section for "reading" in the Boston League's "Selective List of Plays for Amateurs." (48) Brown's next publication of plays was a volume of one acts, two of which, The Sugar House and Joint Owners in Spain, were popular with non-commercial theatre groups.

The Drama League handbooks of play lists were important because they promoted the one-act play as belonging to the amateur, "a field they have only begun to cultivate" wrote Clapp, and offered models beginning writers followed. (49) What is significant in reading lists of plays endorsed by

the Drama League, beginning in 1910 and throughout the 1920s, is the mix of great artists and amateurs. In a true democratic vein, one acts were offered beside plays by Shakespeare and Racine. Starting in the non-commercial theatre could potentially lead to professional status, or at least publication. The barrier between artists and amateurs was not rigid. The Drama League assessed plays for their relevance, sympathy, and their spirit in relation to its definition of the theatre as a social force. The objectives of the community theatre, the Drama League, and the more high-brow intellectual journals were not so different. There was an earnest search for plays giving voice to the American experience, reflecting in its use of form and language the local and the topical.

Not waiting for submissions, the call was out to closet dramatists, as a notice in the New York Times attests: "Have you any little one-act plays at home? If so, send them to May Tully, Palace Theatre." (50) Who could guess the fate of one's play, if only it could get a hearing? There was a receptive audience that was granted credit for appreciating the new drama, especially if it was sincerely rendered and evinced an investment in democratic principles. These

qualities were more important than professional credentials. Thus, the plays reveal this lucky intersection of circumstances that produced them: a concern with social problems; the decentralization of the theatre; a market for one-act plays; an interest in developing new forms in drama; and a belief that sincerity was more important than experience in the development of an authentic American drama.

The Tenement Plays: The Shadowed Star, Mrs. Pat and the Law, and Daily Bread

Mary Louise MacMillan wrote three volumes of plays published between 1915 and 1922. All of the plays in her first book, Short Plays, were presented by the Cincinnati College Club or the Cincinnati Woman's Club. In the preface MacMillan described her process of playwriting:

Some are born dramatists--like Shakespeare, some achieve dramatic construction--like Ibsen, some have drama thrust upon them--like me. I did not lisp in numbers, for the numbers came, but rather I was locked up alone in a room with a crust of bread and a tincup of water and commanded to write a drama that could be produced by five or six women in forty-five minutes without scenery on a stage as big as a good-sized book. (51)

MacMillan's publisher, Stewart and Kidd advertised Short Plays as a collection of sure-fire successes that filled a "long-felt want." (52) The following quote, taken from Review of Reviews, singles out The Shadowed Star as her best piece:

Mary MacMillan offers...a collection of pleasant one to three-act plays for women's clubs, girls' schools, and home parlour productions....The Shadowed Star, the best of the collection, is a Christmas Eve tragedy. The Star is shadowed by our thoughtless inhumanity to those who serve us and our forgetfulness of the needy. The Old Woman, gone daft, who babbles in a kind of mongrel Kiltartan, of the Shepherds, the Blessed Babe, of the Fairies, rowan berries, roses and dancing, while her daughter dies on Christmas Eve, is a splendid characterization. (53)

MacMillan wrote at the beginning of the Little Theatre movement and during the Progressive era; with The Shadowed Star she connected to both. Initially, MacMillan wrote the play to benefit the Cincinnati branch of the Consumers' League, and The Shadowed Star was published separately by the League. (54) Her one act gave six actresses an experience with the new dramatic art as it helped guide an audience of middle-class women to think about their responsibility to the poor.

The Shadowed Star dramatized the League's request that

the public "shop early" at Christmas and that consumers not patronize stores employing children as messengers. The shop early campaign, which shamed the public into thinking beyond their "orgy of holiday buying," was summarized, in a 1925 League pamphlet, as one of its first successes:

For...thousands of workers in factories and stores Christmas had become chiefly a season of weariness due to excessive work, followed often by illness and even by death. 'Shop Early' was a slogan new in the early days of the League's existence, and soon exceedingly popular. (55)

The political goal of the Consumers' League, which the play helped to promote, was the passage of protective legislation on behalf of all workers, and especially women and children. The League's initial campaign, begun in 1890, was to entreat shoppers, primarily women of the upper- and middle-classes, to buy only at stores deserving to appear on the League's white list. (56) A white list store provided its employees with sanitary toilet facilities, allowed seats for shop-girls, did not hire children for deliveries, and kept to ten hour days during Christmas and Easter, as opposed to the quite usual fourteen. The purpose of the white list campaign was to make middle-class women aware that as purchasers they wielded power. Later, as League members,

women agitated for changes in city ordinances and state and federal laws, but first the League needed to arouse their outrage and sympathy.

The Consumers' League of Ohio, with headquarters in Cleveland, was organized in 1900; in 1905 the Toledo, Canton, and Cincinnati branches were started. The rapid-fire proliferation of groups in smaller cities gives some understanding of middle-class women's eagerness to join a charitable organization. In 1926, Maud Nathan, president of the New York City League, wrote a history of the Consumers' League, The Story of an Epoch-making Movement, which detailed the gains made by each state. (57) The Ohio League, according to Nathan, helped to establish laws that reduced women's hours and raised the age of working children to sixteen; in addition, League women exerted enough pressure on store owners to effect the early closing of stores during the Christmas season.

There is no mention of better wages or the surety that these laws and city ordinances were consistently enforced, but middle-class women had become aware of their role as conscious consumers as they discovered more about the lives of the workers who served them. A member from Toledo

testified to the League's affecting a great change in her group's attitude toward the poor and spoke of the sense of achievement she and her fellow-members felt since becoming involved in the organization. She told Nathan: "The work has been a glory in the lives of those who were permitted through the League to understand better the noble aspiration of thousands of working women!" (58)

The Cincinnati branch distinguished itself from the rest of the state, Nathan reported, by having had two plays written for it:

The Cincinnati League presented its cause in a picturesque and dramatic manner, through the medium of two original plays, written especially for it. One a comedy entitled: Merry Xmas!, giving the harassed shopper's point of view; the other a touching tragedy called The Shadowed Star, founded upon actual conditions which showed the hardships of overburdened workers at the holiday season. (59)

The Shadowed Star is set in a room of a tenement house furnished with an armless rocking chair, two beds, and an old-fashioned safe with a perforated tin front that contains a few pieces of broken crockery and the last of the family's food. In the center of the room is a small table, on which stands a small evergreen tree. Two women, Mary, who is sick and lying on a narrow cot, and her mother, who sits in the

rocker, are spending their first Christmas in America waiting for Mary's daughters to return from their job at a department store. Too sick and too old to work themselves, the women live on the earnings of the young girls. The men in the family have stayed in Ireland while the women have emigrated alone. They refer to Ireland as the "ould counthry, where there was nothin' to buy wid the money ye didn't have." (60)

However, life is not much better in America with hunger, illness, low wages, long hours, and the need for children of poor families to work. During the women's Christmas Eve vigil, as they wait for the girls to return, they are visited by three neighbors, each of whom comes asking for help. And to each the women give: their last scrap of tea to the first neighbor; a meal of bread to nine year-old Timmie, who is about to set out on an eight mile walk to deliver a basket of Mexican Beauty roses; and finally, the women try and comfort the third visitor, a laundress, who stops in after work to tell the women about the evictions, deaths, and problems of the other tenement families. When the women remind their third visitor that it is Christmas, she says, "with a sneer":

Christmas Eve don't seem to prevent people from dyin' an' bein' turned out o' house an' home. Did ye hear how bad the dipthery is? They say as how if it gits much worse they'll have to close the school in our ward. Two o' the Homan childern's dead with it. The first one wasn't sick but two days, an' they say his face turned black 'fore he died. But it's a good thing they're gone, for the Homans ain't got enough to feed the other six. (61)

Beyond the visits of the three neighbors there is very little action, which allows the audience to concentrate on life in a tenement. Mary, gasping on her cot, describes the air in the room: "These fogs an' smoke choke me so." (62) The play ends with the ringing of the midnight bells and the girls returning home to find their grandmother asleep in the rocker and their mother dead.

The Shadowed Star, a morality tale that deliberately echoes Dickens' A Christmas Carol, reminded the audience that which stores to patronize and what time to shop were moral decisions. Little Timmie, "pale and dirty," knows Christmas is near because he and his sisters must work longer hours:

I got to work till midnight every night, an' I'm so sleepy I drop off in the cars whenever I get a seat. An' the girls is at the store so early an' late they don't get time to cook me nothin' to eat. (63)

The play also informed its audience about the living

conditions of many workers. Aided by the endorsement of the Consumers' League, MacMillan's play was regarded by its middle-class actresses and audience as a true measure of tenement life. In addition, a play written to be performed by amateurs to audiences of club women correlated to the League's method of educating the public through museum exhibits. Aware of the "eye-minded public," the League sent suitcases of material, consisting of photographs, maps, and even samples of tainted clothing stitched in home sweatshops that traveled the Chautauqua and college circuit. One of the most popular, the "Tuberculosis Exhibit," was quite persuasive in showing women that they were protecting their own families when they bought at "white label" stores, which sold only sanitary products. (64)

The play, as described by Review of Reviews, was considered a testament to Christian giving. However, The Shadowed Star offered its audience a different perspective on the efficacy of having only Christmas charity to rely on. The problems of the tenement families could only be solved through protective legislation and the passage of a minimum wage bill, which were the goals laid out by Florence Kelley, the General Secretary of the Consumers' League from 1899

until 1932. (65) Kelley pointed out that abolishing child labor without a minimum wage meant ruin to families, who needed the children's income. Timmie, who lives with his sisters, tells the women he can not stay and celebrate Christmas with them because if he wants to eat, he must work, adding, "I ain't had nothin' since a wienerwurst at eleven o'clock." (66)

The first neighbor thinks the women are lucky to have girls too young to marry, but who can work. In her fight for a decent minimum wage for women, most of whom worked in jobs unprotected by labor unions, Florence Kelley said:

So long as women's wages rest upon the assumption that every woman has a husband, father, brother, or lover contributing to her support, so long these incidents of women's industrial employment (tuberculosis, insanity, vice) are inevitable. (67)

Marriage for the women's first neighbor means more people to feed and an abusive husband to tolerate. After getting the tea, she hurries from the room, saying as she leaves, (wiping the tears from her eyes): "I've got to go home to the childer an' give thim their tay. Pat's gone to the saloon agin, an' tomorrow bein' Christmas I misdoubt he'll be terrible dhrunk agin, an' me on'y jist well from the blow in the shoulder the last time." (68) Thus MacMillan

displays a range of problems that broaden the political platform beyond that of the shop-early campaign.

The Shadowed Star underscores the decency of the working poor by showing that poverty is not a moral failure but a political one. The audience is to understand that these women, like many workers trapped by low wages and poor working conditions, deserve a chance to improve their lives. Though set in a bare room, it is not about human wreckage, nor about the poor looking for alms. Rather, as the Irish women give all that they have, it demonstrates the charity between equals, which was one of reciprocity as workers tried to help each other as best they could. MacMillan's play reflects the thinking of many Progressive reformers, who believed that people of the lower-class were the ones capable of imparting lessons about community and sacrifice. Jane Addams wrote, in Democracy and Social Ethics, a compilation of lectures that she had given in 1902:

The daintily clad charitable visitor who steps into the little house made untidy by the vigorous efforts of her hostess, the washerwoman, is no longer sure of her superiority to the latter; she recognizes that her hostess after all represents social value and industrial use, as over against her own parasitic cleanliness and a social standing attained only through guilt. (69)

MacMillan's attitude toward the poor is not merely sympathetic and respectful; the two main characters set a standard of conduct that requests its own reciprocity from the audience. Reminiscent of performances of temperance dramas that had men and women waiting in the lobby for converts to sign the "cold water pledge," the moment to gather new members for League work, one surmises, would be as the audience rose from their seats.

The Shadowed Star helped to establish MacMillan's reputation as having "written more worthwhile one-act plays than any other writer." (70) This assessment was made by Ethel Theodora Rockwell, who, in 1923, prepared a study course on the American one-act play for the Women's Club Section of the University of North Carolina's Extension Division. Rockwell, one of the original members of the Wisconsin Players, was herself a playwright and pageant writer. (71)

In her discussion of the Chicago Little Theatre scene, Rockwell included Mary Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law. Rockwell introduced Aldis as founder of one of the first Little Theatres in the country, the Lake Forest Players, and as being "one of the leading workers in social service in

Chicago." (72) Aldis's sympathetic treatment of an abused wife was her most representative work, Rockwell wrote, and added that the play was based on a real incident that had been related to Aldis by a friend who was a district nurse in Chicago.

Mrs. Pat and the Law, set in a "small, poor room" of a Chicago tenement, is about Nora O'Flaherty, who takes in laundry to support her crippled son Jimmie and her unemployed husband Pat. When the play begins Nora is bent over her steaming washtub with an "ugly red cut" across her forehead made by Pat the night before, when he came home drunk and threw his boots at her. When the district nurse, Miss Carroll, comes to tend Jimmie, she is appalled by the gash on Nora's forehead. She urges Nora to go to the local police station and have Pat locked up for a day or two, which is, she says, Nora's right. Miss Carroll continues:

As I've told you before, I've no patience with you for putting up with such treatment. Don't you know the law would protect you? You ought to swear out a warrant for your husband's arrest on the grounds of personal violence. That might teach him a lesson. This is the third time now in a month he's struck you. (73)

Miss Carroll's most persuasive argument is that the arrest may scare Pat into finally getting a job. While Nora is at

the station, Pat emerges from the next room where he has been sleeping. He discovers from Jimmie where Nora has gone and when she returns, he begins to cry, saying to his son "I don't deserve her. I don't." (74)

Beguiled by his repentance, Nora chases the policeman from the flat after he arrives to arrest Pat. When she sees Miss Carroll, who stops in with a gift for Jimmie, she blames the nurse: "You're a wicked, interferin' woman, a-makin' me do them awful things to me pore man there! Look at him, so sweet and gentlelike!" (75) The nurse apologizes for giving advice and admits it is against policy to interfere in personal matters. The play ends with Pat wheedling fifteen cents from his wife for "carfare" to look for a job, and as he leaves whistling, the stage direction reads, "Nora wilts." (76)

Aldis contrasts Nora's timid attempt to stand up for herself with the organized militancy of the suffrage movement. The reference is made by the policeman, who, on being told to leave and reflecting on a suffrage march he has recently witnessed, says: "Next time one of them suffragist ladies ask me what I think, I'll tell her I think women is fools, that's what I'll tell her." (77) Unlike the

solidarity of suffrage workers, home-bound women lacked a powerful female network. Like the Neighbor in The Shadowed Star, Nora is resigned to supporting her drunken husband and explains to Miss Carroll that Pat is as much of a child as Jimmie is, "foolish and lovin' and helpless like, and I love 'em both." (78)

Mrs. Pat was first performed in 1913, with Aldis as Nora, "for the amusement of some visiting nurses," according to the caption of a later publication of the play. (79) The nurses' amusement at Miss Carroll's failure to intervene was most likely rueful. The play ends with the certainty that the violence will continue, at least until the victim decides to cooperate. Though Theodore Ballou Hinckley called the play a "tenement comedy," in his 1915 review of Aldis's volume Plays for Small Stages, there is an uneasy contrast between Pat's blarney, in the long-winded fairy tale he begins to tell his son, and his violent behavior the night before. (80) The audience is spared further evidence of what happens in the home beyond the cut on Nora's face and Miss Carroll's comment that within the past weeks it has happened twice before, but the implication is that the violence is escalating. After Miss Carroll dashes out to

her next appointment, Pat leaves for the saloon, and Jimmie turns to his books, Nora is left as she was when the play began, bent over her washtub in the crowded, hot, and untidy room.

Margaret Mayorga categorized Mrs. Pat and the Law in Representative One-Act Plays as a "dramatic episode," similar to that of Eugene O'Neill's In the Zone, which shows the passage of the steamer through a war zone. Though there is tension in O'Neill's scene, there is no development, and the sailors, writes Mayorga, are "no farther advanced at the end of the play than [they were] at the beginning." (81) As with MacMillan's play, the plot of Mrs. Pat is overshadowed by the exposition of life in a tenement. Aldis's point is not to resolve Nora's domestic crisis, but to give an audience a greater understanding of it. Despite Nora's failure to do as the nurse advises, the audience is to see that Nora's decision is based on her loyalty to her family, who rely on her to support them. Marriage for working-class women often means more dependents. Miss Carroll, a single, professional woman, whose mobility is underscored by her entering and exiting twice, says (almost gleefully) to Nora, as she leaves at the end of the play: "You see, I haven't

any man of my own, so I suppose it's hard for me to understand married life." (82)

Mary Katharine Reely's Daily Bread is also about the inability of a father to provide for his family, which means both his wife and children must go to work. Reely, educated at the University of Michigan, worked for the Wisconsin Free Library Commission before becoming a professor at the University of Wisconsin in 1930. Editors Leroy Phillips and Theodore Johnson, who included her play The Lean Years in their 1927 one-act anthology, wrote of Reely:

The material of her writings for the stage is found in interests deep-seated in human emotion--the concerns of daily life, its routine and its crises. Two examples of such short plays are Daily Bread and A Window to the South, which must move everyone, especially the socially awake. (83)

Daily Bread is set in a four-family tenement house in a mid-western city in a room described as one of "clean respectable poverty." (84) The play opens with Mrs. Boyd hurrying about the room preparing an Irish stew. She is excited because her husband, who has been out of a job for so long, is about to return from his first day of work. In anticipation of a steady wage, Mrs. Boyd has bought meat and vegetables on credit, which will be the family's first meal

in weeks beyond that of bread and tea. Mr. Boyd's job at the local flour mill was arranged for him by Miss Davis, the neighborhood Settlement worker. Miss Davis, a "good-looking young woman, dressed in a stylish but plain and business-like suit," considers finding Mr. Boyd a job a significant accomplishment compared to much of her work that she calls "trifling." (85) His job means that Mrs. Boyd will not have to work at nights as a scrub woman and most important, that Alice, the eldest child who is thirteen, will be able to stay in school.

While Mrs. Boyd and Alice wait for his return, Miss Davis and their upstairs neighbor, Mrs. Shultz visit. Mrs. Shultz, like the other women in the tenement house, works scrubbing office buildings. She has stopped in to see if Mrs. Boyd is coming too, adding that their neighbor Mrs. Atkins has quit for the day to have her baby. Mrs. Atkins had to work until the day she gave birth because, says Mrs. Shultz, "her man's sent up to the workhouse for vagrancy--and there's three others besides the one that's on the way." (86) Mrs. Schultz shares her dinner of cinnamon rolls with the other women; the women agree that they can easily subsist on a diet of bread and tea, but for men it is

much harder. They talk about Alice's progress at school, the gym classes at the Settlement, and the recent lecture given to tenement families on the need to budget. Even Miss Davis laughs at the ridiculously high \$950 annual income on which the economist based her weekly food plan to accommodate an "average American family of five." Mrs. Boyd has the requisite number in her family, but adds, "If I only had the \$950, I'd be all right! but I ain't been having it this year, by a long sight!" (87) Miss Davis tells her that Mr. Boyd's job has solved her problems, yet when he arrives home he tells the women he has been fired.

Though only forty years old he is too weak to shovel wheat and lost his place to a young man. Miss Davis offers to intervene, but realizes she cannot restore the strength he has lost, and unable to do anything to help except to find him a job not requiring physical labor, she leaves "trying not to lose her professional composure." (88) The play ends with Mrs. Boyd getting her scrub pail to leave with Mrs. Schultz. She tactfully explains to him that it is "all the style now for married women to work--it's called being economically independent. I heard about it at the Settlement. Sure, John, you want your wife to be up-to-

date." (89) Throughout the play Alice has been waiting to show her father her report card. After her mother leaves, she comforts him by promising to get a work permit next month when she turns fourteen and find a job so she can help support the family. Alice's plan to quit school only adds to her father's sense of worthlessness; the play ends with his reaction: "The man's shoulders sink lower." (90)

These one acts about tenement life differ from many of the full-length plays about women written during the Progressive Era, which concentrate on the conflict between a middle-class, educated woman's actual abilities and her lack of commensurate status. (91) Plays about lower-class households follow a different pattern as they show how women are ruled more by material circumstances than they are by men of their class. The plays reverse Thorstein Veblen's phrase, which defines women as ornaments of successful men, by showing first the absence of monied men in the households. When men are part of the family, they are often underemployed and at home, thus are the women deprived a separate "feminized" domestic sphere indexing male wealth and privilege. In fact, Aldis and Reely show their main female characters attempting to mask the inability of men to

dominate financially. Jailing Pat means the removal of the symbolic head of the family, something that is, perhaps, more painful than physical injury. Plays about tenement families also assisted middle-class women's understanding that the affects of gentility--a clean house and a neat appearance--belong to those who can afford it.

A Rural Play: A Window to the South

Mary K. Reely, who described herself as primarily concerned with problems of rural and community development, in 1918, prepared a study outline, Country Life and Rural Problems. (92) The purpose of the outline was to encourage rural people in developing an interest in life beyond the business of farming and housekeeping by referring them to articles that would help them improve their homes, churches, schools, and neighborhoods. A book in Reely's bibliography, which she marked as one of the most important, was Henry S. Curtis's 1914 Play and Recreation for the Open County. Curtis's chapter, "Recreation for the Farm Wife," begins by delineating the conditions common to many farm women. He wrote:

The woman's work is indoors. With her long hours she might almost as well be in the city, so far as any contact with birds or sunsets or an outdoor life is concerned. If a woman's laundry and baking are done out...she can easily reduce her hours of labor to five or six, which is quite as much as any woman with children should be expected to give to her house. (93)

Unfortunately, the main obstacle to many women's happier life on the farm was their husbands. Curtis explained the extreme parsimony demonstrated by land-hungry farmers by relating an incident that occurred at a farmers' institute, where a group was meeting to discuss the benefits of a communal laundry, which would cost each family ten cents per load. A well-to-do farmer asked, "What would my wife do if she didn't save that ten cents?" Curtis hoped that that farmer was the exception: "Any farmer ought to be ashamed to have a wife whose time is not worth more than ten or twenty cents a day to her family." (94) Reely's play dramatizes the concerns Curtis raised in his book and that her study outline attempted to meet.

A Window to the South resembles Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story "The Yellow Wallpaper," yet instead of an over-protective husband who will not let his wife stir from her darkened room, Mr. Stockman, a successful farmer, does not let his wife rest. (95) The play, set in a farm

kitchen, is about the toll taken by a woman's twenty-eight years of unending work and her husband's neglect of her request for a window. The room is described as dim, and the "back wall--the south wall of the kitchen--is conspicuously blank." (96) The single window in the kitchen, small and set low, faces the barn, placed there so "Ma" knows when to set the table for dinner. The farm is a prosperous one, but only by denying Ma inexpensive luxuries. Even a small patch of land next to the house where she planted flowers her son Hank dug out to put in cabbage.

What Ma misses most is a kitchen window with a southern exposure, which her husband promised her he would put in during the first months of their marriage, but never did. For the past year Ma no longer eats much and spends her days aimlessly wandering about the house. Because she can no longer work, Mr. Stockman has hired Lucy, from a neighboring farm, to help his daughter Hat clean the house and cook meals. The play begins with Lucy and Hat baking biscuits, though it is a very hot morning. Lucy wonders why, when Hank drove to town the night before for binder twine, he did not buy bread to eliminate their having to bake. Hat explains that their father never eats bakers' bread because

he thinks it is an unnecessary expense. The money saved by such economy has gone toward a new barn, farm machinery, and more land. Lucy responds to Pa's success as a farmer by declaiming the play's message: "Yes you told me about your Pa's barn--and what he could do for the boys--but what's getting on ever done for you and your Ma?" (97)

The result of constant work is Ma's listlessness and lack of appetite. The local doctor, having failed to find anything wrong with her, brings in Dr. Sedgwick, an "alienist," whom Reely also refers to as the "Great Specialist." (98) Ma tells Dr. Sedgwick that for years she has longed for flowers, sunlight, and a large window with a southern exposure. She also confides in the doctor that before her husband put in the window--"we did get the window cut in of course"--she used to hallucinate that it was there.

I'd dream about it--and I'd think about it when I was in the other parts of the house, making up beds or sweeping--I'd think about a south window in the kitchen, and how bright and pleasant it would be--and how I'd have white curtains and flowers in the winter--red geraniums in bloom--and a Christmas cactus like we used to have at home...Well, I used to think that so hard and imagine about it in my mind until I'd believe it! Then I'd come out here--and it wouldn't be so! And it would be just like a shock to me--and I couldn't believe it. (99)

When she finishes speaking, turns to the blank wall, and realizes the window is really not there after all, she covers her face and begins to cry. The play ends with the "Great Specialist step[ping] up to the broken woman" and taking her hands from her eyes, as Mr. Stockman enters with a T-square and carpenter's tools to cut out a window in the kitchen wall. (100) Reely ends the play with the focus on Mr. Stockman, who, she writes, is the most tragic figure in the room. Reely shows him to be well-meaning, but whose life is as unbalanced as Ma's so obsessed had he become with the business of farming.

Though farm plays did not become popular until the 20s, with the increase of university playwriting courses and the fascination with folk subject material, A Window to the South lays out the major issues concerning rural women. In a 1931 article for Drama magazine, "The Farmer Goes to the Theatre," Henry Bailey Stevens mentioned Reely along with dramatists Alice Brown, Zona Gale, and Paul Green as having done "pioneering work" in their plays that "expressed the familiar characters and dialogue of rural people." (101) However, Reely's play is more optimistic than most of the farm plays written in the 20s. Not only does Ma get her

window, but Lucy, who has been dating Hank, discovers that it is Charley, whose ideas about a small farm with room for a flower patch and days off from work, are closer to her own. The positive tone of the play indicates that Reely was writing for the rural audience she addressed in her Country Life outline. People who would, she hoped, "learn from what others have done and put the new ideas into practice." (102)

A Mill-Town Play: Honey

In 1903 the National Consumers League began investigating the exploitation of children in cotton mills. The state of Georgia was a principal offender and was brought to trial by the League in a series of lawsuits that attempted to make it a misdemeanor for fathers to live off the wages of their children. Florence Kelley wrote, in her 1905 report Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation, that on her visit to a Georgia mill she had seen children as young as five going to work. She reported:

[This] writer has seen children at work in Georgia mill who were pitifully stunted if they were eight years old. There is, in Georgia, no restriction upon the hours of work and usage calls for eleven hours in twenty-four. It was, therefore, due merely to the good will of their

employer, that these little boys and girls were not required to form part of a shift of workers at night. (103)

Kelley concluded that despite the lawsuits, "the cotton mills of Georgia are doubling their spindles...and new villages grow up along the line of the Southern Railway almost between spring and autumn." (104) Although there is no evidence that MacMillan wrote Honey for the benefit of the Consumers' League, it closely resembles Kelley's criticism of mill owners, who ignore the "right to childhood," and reflects Kelley's belief that it would continue until the public was alerted.

Mary MacMillan's Honey, set in an unplastered one-room cabin in a southern mill town in 1917, shows how women and children work, while the men wait at home for the money. The play dramatizes the cycle of poverty that trapped women; as children they worked for their fathers and after marriage, for their husbands. MacMillan denotes characters according to their relation to the mill. She wrote: "The characters have not been given names because they are all types or symbols rather. The Child only, being the most distinct with sweetness and strength, is called by the name her mother used." (105)

The short play--able to be performed in under an hour-- is divided into four acts that begins in the spring and ends the following autumn. Honey opens with a family of mountaineers--a man, a woman, and their child, Honey--moving to a mill town so the mother and child can work. Like all the other men, the father sits in the cabin and waits for women to return with their wages. In a scene that would have made an appropriate caption to Kelley's indictment of men living off children, Honey's father sits smoking his pipe while out the window "mill children are seen going by, most of them pale, listless bits of humanity." (106) Visits to the cabin from the Mill-woman, Mill-girl, and Neighbor fill in details of their lives. The Mill-girl is desperate to get away from her father so she can keep the money she makes and in Act I she tells Honey that she plans on getting married. In Act II the Mill-girl, now married and pregnant, believes life is even worse than before:

I wish I hadn't got married. A person plans to get married and save all her wages and not have to give them to her Pap, but instead you'll be having babies and be sick and miserable....Don't you never think you are going to better yourself by getting married. You ain't. You're going to worse it. (107)

Present throughout the play, though never seen, is the

Teacher, who haunts the town trying to persuade the girls to put off marriage until they have gone to school.

The Mill-girl fled from the Teacher and regrets it; Honey, on the other hand, wanted to come to town because she knew the Teacher lived near by. Once in the mountains she had seen the Teacher, who described to her what an education could do. Honey told the Mill-girl about the Teacher's visit:

It was one day up in the mountains the Teacher came, last spring....It was like a angel's visit. And I heard tell how you can get larning. How girls can larn to be strong and clean and take care of themselves, how they can larn to do all kinds of useful things and help others to be happy. The Teacher told me all that. (108)

After her mother dies from tuberculosis, Honey fulfills her dream by finding the Teacher and liberates herself from the robotic mill life by getting an education.

Protests against the abuse of women and children by the textile industry were largely ineffective as it proved to be one of the most difficult to reform. According to the National Consumers' League's 1925 pamphlet, listing the major investigations undertaken by the League since its formation, the textile industry was compared to tenement sweatshops, which were only slowly being abolished:

Long hours, dangerous machinery unguarded, neglect of elementary principles of hygiene, wage scales for men so low that wives and children have always been drawn into the mills--these were as characteristic of the textile industry as they had once been of the needle trades. (109)

In addition to the muckraking exposure of horrific conditions in cotton mills, MacMillan indicts the paradigm of female dependence. Only by following the advice of the mysterious, always off-stage Teacher, who has transcended the confinement of gender and is instead "a angel," does Honey escape the mill. The Teacher liberates young girls by showing them how to care for themselves so they can in turn help others. Waiting on the benevolence of the mill owners or fathers and husbands means relegating responsibility to someone else, which the Mill-girl calls "wors[ing] it."

The one-act play was for the depiction of a single situation, according to George Pierce Baker, who added it "should deal with characters static rather than in the process of development." (110) In MacMillan's four acts, the child Honey transforms into an adolescent and more importantly, eludes domestic confinement. Unlike Honey, who with the help of the Teacher, devises an escape that takes her off-stage and far away from the cabin, the greatest fear of the women in the next two plays is being displaced from

their homes. The formal strictures of a one act made it particularly suitable for depictions of home-bound women, who feared change.

The Small Town Plays: The Poor House and The Old Order

Louise Driscoll's The Poor House and Evelyn Emig's The Old Order are about weak, dependent women, who, though working ceaselessly in their little houses, have never supported themselves economically. The two plays are about the women's fate when they are forced from their homes. Driscoll's The Poor House is set in Miss Hattie's kitchen in a cottage in Catskill, New York, the neighborhood where Driscoll lived. Hattie supports her nineteen year-old nephew Wash on the little money her father has left her, and when the play begins Hattie tells him that they only have the house for eight more months before it will be sold to the bank. At that time she will move to the Old Ladies' Home for which she has saved her money. She says, feeling the bills in her pocket:

I've got four hundred and twenty-seven dollars...that I've scrimped and pinched and saved. My, it looks good to me when I take it out and feel of it! Three hundred will put me in the

Old Ladies' Home down in the village and they say
I can have the interest on the rest as long as I
live. I'm safe. (111)

Eviction is inevitable, but at least Hattie will not have to go to the local poor house where fellow-spinster, Lannie Frear, is being taken to that day. All day Hattie avoids looking out of the window for fear of seeing the poor house wagon. Two of Hattie's neighbors, who know of her fragile money situation, come and visit bringing food. The scene allows Driscoll to comment on love and money, two things that Miss Hattie's sentimental neighbor, Mrs. Tompkins says "can't be bought and sold." (112) Miss Hattie disagrees, remembering that her last church visit cut into the money she was setting aside for the Old Ladies Home. Both she and Lannie Frear are spinsters, who have had to limp along on little, but Hattie adds having husbands did not make either her mother or her sister's lives happy. Her father never let her mother "say her soul was her own," and she and her sister were frightened by him; Hattie tells Mrs. Tompkins that just like going to church you have to "pay for love all right." (113)

However, Hattie is not spared the Poor House. She has never been able to discipline her nephew, Wash. Before the

play begins Wash has smashed a car that he had taken for a joy-ride and during the play he discovers he will have to go to the Reformatory unless he pays three hundred dollars to repair the car. Hattie gives him the money and forfeits the allotment she had set aside for the Old Ladies' Home. She blames herself for Wash's weakness. If she had a stronger character and cared more she would have been stricter and fought with him, but that was too difficult. In the first scene Wash repeatedly taunts her, which demand from her a fight. Hattie responds with silence. She does not take much interest in him and thinks that his job as a delivery-boy is good enough. Though on the surface a neat, kindly woman, she proves to be as passive and weak as she claims. She is the kind of person, she says of herself and her entire family, "that keep the Poor House going." (114)

In Evelyn Emig's The Old Order two mothers must move in together so their children, who support them, can afford to marry. The main character, "the Mother," old at fifty-two, has had a to struggle to make ends meet. Though her life has been hard, Emig writes, "the time has come when she can rest form her labors." (115) She is a widow who has raised three sons and now lives off the youngest, Charles, who is

twenty-five. The play opens with an example of the Mother's useless labor, performed fitfully, as she wraps her son's lunch and then unwraps it to add a salt shaker, only to wrap and rewrap it again. The crisis of the play occurs when Mother's neighbor, Mrs. Redmond, tells her that Charles and her daughter Cissy want to get married. Mrs. Redmond has a plan: the women will live together in her house, give the Mother's house to Charles, and then the two women will get jobs as file clerks at the local factory working alongside old spinster, Sue Wiser. Mrs. Redmond is thrilled with the idea: "It would be fine, Ann. What'll we feel like--earnin' our livin' at this time of life? (She starts gaily out.) I won't even breathe it to Cissy till Monday." (116) The prospect is too much for the Mother. After Mrs. Redmond leaves, the Mother goes to the cabinet, takes out a bottle of poison, and drinks it. At curtain Charles finds her dead in the sitting room of the little house where she has lived for thirty years.

The fate of the respectable housewife, according to Emig, is to age prematurely, become homebound, depend on others for support, and choose death over change. Mother's house, where she has lived since she married, is crowded

with knickknacks, shabby furniture, and "cluttered with useless objects...; one thing only is missing; the knitted motto 'God Bless Our Home.' No--there it is, above the center window, its top almost touching the ceiling." (117) Emig's ironic description of the Mother's tomb-like home resembles Mary McCarthy's observations, in her essay "The American Realist Playwrights, that "in the realist drama, the accessories of the action are described at length by the playwright." (118) In Emig's play, the Mother has become an accessory, barely distinguishable from the other useless objects. McCarthy adds that critics, who dismiss the realist box set as being old-fashioned, miss the point as it is supposed to "resemble a coffin...revealing the corpse within, looking, as all embalmed corpses are said to do 'just as if it were alive'." (119) This seems particularly applicable to Mother, who appears to have been buried alive years before, and given an opportunity for freedom, chooses instead to finish the job. Charles ensures this will continue into the next generation since he insists that his fiancée, Cissy, quit her job to stay home and be the housewife his mother was.

Emig announces the political solution early in the

play. When old Sue Wiser passes by the window on her way to work at the factory on Saturday afternoon, the Mother shakes her head sympathetically, and says of Sue:

Poor soul.--I declare it's terrible....
Working, working, working, jes to keep herself
alive. It ain't like she was young, with
somethin' ahead of her. You don't mind work then.
But she's getting old and feeble; feebler all the
time. An' she can't ever stop cause there's no
one to care for her. (120)

Charles responds by declaiming: "There ought to be a law, to pension old people, like they do with soldiers;" and the money should come, he thinks, from the "young, strong people of the country." (121) Mother considers this an aspect of Charles' radical tendencies, of which she disapproves. Emig's criticism, though, is aimed at narrow, constricted thinking such as Mother's, which she contrasts with Mrs. Redmond's feeling of exhilaration at the opportunity of finally becoming independent of her daughter, which has made her ashamed.

Sociologist Willystine Goodsell wrote in her 1928 monograph, Problems of the Family, that until women were employed outside the home, self-supporting, and contributing to their families, they would be treated with scorn.

When the majority of women are engaged in gainful work, the semi-parasitism of so disturbing a

number of married women at present will inevitably meet with increasing social disapproval....Idle married women, who have not regular employment within the home or outside it, and who are content to be maintained in indolent comfort by overworked husbands, will more and more fall under a social ban. (122)

Emig's The Old Order indicates the growing derision aimed at women content to rely upon others for their living. The social efficacy of women's one-act plays was thus extended beyond that of exposing the suffering of poor women to interrogating the ideal of homemaking and a protracted motherhood. However, as Emig shows, overthrowing entrenched cultural conditioning is very difficult.

In 1916, Jessie Taft wrote in her essay, "The Woman's Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness," that "people are afraid to let their values be tampered with...and having identified women from the beginning with sex and family, they dread...any alteration." (123) Charles can see where the government should step in, but can not fathom his wife continuing to work after marriage. The key to the success of the woman's movement, according to Willystine Goodsell, was a "fundamental change in mores," which demanded "practical weapons." (124) She wrote: "A transformation of social custom can be realized solely by

continuous effort to enlighten and convince the popular mind." (125) For evidence, Goodsell refers the reader to the impact Ibsen's A Doll's House has had on audiences and concludes her chapter with the final scene between Torvald and Nora.

The playwrights considered here, who were part of the first generation of Little Theatre playwrights, were interested in the use of drama to engage in topics of social reform and issues of concern to their middle-class audiences. The playwrights' object was, as some of them stated, to help both the reform of theatre and their communities. Their one-act plays concerning women entrapped by poverty and/or cultural conditioning, became a model for other amateur writers, who studied them in women's clubs and college drama courses. Dorothy Chansky talks about the ambivalence some audiences had toward theatre reform because at its most experimental it became, as Chansky writes, "too freaky." (126) Alternatively, these realistic one-act plays allowed an audience to concentrate on the subject matter as it demonstrated to beginning writers how they too could use the humble form to express themselves.

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise indicated page numbers of the plays refer to the following editions. Mary MacMillan's The Shadowed Star in Short Plays (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1915); MacMillan's Honey in More Short Plays (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1917); Mary Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law in Plays for Small Stages (New York: Duffield and Company, 1915); Louise Driscoll's The Poor House in More One-Act Plays by Modern Authors, ed. Helen Louise Cohen (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927); Evelyn Emig's The Old Order in Poet Lore 32 (Winter 1921); Mary Katharine Reely's Daily Bread and A Window to the South in One-Act Plays (White Plains, N.Y.: H.W. Wilson Company, 1919).
2. Aldis, Mrs. Pat and the Law, 1; Emig, The Old Order, 586; Reely, A Window to the South, 21; and MacMillan, Honey, 49.
3. Robert Bremner, From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 201.
4. Sophonisba Breckinridge, Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Their Political, Social and Economic Activities (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), 258. According to Robyn Muncy the social service profession which was then developing, drew upon the model of women's volunteerism that had begun in the nineteenth century and meeting the needs of women and children remained a central concern. See Muncy's Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
5. Karen J. Blair, The Torchbearers, 146.
6. Dorothy Chansky, "Composing Ourselves: The American Little Theatre Movement and the Construction of a New Audience, 1912-1925," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1997), 256.
7. Undated clipping, Drama League File, MWEZ n.c. 7624, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
8. For the mood among artists in the years before World War

I, see Anita Block's Changing World in Plays and Theatre (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 15. See Warner Berthoff's chapter, "Literature of Argument," which lists novels and documentary exposes published at the end of the nineteenth century, in The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919 (New York: Free Press, 1965). See also Robert Bremner's chapter "The Literary Record," 164-84.

9. Aldis, "Preface," Plays for Small Stages, xv.

10. Ibid.

11. See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics, ed. Carl N. Degler (New Ycrk: Harper and Row, 1966). Olive Schreiner, Woman and Labor (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1911). Lois Banner points to the identification that occurred among many progressive reformers and women volunteers, reminiscent of workers in the abolition movement and a foreshadow of civil-rights activists, who saw their own subjugation reflected in the lives of those for whom they worked. See Banner's Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 100.

12. Despite the Belasco picture-realism of the late nineteenth century, it was the drama of Ibsen, Strindberg, and later Chekhov, which influenced the direction of American theatre at the turn of the century. See J. L. Styan, Modern Drama in Theory and Practice, vol. 1: Realism and Naturalism (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1981), 112. A short list of the plays with women as central characters: James A. Herne's Margaret Fleming (1890) in Representative American Plays: From 1767 to the Present Day, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1938); Eugene Walter's The Easiest Way (1909) in Representative Plays by American Dramatists, vol. 3: 1856-1911, ed. Montrose Moses (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964); Rachel Crothers's A Man's World (1909) in Plays by American Women, 1900-1930 ed. Judith E. Barlow (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1985); and He and She (1911) in Representative American Plays.

13. Helen Hoyt, "A Woman's Number," Others 3 (September 1916): 54. This concern parallels African American critics' demand that black-authored plays replace the white-authored

abstract constructions of "the Negro." See Theophilus Lewis, "The Book of Job in Blackface," The Messenger (May 1927): 157. Lewis pointed to the gross exaggeration of the life of a "Southern Negro peasant," as depicted by white author Em Jo Basshe, who had him nightly "brooding on the welfare of his soul and madly dashing back and forth between the parson's church on the hill and the voodoo man's hut in the swamp." White writers garnered awards for their plays; Paul Green for In Abraham's Bosom, 1926-1927, and Marc Connelly for The Green Pastures, 1929-30. See The Pulitzer Prize Plays: 1918-1934, ed. Kathryn Coe and William H. Cordell (New York: Random House, 1935).

14. Florence Kiper, "Some American Plays From the Feminist Viewpoint," Forum 51 (June 1914): 921-931.

15. Ibid., 921.

16. Ibid., 931.

17. Archibald Henderson, "The Published Play," Drama 5 (May 1915): 305. See also George Middleton, "The Publication of Plays," Harper's Weekly (24 January 1914): 26.

18. Cheryl Black, "Technique and Tact: Nina Moise Directs the Provincetown Players," Theatre Survey 36 (May 1995): 55-64. A brief selection of material on Susan Glaspell: see Linda Ben-Zvi's "Susan Glaspell's Contributions to Contemporary Women Playwrights," in Feminine Focus, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 147-166; J. Ellen Gainor's "The Provincetown Players' Experiments with Realism," in Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition, ed. William W. Demastes (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 62-65. One acts written by women members of the Provincetown Players: Alice Rostetter's The Widow's Veil, Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood's Enemies, and Rita Wellman's The String of Samsien are in The Provincetown Plays, ed. George Cram Cook and Frank Shay (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1921).

19. For a sample of the playwrights' other work see: Mary MacMillan's Third Book of Short Plays (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1922); and The Little Golden Fountain and Other Verses (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1916). MacMillan's

poems were published in Poet Lore, The Boston Transcript, The International, The Smart Set, Midland, Home and Country, and the Masses. For mention of Mary Aldis's Lake Forest Players, see Constance D'Arcy Mackay's The Little Theatre in the United States (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), 121-125. See Mary Aldis's "The Sisters" in Others: An Anthology of the New Verse, ed. Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Knopf, 1916), 1-5; and Aldis's tribute to Carl Sandburg, "C.S." in Others 4 (June 1917): 7. Louise Driscoll's The Poor House was first published in Drama 7 (August 1917): 448-460. See Driscoll's The Child of God in Seven Arts 1 (November 1916): 34-46; and her volumes of poetry, The Garden of the West (New York: Macmillan, 1922) and Garden Grace (New York: Macmillan, 1924). See Evelyn Emig Mellon's Two Prize Plays and Four Others (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1929). Mary Katharine Reely's compilations of pamphlets, published by the H.W. Wilson Company of White Plains, New York, included: Selected Articles on Immigration, 1915; Selected Articles on World Peace, 1916; Selected Articles on Minimum Wage, 1917; and Country Life and Rural Problems: A Study Outline, 1918.

20. Asa Don Dickinson, "Introduction," Drama (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922), vii. The Shadowed Star was also anthologized in Short Plays by Representative Authors, ed. Alice M. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1922) and Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays, ed. Pierre Loving and Frank Shay (New York: D. Appleton, 1928). In 1915 Frank Shay began to keep track of Little Theatre plays on index cards; eight years later he listed the best plays available, which included most of the one acts in this chapter. Only Emig's The Old Order is missing. See Shay's One Thousand and One Plays for the Little Theatre (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1923).

21. Margaret Mayorga, "The One-Act Play," in Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1919), xiii.

22. *Ibid.*, xvi.

23. Theodore Ballou Hinckley, "Review," Drama 6 (Feb. 1916): 149-51.

24. Ibid., 150.

25. Edna Wahlert McCourt's Jill's Way (1917), begins with Jack and Jill on a park bench in the predicament of being too poor to marry and too stubborn to return to the country, where they could afford to have a family. The crisis does not stop Jill, who advertises for an "associate parent" to pay child expenses in exchange for time with the future baby. Jill's Way is a whimsical treatment of the themes of female independence, country versus city life, and poverty, which fit with many of the other plays written by women during this time. See Seven Arts 1 (February 1917): 328-335. For a verse play see Louise Driscoll's The Child of God; and for an American "symbolist" play see Mary Carolyn Davies' The Slave with Two Faces in Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays.

26. MacMillan, More Short Plays, 2.

27. Archibald Henderson, The Changing Drama (New York: Henry Holt, 1914), 15.

28. Van Wyck Brooks quoted in Frederick J. Hoffman's The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Free Press, 1965), 29. As with many other journals, Seven Arts paid homage to Walt Whitman; the epigraph of each issue quoted Whitman: "An Expression of Artists for the Community." The title of the journal Others came from Whitman's line, "The old expressions are with us always, and there are always others." The epigraph to each issue of Poetry was also from Whitman: "To have great poets there must be great audiences too."

29. Romain Rolland, "America and the Arts," Seven Arts 1 (November 1916): 48-49.

30. Waldo Frank, "Concerning a Little Theater," Seven Arts 1 (December 1916): 164.

31. Sheldon Cheney, "The American Playwright and the Drama of Sincerity," Forum 51 (April 1914): 498. This essay can also be found in Cheney's The New Movement in the Theatre (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1971).

32. Ibid., 499.
33. Ibid., 500.
34. Frank, 164.
35. Ibid.
36. Z, "The Provincetown Players," Seven Arts 2 (August 1917): 524.
37. Louise Burleigh, The Community Theatre: In Theory and Practice (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917), xxxiii. Ellen Gainor calls the Provincetown Players, "first and foremost a community theatre" in her essay, "The Provincetown Players' Experiments with Realism," 61.
38. Ibid., xxxii.
39. Alfred Arvold, "The Little Country Theater," Drama 6 (February 1916): 97.
40. Marjorie A. Starr Best, Drama League of America: Its Inception, Growth, Accomplishment and Promise (Chicago: Drama League, 1925), 4.
41. "Statement of Purpose," in Drama League of Boston: A Selective List of Plays for Amateurs (Boston: Drama League, 1915), 4.
42. William Hughes Mearns, "The Jury at the Play," New York Dramatic Mirror (26 August 1916), Drama League File, MWEZ n.c. 6309, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, N.Y.P.L. at Lincoln Center.
43. Best, Inception, 9.
44. "The Drama League File," Billy Rose Theatre Collection, N.Y.P.L. at Lincoln Center.
45. John Mantel Clapp, Drama League of America: Plays for Amateurs (Chicago: Drama League, 1915), 9.
46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 5-6. Some of the plays follow the description made of Zona Gale's The Neighbors, as being comedies with "an undercurrent of seriousness." What sets Gale's play apart from the domestic dramas in this chapter is the community of Friendship Village, that is not only supportive, but has resources to share. Although Gale avoids sentimentalizing her characters, the bucolic appellation does indicate her intention to imbue her fictional town with such cherished American values as charity, self-reliance, and autonomy. So bountiful was Friendship Village--in its flowering trees, neat hedges, and window boxes standing between crisp muslin curtains--that it provided Gale a sequel, Mister Jimmy, in 1921. Clapp, Plays for Amateurs, 9. Zona Gale, The Neighbors in Wisconsin Plays, Series One, ed. Thomas Dickinson (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1914). Gale offered The Neighbors royalty-free to any country theatre who wanted to use it for fund raising. See Alexander M. Drummond, "A Unique Experimental Theatre," Drama 10 (March-April 1920): 238. Zona Gale, Mister Jimmy in Types of Modern Dramatic Composition.

48. Drama League of Boston: A Selective List of Plays for Amateurs, 27.

49. Clapp, Plays for Amateurs, 5.

50. Quoted in Louise Shipman Hubbard's, "The Rise of Amateur Drama," Drama 7 (May 1917): 625.

51. MacMillan, Short Plays, i.

52. Advertisements of Short Plays appear at the back of MacMillan's other volumes of plays and poetry. All of MacMillan's Short Plays were "easy" and were offered royalty-free to groups if they wrote for the author's permission. See Clapp, 38. Another example of moral lessons being taught by the poor is Rachel Field's Rise Up, Jennie Smith, which contrasts an Irish immigrant shopgirl, who spends her savings on a war bond, with the selfishness of the wealthy matron who sells it to her. Field won first prize in the Drama League-sponsored playwriting contest of 1918 to promote patriotism. See Field's Rise Up, Jennie Smith (New York: Samuel French, 1918).

53. See Review of Reviews excerpt at the back of MacMillan's More Short Plays and Third Book of Short Plays.

54. MacMillan mentions the separate publication of The Shadowed Star by the Consumers' League in the preface to Short Plays, but does not date it. Presumably it was published around the time of Merry Xmas. See note 59.

55. The National Consumers' League: First Quarter Century, 1899-1924 (New York: National Consumers' League, 1925), 8.

56. For the origins of what constituted a white-list store and the rules for membership in the League, which included the League's own self-restraining clause: "The members shall not be bound never to buy at other stores," see Helen Campbell's Women Wage-Earners: Their Past, Their Present and Their Future (Boston: Roberts Press, 1893), 263-265.

57. Maud Nathan, The Story of an Epoch-Making Movement (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1926), 192.

58. Ibid., 198.

59. Ibid., 197. The title page of Elizabeth Kellogg's play reads: "A farce in two scenes. Written once upon a time for the College Club." See Kellogg's Merry Xmas (Cincinnati: U.P. James, 1910).

60. MacMillan, The Shadowed Star, 4.

61. Ibid., 16.

62. Ibid., 4.

63. MacMillan, 11. Sue Ainslie Clark reports in her study of the living standards of self-supporting women that five to six weeks before Christmas the following was the usual schedule: 8 am -12:15 pm; 1 -6pm; 6:30 pm -to closing that was between 11pm and midnight. See Clark's Making Both Ends Meet: The Income and Outlay of New York Working Girls (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 5-6.

64. National Consumers' League, 7. The Consumers' League took advantage of the visually-oriented public, who had been

moved by the "detective camera" used in 1890 by Jacob Riis while documenting the Lower East Side of New York in How the Other Half Lived. Mary Beard discusses the use of social exhibits to inform the public about diseases with the intent of making communities responsible for their eradication. See Beard's 1915 Woman's Work in Municipalities (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 245-250.

65. Kathryn Kish Sklar, Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 306.

66. MacMillan, The Shadowed Star, 12.

67. Florence Kelley quoted in Josephine Goldmark's biography of her, Impatient Crusader (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 65.

68. MacMillan, The Shadowed Star, 6.

69. Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, ed. Anne Firor Scott (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1964), 16.

70. Ethel Theodora Rockwell, A Study Course in American One-Act Plays (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1923), 56. By 1923 MacMillan had written twenty-four short plays. Though Rockwell also assigned MacMillan's verse play A Fan and Two Candlesticks and her spoof on a nineteenth-century woman's cluo, The Futurists, both in Short Plays, Rockwell deemed The Shadow Star her most poignant.

71. Ibid., 38.

72. Ibid., 48.

73. Aldis, Mrs. Pat and the Law, 7. For a tenement play about a woman who supports herself as a laundress and is rejected by her boyfriend when she suggests he get better job instead of living off his mother, see Elva De Pue's Hattie in The Morningside Plays (New York: Frank Shay and Company, 1917).

74. Aldis, Mrs. Pat and the Law, 20.

75. Ibid., 25.
76. Ibid., 28.
77. Ibid., 23. The theatrical approach to dramatizing a woman's personal story positioned the audience differently from that of suffrage plays, pageants, and monologues. Marie Jenney Howe, founder of the feminist group Heterodoxy, based in Greenwich Village and active between 1912 and 1940, wrote, in 1913, her satirical "An Anti-Suffrage Monologue" for use in suffrage debates around the country. Undoubtedly women in the audience were roused when the monologist addressed herself as a rib: "I know that I am but a rib and so I wash the dishes. Or I hire another rib to do it for me, which amounts to the same thing." See Marie Jenney Howe's "An Anti-Suffrage Monologue," in Judith Schwarz's Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy: Greenwich Village, 1912-1940 (Norwich, CT.: New Victoria Publishing Company, 1986), 113. Schwarz includes details of the reception of Howe's monologue. See also On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement, ed. Bettina Friedl (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).
78. Aldis, Mrs. Pat and the Law, 15.
79. See Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1923), 3.
80. Hinckley, "Review," 149.
81. Mayorga, Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors, ix.
82. Aldis, Mrs. Pat and the Law, 26.
83. See Types of Modern Dramatic Composition, 353.
84. Reely, Daily Bread, 5.
85. Ibid., 14.
86. Ibid., 13.
87. Ibid., 12.

88. Ibid., 16.
89. Ibid., 17.
90. Ibid.
91. Judith L. Stephens, "Gender Ideology and Dramatic Convention in Progressive Era Plays, 1890-1920," in Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 283-293.
92. Reely, Country Life and Rural Problems, 5.
93. Henry S. Curtis, Play and Recreation for the Open Country (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1914), 158.
94. Ibid., 157.
95. See "The Yellow Wallpaper," in The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader, ed. Ann J. Lane (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 4.
96. Reely, Window, 21.
97. Ibid., 24.
98. Ibid., 20.
99. Ibid., 43-44.
100. Ibid., 44
101. Henry Bailey Stevens, "The Farmer Goes to the Theatre," Drama 21 (May 1931): 8.
102. Reely, Country Life, 7.
103. Florence Kelley, Some Ethical Gains Through Legislation (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 34.
104. Ibid., 35.
105. MacMillan, Honey, 49.

106. Ibid., 81.
107. Ibid., 88-89.
108. Ibid., 59-60.
109. The National Consumers' League, 15.
110. George Pierce Baker, "The One-Act Play," Types of Modern Dramatic Composition, xii.
111. Driscoll, The Poor House, 150-151.
112. Ibid., 151.
113. Ibid., 152.
114. Ibid., 154.
115. Emig, The Old Order, 587.
116. Ibid., 594.
117. Ibid., 586.
118. Mary McCarthy, "The American Realist Playwrights," Discussions of Modern Drama, ed. Walter Meserve (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965), 120.
119. Ibid., 120-121.
120. Emig, The Old Order, 589.
121. Ibid.
122. Willystine Goodsell, Problems of the Family (New York: Century Company, 1928), 450-451.
123. Jessie Taft, "Woman's Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness," Philosophic Studies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 31.
124. Goodsell, Problems of the Family, 277.

125. Ibid.

126. Chansky, "Composing Ourselves," 257.

Chapter Two: Not All Women Were "New," 1920-1924

Through the 1920s amateur theatre activity increased as people across the country put on plays that were made readily available to them. Influenced by the success of little theatre practitioners of the previous decade, whose productions had been heralded in journals and whose plays had been published, many people decided that they too could provide their own entertainment. In his 1926 article in Drama, "The 'LITTLE THEATRE'--What is It?," Marion Tucker considered the growth of the Little Theatre movement and attributed its popularity in part to a new appreciation of the amateur's contribution to the theatre. (1) As an example Tucker cited the changed attitude of producer David Belasco, who, though once opposed to their efforts, in 1923, with the co-sponsorship of the Drama League, established the Little Theatre Tournament to showcase college and little theatre productions. In addition, Tucker wrote, the achievements of those involved in the early experimental theatres served as a revelation to others:

There was a quickened feeling for the arts all over America; there was the discovery--most influential and significant--that no such chasm separates the professional theatre from the amateur as the layman had imagined, and that thousands of non-professionals had within themselves capacities formerly unsuspected and capable of being developed by the amateur theatre. (2)

Walter Prichard Eaton's article on the 1922 Drama League convention, "Towards a New Theatre," in the Freeman, reported on the shift in the focus of the League, from organizing audiences for productions of worthwhile plays performed by professionals, to a "study of the amateur." (3) The Drama League had begun its campaign to "keep spoken drama alive in those sections of America, which the professional theatre ha[d] abandoned," soon after its formation in 1910. However, it was in the 20s that it found tremendous support by university theatre departments, high schools, church groups, and women's clubs. The enthusiasm was such that, Eaton believed, the most important aspect of League work in the future would be to coordinate local groups and provide a national communication network for community theatres, which the organization did through its "Little Theatre Monthly" section of Drama magazine. (4)

The high quality of plays written during the first decade and a half of the Little Theatre movement inspired amateur

clubs to form in order to produce them, according to Thomas Edwards, managing director of Samuel French. In his 1925 essay in Drama, "The Evolution of Play Publishing," Edwards wrote of his astonishment that there was a market for rather somber works, produced in experimental little theatres, which he calls the "'Art Theatre' side of producing." (5) Groups that had in the past been satisfied with slapstick farces or "imitations of French and German dramas," Edwards added, now "took it upon themselves to look for and produce plays more worthy of their time." (6) The key decision for a successful amateur production was the right play, which generated a need for pamphlets such as Barrett Clark's 1926 The Production of Amateur Plays, an annotated drama list. (7) In a similar compilation, Frederick Koch's 1920 "Plays for Amateurs," are Mary MacMillan's The Shadowed Star and Mary Aldis's Mrs. Pat and the Law, both of which Koch recommends as ensuring "wholesome entertainment." (8) Mrs. Pat and the Law also appears on Clark's list.

The one-act plays that had been written by authors associated with the leading dramatic groups in college or community theatres appearing before World War I were studied for their formal properties and admired for their choice of

subject matter. The inclusion of their plays in anthologies, in bibliographies listing one acts, and the many publishers printing their work, reflects the importance granted to those who started as amateurs and who were later referred to as artists. In her 1924 monograph The Living Drama, dramatist Nellie Burget Miller noted the predominance of women in the field of one-act playwriting and considered their work comparable to European "masters":

There has been a great impulse to the creation of short plays, an impulse in which women have had rather the larger share. The work produced is not only generous in quantity but will bear comparison with the best of the contemporary work, not excluding Dunsany and Maeterlinck, Barrie and Shaw, Synge, Schnitzler, Benavente, and Tagore. (9)

Miller's judgment of the achievement of women may seem exaggerated now, but she was most certainly drawing her conclusion based on the number of anthologies in which women's one acts figured prominently. American women's plays had not merely infiltrated anthologies and helped to contribute to the tremor felt in the publishing industry, but were in part responsible for the proliferation of amateur productions. (10)

This chapter treats middle-class women's support of non-commercial theatre and discusses five plays by women, four of which were written for production by amateur groups and little

theatres, and one published in the journal Poet Lore. The plays concern issues of marriage, home, and the family, which were being debated in contemporaneous literature. Two of the plays have young, energetic career women, who abandon the domestic sphere and leave the old, worn concepts of biological womanhood to their mothers' generation. Despite these two playwrights' interest in the "new woman," defined as one who aspired to have both a professional career and a family, the focus in each play remains on the mother, who has been constrained by her devotion to her children. All of the plays are informed by what became the often-repeated observation in the 20s, that most of the productive labor had been removed from the home. Thus the home narrowed women, and their over-attendant mothering robbed children of their freedom. In all of the plays the underlying message is the same: women need to break from old patterns of behavior, which define them only in relation to their families, to men, or to their homes. The plays reflect the anxiety surrounding the status of women, who were not employed the home or who had no useful work in it, an anxiety which was undoubtedly shared by many of the women participating in little theatre activities.

Through their membership in clubs, middle-class women

volunteered their time in support of a panoply of organizations and were largely responsible for the vitality of the Little Theatre movement through the 20s. This tremendous source of unpaid labor connected with one of the central questions of women during this period, which concerned their value. With more modern conveniences in the home, a housewife's contributions to her family became increasingly suspect as she was very often perceived as a financial drain. Volunteer work, which offered women a means of self-expression and development outside the family, also foiled the charge of wifely parasitism.

In addition, experience with the successful suffrage campaign had made many women impatient with the limitations of familial duties. With the ballot won and much of the volunteer work women had engaged in before World War I taken over by state or local agencies, they sought new projects in which to participate. (11) The rhetoric of the Drama League, which entreated "leading women" to lift up their communities, sounded like a mandate and one welcomed by many who were looking for something to do outside of the home. Local drama production was an area where women's volunteer efforts were believed to be both necessary and appreciated.

Club Women and the Little Theatre

Reflecting on the continual success of the Little Theatre movement after 1920, Harold Ehrensperger observed in his 1927 essay for Drama, "Women and the Little Theatre," that it was women's club members who kept it thriving. Taking upon themselves the responsibility to raise the standard of dramatic fare in their towns, women studied modern drama in courses specially prepared for them. Once women trained in the basics of staging and had some knowledge of plays that offered them good parts, they wanted to produce their own shows. Ehrensperger wrote:

The renewed interest in the drama, the extraordinary activity in women's clubs and study groups organized over the entire country, created a demand which the commercial theatre could not meet. Women with leisure had set in motion a gigantic undertaking in club work. Now came the incentive born of a surer understanding and intelligence to produce and act in the plays that had been read and studied. (12)

An example is Ethel Theodora Rockwell's 1923 A Study Course in American One-Act Plays, which was offered through the Women's Clubs section of the University of North Carolina's Extension Division. The outline, which introduced club members to the plays that had been written for the best-known little theatre

groups, was not, Rockwell wrote, merely for women's cultural edification, but for them to "take a vital interest in the new art movement." (13) She urged club members to join the Carolina Dramatic Association, which meant competing in play tournaments, staging two one-act programs a year, and introducing drama into their local schools. (14) Club activities allowed women to make positive use of their leisure time, which some critics believed, if left unfocused could do much harm. In his 1926 study, The Drifting Home, sociologist Ernest Groves, a specialist in the subject of marriage and the family, listed the possible consequences of women's profligate time expenditure:

There will be positive faults more serious than mere waste, as woman obtains this most testing of all luxuries, leisure. She will become, when she fails in her social trial, discontented, restless, parasitic, shirking, and intolerant of home obligations. (15)

Throughout the 20s the unemployed middle-class housewife was often typified, in monographs on sex and marriage, as parasitic and her home the site of narrow activities. Anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons wrote, in her 1924 essay, "Changes in Sex Relations," that even with the increase in the number of women gainfully employed, "wifely parasitism [was] holding its own." (16) In his 1928 text, American Marriage

and Family Relationships, Ernest Groves observed that often when a marriage failed it was because the woman was uninteresting. He added that if the wife "is tempted to concentrate unduly on either her household or parenthood duties, the family loses from her rapid narrowing." (17)

Thus, a woman's volunteer work was seen as benefiting her family, who would gain from her acquiring discipline and orderly habits. These were traits eviscerated by a life of unproductive leisure, an existence which attracted the ire of feminists such as Mary Ross. In her essay, "The New Status of Women in America" in the 1931 anthology Woman's Coming of Age, Ross described a typical, vacuous day of many women as including "a shopping expedition, bridge-party, an hour with the children, and dinner with a husband too tired to talk of much but the stock market." (18)

Though she acknowledges women laid the foundation of American philanthropy and were relentless in the suffrage campaign, Ross's jibes are aimed at the "current middle-class practice--that one must earn while the other spends." (19) Like many other feminists of the 20s, Ross, in her attempt to persuade middle-class women that they could contribute more to their families by going to work outside the home rather than

staying at home, belittled "woman's culture." Charity work, afternoon meetings, and all-female organizations paled in importance to recreation on the golf links or after-office cocktail parties, places where both men and women could meet. Women's club activities she considered ancillary to the center of real experience, which was the professional world of men. In their haste to "join the gentlemen," a phrase from the title of Ross's essay for the 1926 "woman's place" issue of Survey, women wanted to throw off the trappings of nineteenth-century feminism, which they identified with a continuation of separate spheres. (20) The female public sphere of women's little theatre productions was perceived in many quarters with just this sort of disdain--useless, frivolous activity meant to absorb women's "empty" days.

On the other hand, Sophonisba Breckinridge, in her carefully researched 1933 study, Women and the Twentieth Century, charted the growth in the number of women's organizations, through the first thirty years of the century, and saw it as a response to middle-class women's need for "experiences unrelated to domestic responsibilities or obligations." (21) Breckinridge connected the flurry of the building of club houses with Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's

Own, as she believed women were searching for venues that would foster their creativity in spaces outside of the home. Women did not revel in their leisure, but continued to be engaged in civic affairs and in questioning their role in public and private life. Women were dismissed as politically ineffective after 1920, Breckinridge notes, because they did not vote in a block nor make the sweeping social changes via the ballot as many had hoped they would do. Breckinridge concludes that though with suffrage women did not gain a new political power base in which to further their goals of equal opportunity and treatment, they continued to work in the established framework of their clubs and in educational institutions. She wrote that it was there, "in the meantime," that "preparation is being made for full participation by women in the activities requiring continuity and stability."
(22)

Estelle Freedman points out in her 1974 essay, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," that Breckinridge's work was largely ignored by historians, publishing between the mid 30s and the late 50s, who claimed that after 1920 women's liberation was complete and that they had achieved equality with men in all aspects of life. (23)

Breckinridge's book tempers the image of post-suffrage women, who, according to Charles and Mary Beard in their 1930 volume The Rise of American Civilization, "assumed an unquestioned role in shaping the production of goods, materials, humanistic, literary, and artistic." (24) In addition, Breckinridge adjusts the view of the parasitic housewife. Certainly the energy women put into their club activities, to which Breckinridge devotes a third of her book, contradicts the prevailing notions that most middle-class women were content with a life of mindless consumption and that they happily returned to the home after the flurry of pre-World War I social and political activism. (25)

The plays in this chapter are about women who are neither "new" nor invidious parasites. What they do show is that a career of homemaking is not enough for most women. The important exception is that of farm women, whose unpaid work was considered of essential value to the family economy. The plays, set on farms or in small towns, evidence what a few women thought about the roles of mothers and daughters, marriage, family life, and romantic love. The plays are: Clarice Vallette McCauley's The Conflict (1920), about the struggle between a daughter and her controlling mother;

Evelyn Emig's The China Pig (1920), which shows a woman who has sacrificed her own ambitions for the sake of her family and continues the theme of a housewife's self-entrapment, which Emig began with The Old Order; and Eleanor Whiting's Common Ground (1921), about a woman, who has let a broken marriage engagement ruin her life. Mary Katharine Reely's Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds (1921) and Bringing Up Nine (1923), both set on farms, as was her 1919 one act A Window to the South, are about characters who might be described as role models for rural women. (26) Early Ohios illustrates a marriage of equal partnership between two city people turned farmers; and Bringing Up Nine belies the stereotype of a farm woman's ceaseless work by showing a mother who insists her children follow her example and take time off from their chores to read.

The plays reflect the changing direction of many American women after 1920, from a concentration on the suffrage battle and social reform to a concern about their economic dependence and individual development. As Lois Scharf writes in her history of women between the wars, To Work and to Wed, feminist activity did not so much decline in the 20s as it changed from a unified movement centered on a single issue to

each woman's negotiation of new expectations and old responsibilities. (27) The turn-of-the century feminists, who had chosen a career over marriage and a family were, in the 20s, considered old-fashioned and regarded with pity because they had missed the joys of marriage and children. The "truly modern" woman, Dorothy Bromley wrote in her 1927 article in Harper's, "Feminist--New Style," was one who had a "full life," which meant having both a satisfying job and a family. (28) To have only a career, or to have only volunteer work as most club women did, was most definitely feminism--old style. However, if the career-only feminist was perceived as having missed a "full life," the middle-class housewife, who lived only in relation to others, was seen as threat to herself and her family.

Feminism of the 20s placed a premium on stripping away the concept of woman as inferior, dependent, and defined by biology. As psychologist Beatrice Hinkle wrote in her 1924 essay, "Women and the New Morality," many women--both those with jobs and club women not gainfully employed--resisted being "swallowed up in their biological values." (29) The plays are informed by just such resistance. Reely's Early Ohio shows a "companionate marriage" as it was referred to in

the 20s, in which a childless couple both work. (30) Reely's Bringing Up Nine, which from the title seems to be about a woman devoted to her biological value, is about the need for education in rural areas for all members of the family. The Conflict, The China Pig, and Common Ground show the damage women do to themselves or to others because of their narrow lives. Yet, the playwrights treat their characters with sympathy, while on Broadway the housewife was becoming the stock figure of ridicule.

A few of the well-known plays by men, written in the 20s, dramatized the consequences of a woman who was overly involved in her husband and family. There was the devouring matriarch, Mrs. Phelps, who does not want her sons to become independent of her, in Sidney Howard's The Silver Cord (1926); and the demonic wife, Reena Huckins, in Lewis Beach's The Square Peg (1924), whose manipulations of her family drives her husband to suicide and causes her children to flee the house. In George Kelly's Mrs. Craig (1925), Harriet Craig admits she married to become free of her parents and controls her husband to ensure her security. (31) When Craig moves out to get away from her, Harriet is comforted by knowing that now the house is finally hers. Brenda Murphy writes, in American Realism

and American Drama, that throughout the 20s the middle-class matron's neurotic personality attracted much attention from writers and that she was at the center of "scenic images of domestic tyranny." (32) Murphy adds that writers of psychological plays used set descriptions for their "indexical effect" to define character. (33)

The middle-class home in these plays was dramatized as the site of her domination with its transliterative set design. The suffocating interior of the Huckins family home in The Square Peg, financed by the downtrodden husband, was "the sort of house a woman who delights in good housekeeping but who has little feeling for beauty would much admire; and it is the typical home of the \$2500 or 3000-a-year clerk in the Middle West." (34) Mr. Huckins may have paid for it, but the "characterless and inharmonious" frippery was chosen by his wife. Mrs. Craig's "frozen grandeur" was embodied by her living room: "This room like all the other rooms in the house, reflects the very excellent taste and fanatical orderliness of its mistress." (35) In her destructive behavior Mrs. Craig, like many of her type, was childish, psychologically damaged, and damaging. The living room of the suffocating mother, Mrs. Phelps in The Silver Cord, was "cluttered with the souvenirs

of maternal love" reflecting "an orthodox enthusiasm for the arts." (36)

This female character's most prominent trait was intransigence. Mrs. Craig ends with Harriet alone in her house, latching the front door, and wandering about the empty rooms that now belong only to her. (37) John Gassner wrote that in the title character of Mrs. Craig, George Kelly had exposed "the average middle-class woman" so successfully that for years she remained "representative of emotionally inadequate Main Street women." (38) The parasitic-housewife/vampire-mother character(s) seemed to prove that unlike the public world ruled by men, the home remained a non-regulated private sphere vulnerable to the personality of the woman who ran it. Both male and female realistic playwrights assumed that readers learned about the housewife through her home.

Domestic Confinement: The Conflict, The China Pig, and Common Ground

In plays about domestic entrapment, the interior is not just the setting, but the dominant element that establishes the tone. In Clarice McCauley's The Conflict, the mother, as

patterned as her wallpaper, attempts to keep her children from wandering from her ordered home. The mother's depression in Evelyn Emig's The China Pig, is mirrored by her threadbare living room furniture. Eleanor Whiting's Common Ground, about a woman who was abandoned by a man fifteen years before, lives in self-imposed exile in a barely furnished farmhouse room with a "cracked mirror over the fireplace and several broken ornaments on the mantel." (39)

Both Clarice McCauley's The Conflict and Evelyn Emig's The China Pig were included in Frank Shay's 1922 A Treasury of Plays for Women, an anthology specially prepared for productions by women's clubs. Both plays concern ambitious daughters, who are studying or about to start careers and are contrasted with their mothers, who are supported by their husbands. Clarice McCauley, who taught play production at Columbia University, was the artistic director of the Morningside Players, between 1920 and 1922. (40) The Players was a group of Columbia University students, which had formed in 1917 under the leadership of Hatcher Hughes and Elmer Rice. In addition, McCauley was also a member of the Vagabond Players, located in Baltimore, where The Conflict was first produced. (41) Evelyn Emig, who was director of the Incubator

Players in Washington D.C., wrote that The China Pig, included in her anthology Two Prize Plays and Four Others, was produced "from manuscript by scores of university dramatic clubs." (42)

Like the overprotective Mrs. Phelps, in The Silver Cord, the mother in McCauley's The Conflict tries to control the lives of her children. The "wholesome" interior of the mother's old-fashioned kitchen, in a small New England village, is neatly ordered, unlike the "vague, hazy sunshininess" that can be seen through the back window. (43) McCauley adds an interpretive footnote to the set description, which explains the conflict between mother's cozy environment that she has built to keep the children in and that of the outside world she can not control. McCauley writes:

The room should suggest by every detail of its cheery, wholesome orderliness a certain sympathetic plea for the mother. Otherwise, if the home were unattractive, there would at once be furnished a reason for the children's wish to leave it; but there is no fundamental reason--other than the primordial urge to try our wings, which gets us all sometime; and which no mother can successfully deny without forever crippling her child. In contrast to the crisp, clear-cut details of the kitchen is the vague, hazy sunshininess of the garden outside the door. (44)

Mother has done her duty to her children by raising them in a uniform strictness that provokes Emelie to say to her, "If

only you could have individualized us a bit, dear, instead of lumping us together as just `your children'." (45)

Emelie has returned home from Boston to attend father's funeral, and in the few days she has been there she decides not to go back to Boston because she wants to break from a married man with whom she has been having an affair. She plans to move to New York, but her mother, who has found out about the affair, thinks the move is to be with the man and stops Emelie at the door. Because of her mother's interference Emelie misses the earlier train to New York and is forced to take the train to Boston where the man is waiting at the station. McCauley ends the play with the mother's reading of the man's telegram and as she discovers what she has done, she is overcome with grief and goes "heavily, brokenly up the stairs, muttering." (46) Unlike Mrs. Phelps in The Silver Cord, who feels her son has betrayed her when he chooses to leave with his wife, the mother in The Conflict regrets what she has done. There is hope for the mother's loosening her vice-like hold on her children, as in the final scene, after Emelie leaves, the stage direction reads, a "shaft of sunlight--a long pale one this time--falls across the threshold." (47)

Evelyn Emig's The China Pig is about a mother who has lived to serve her family. Now that her one daughter is moving to New York and the other is soon to leave home, the mother can finally begin to concentrate on her writing, which she set aside while raising them. However, she discovers that she has been stopped for so long she does not know how to resume. The China Pig opens with a hat delivery to Elizabeth, the mother, who spends minutes in front of the mirror trying it on. The new hat contrasts with Elizabeth's shabby dress and her dilapidated living room. The mother's living room apartment is filled with a "rather heterogeneous" collection of worn furniture "reminiscent of a more prosperous period of the owner's career." (48) After years of ignoring her own ambitions to serve her family, Elizabeth is drooping, but glints of what has remained of her youth are also apparent in the room:

The whole atmosphere seems somewhat subdued and depressed; but it is an energetic depression; there is nothing lethargic about it. Perhaps it is the woman who conveys the impression; she seems somehow to dominate the room. One rather wonders why. She is no longer young: about forty-three, one should judge, and whatever charm she may have possessed--it probably lay in her quick black eyes and her young determination--has long lain dormant. She is badly dressed in an old brown skirt and a shabby waist. (49)

The delivery of the hat shows that she is not entirely cowed, although she tells her daughter that she's sending it back because it is too expensive.

In constructing her "transactional analysis," where characters display symptoms of "geopathic disorders" caused by their location, Una Chaudhuri in Staging Place, uses a triangle of home, addiction, and performance, which she identifies as a structural device often used in dramatic realism. (50) To escape a sense of entrapment in their environments, Chaudhuri writes, characters act "as if" they belong, when in fact they feel alienated from those they live with. This is certainly true of the performing and addicted/alcoholic Tyrone family in A Long Day's Journey, one of the plays to which Chaudhuri applies her theory. As she notes, characters often use performance within the family or home to allow them to occupy a space without inhabiting it.

The cultural definition of addiction, Chaudhuri notes, actually contradicts the medical one that calls addiction a disease, and one that can not be cured moving away from home-- "doing a geographic"--as it is known by members of Alcoholics Anonymous. (51) Geographic cures are failed attempts to stop addiction by moving, something that can only occur spiritually

through an interior adjustment. Women often have only been allowed to do a "geographic cure" for their illness of home entrapment when they can afford to leave, and so are usually stuck at home. This lack of freedom, tied as it is to money, is the irony of The China Pig.

For many years Elizabeth has been acting as if she will soon be leaving home and to afford her escape from her husband, she has been saving money in a piggy bank. Although she has had enough money many times, just as she was about to leave something happened forcing her to spend it and start all over again. Practice of sacrifice and selflessness as a housewife have eaten Elizabeth's ambition; she continues to set aside money, but her desire is nearly spent. Elizabeth's two daughters have inherited their mother's ambition: "I gave you that longing," she says to her eldest daughter. (52) They want to leave before acquiring her timidity. When the daughters talk about their moves from home, Elizabeth thinks they are risking too much, pleads with them to stay home a few more years.

The central action of the play is Elizabeth's monologue that charts her near escapes from the drudgery of married life only to sacrifice her savings repeatedly to the needs of her

children or husband. When she first married, her husband promised to let her go to college for a year on the savings she had set aside for it, but then took her money to finance a business deal. After she finishes telling her daughter Elsa her story of the china pig, she decides that she will leave with Elsa and move with her to New York, knowing that Muriel has only another year at home. But then Muriel returns from a confrontation with her father, vowing to leave that day, and Elizabeth gives her the thousand dollars that is stuffed in her china pig. Asked if she did the right thing by giving up her money to Muriel, Elsa answers her mother:

You asked me if you were right in giving up the money. And I say--it didn't matter....All your life you've been waiting and saving for an opportunity--when you should have been going on without it....What have you done with your life? Saved. Saved money. When you should have been studying, working at home. When you should have been writing. Have you ever written anything? No. You've been waiting to learn. (53)

Elsa's criticism of her mother's languishing is similar to what Jane Addams observed in Twenty Years at Hull House, that many women of her generation wasted precious time in endless preparation and put off what they felt they were not quite ready to do. (54) However much needed to be changed within

the family dynamic, the viewpoint of The China Pig is that women can not wait for its reformation, but must begin with what they have. Elizabeth's leaving home would not facilitate her writing, but would distract her further. Because Elizabeth has been acting as if she will soon be leaving, she has never accepted her situation, something she had to do first before she could begin to "live." Elizabeth's final line directed at her daughter is: "(wistfully). Elsa--even if it's too late for writing--I can live." (55)

In both The China Pig and The Conflict the mothers have sacrificed useful lives by holding on to the role of motherhood. It was this more than their economic dependence that harmed them. Each play points to the need of women of the older generation to relinquish much of the responsibility that they have traditionally borne, if they are to have a life beyond that of raising children. Sociologist Anna Garlin Spencer, writing in her 1925 study Woman's Share in Social Culture, was careful to point out that a woman's development did not necessarily depend upon her economic independence. Countering the charge that all women's unpaid work had no value, Spencer defended women's contributions to society and in her chapter, "The Post-Graduate Mother," addressed the

qualms of women not employed outside the home. Is a woman who is supported by a man worthless, asks Spencer, and answers with: "Nay, her social usefulness or harmfulness depends upon the kind of person she is rather than upon the definiteness of her economic status." (56)

Although the daughters in the plays are ostensibly closer to the category of "new women" than their mothers are, they are made so by their desire for work outside the home, which then also includes Elizabeth. The off-stage men--Emelie's married lover in The Conflict and the selfish husband in The China Pig--do not signal the other half of the "new woman" equation. By focusing on the need for women to make decisions apart from their relationships with men, the playwrights also show what happens when women dream of being rescued. Elizabeth tells Elsa that all of the years while she was saving money to get away, she also fantasized about a man, who would appear one day and take her to "all those strange places, new environments." Elizabeth says: "But no one ever came. I've just been chained here all these years." (57) Similarly, Eleanor Whiting's Common Ground is about a woman who has spent half of her life waiting for a man to return.

Whiting's Common Ground, included in the journal Poet

Lore, which published many women's one-act plays, is set in a small, drab room in a New England farmhouse. (58) The play is about thirty-year old Harriet Lane, who was abandoned by her fiancé fifteen years before and has lived alone ever since waiting for him to come back. Harriet cannot support herself on the bit of sewing she does so she has had to depend on the charity of her neighbors. The play takes place on the day her fiancé, John Reid comes back to town. In anticipation of his visit, Harriet has put on a flowered muslin dress, which her neighbor thinks makes her look younger and Harriet fears makes her look ridiculous. When John arrives to see her and set the date for their marriage, he is taken aback not by her appearance, but by her refusal to marry.

Although Harriet has waited for him, while they talk and compare how they have spent the years apart, she becomes enraged. John is now a successful lumberman, "with a certain superiority of manner, evidently acquired with his changed fortunes"; Harriet, worn and thin, has suffered through her fifteen years in her room where, she tells him, each day has been the same." (59) As he walks around the room--"touch[ing] familiarly the dusty objects on the mantel"--he describes his adventures. (60) When he is finished and ready to plan their

wedding ceremony, promising her a big house overlooking the town, Harriet tells him she cannot marry him, even though she knows it will end her poverty. She explains that after waiting for him for years, "something seemed to have died inside," and now she does not care. He shrugs thinking she will change her mind, but as the door closes, "Harriet looks after him wildly, her face express[ing] hate and despair."

(61)

Common Ground was listed in Felix Sper's From Native Roots, his survey of American regional drama, as an early folk play of New England. (62) Common Ground is an example of what would become a woman's folk play theme as it shows the ease with which men can leave the country and the shriveling opportunities for women who remain. While the fifteen years flew by for John, transforming him into a robust businessman, Harriet's life of monotonous days have left her rigid with anger. Common Ground, albeit a regional sketch barely eight pages in length, dramatizes the very simple notion that not only has most of the productive labor been taken out of the home, but women who are confined there wither away. The imbalance between the two characters, to which the title ironically refers, is what Harriet can not accept. She also

refuses to forget her "fifteen years of hell," as John advises, and to marry at his convenience. (63)

Though he left her, Whiting focuses on Harriet's self-entombment as she lived for years waiting and now exists still in relation to him through her hatred. Sharon Friedman writes in her essay "Feminism as Theme in Twentieth-Century American Women's Drama," that even in times when feminism wanes, which she sees as happening in the 20s, though women's issues are "less salient in the drama," they remain nonetheless. (64) Against the backdrop of women's collective work in club activities and those with careers, stories of women, who lived only for marriage and whose plans backfired, fit into the category of feminist warnings. Certainly, the few plays that showed how women harmed themselves or were harmed by their inability to move beyond the home were outnumbered and outranked by the flashier version of a woman's maniacal hold on others. Dorothy Chansky writes that many plays produced during the Little Theatre movement, for which a female audience was presumed, derided women. (65) However, there were a few one acts played in women's clubs, often with housewives in the lead, which focused on the obstacles-- financial and self-imposed--that prevented women from

attaining any semblance of the ideals of modern womanhood.

Domestic Contentment: Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds and Bringing Up Nine

Where the rural play has become a custom, it is the sign of a happy, progressive community. It gives opportunity for self-expression, not only for young folks, but to their fathers and mothers as well.

The above quote is from Katherine Kester's 1924 article in Drama, "The Farmer and the Play," which discusses theatre activity at the School of Agriculture of the University of Minnesota. (66) Agricultural students wrote plays to be presented before rural audiences that demonstrated the benefits of new methods of farming that they studied in college. (67) Kester lists Mary Katharine Reely's Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds as one of the plays popular with amateur actors and their audience in farming communities in Minnesota. In both her plays, Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds and Bringing Up Nine, Reely used drama to encourage her audience to learn about what others were doing in their farm homes and to put it into practice in theirs. Unlike her earlier play A Window to the South, these two one acts comedies illustrate the benefits of sharing work and finding ways to offset the

grind of farm chores.

In 1921 Reely's Early Ohios won first prize in a playwriting contest sponsored by the Minneapolis Woman's Club where it was first produced. The play is about a couple, who two years earlier moved to the country to farm. Although they are as yet failures as farmers, Reely shows an audience of club women and rural people a successful marriage between partners. The title of the play refers to the interests of the Shepherds: Oliver is growing Early Ohio potatoes and Madge is raising Rhode Island Reds, egg-laying hens. The play opens with Oliver announcing that their two years of work has amassed them thirty-nine dollars and twenty-six cents, and within the first two pages of the play they decide to return to live in the city. It is only after a visit from their friends from town that the Shepherds are convinced that rural life is better and decide to stay on the farm.

The Shepherds' marriage of equanimity is reflected in their "simply furnished" living room, which is divided into two work areas, and that resembles an office with two desks. Each is farming by methods learned in their scientific journals. Although their academic farm methods may have failed, an observation made by their Swedish neighbor Mrs.

Nels Nelson, their intelligent approach to living together seems successful. In contrast, their friends from town, who motor out in an automobile complaining of potholes and mud, are in a traditional, problematic marriage of a businessman husband with an unemployed wife. During the visit Madge is offended by her friend's criticism of their "dirty" farm, which makes her appreciate her neighbor Mrs. Nelson and decide on staying on the farm.

After the couple drives off, Madge compares the two women and says about her friend: "Ella's getting fat. Actually fat. Did you notice her double chin? No wonder. What does she do? The Orpheum. Bridge. The movies. I'd rather look like Mrs. Nelson." (68) Though about the superiority of farm life over that of the city, Reely gives her audience a model of marriage in which both the husband and wife share work and decision, which she wanted farm people to follow. After their friends leave, Oliver tells Madge that Tom offered him a job in town and she asks him what he answered. Tom says: "I said I was perfectly satisfied here but that it was a good offer and that I'd think it over and consult with you and let him know." (69) Equally remarkable to many farm audiences was a couple married over two years without children. Though the Shepherds do not

have enough money to afford a child, in context of Reely's play of comparisons it does show a different family experience than one familiar to most rural audiences. In her next play, set on a Wisconsin farm, the McGregors are a family of eleven.

Reely wrote Bringing Up Nine in 1923 for the Wisconsin Free Library Association, for whom she worked through the 20s. The play, which publicized the benefits of reading for rural people and the availability of books through mobile library units, was reprinted by the American Library Association in 1930. (70) Bringing Up Nine is about a mother, who encourages her children to read and teaches her neighbor Mrs. Sampson-- and a rural audience--that useful information and enjoyment can be found in books.

The pleasant farmhouse sitting room of Bringing Up Nine is briefly described. Along with the usual furniture there is a full bookcase, a small table covered with books, and in the corner a Victrola. The play begins with two of Mrs. McGregor's adolescent daughters so absorbed in their reading they do not hear the repeated knocking at the front door. Only when their neighbor Mrs. Sampson enters do they look up. Lucy and Ann are, in their words, "busy reading," though that is a contradiction for farm people, in the view of Mrs.

Sampson, who is startled when Ann "indignantly" tells her that her mother finds time to read each day. (71)

Reading is as essential to the McGregor family as good housekeeping is to Mrs. Sampson, who is too busy to stop and pick up a book. Mrs. McGregor is rearing her children to be independent and encourages each to pursue his or her own hobby through books. Self-sufficiency and the availability of reading materials is the simple, straight-forward message of this sketch that toured rural Wisconsin for years. The value of farm women to their families, which Reely underscores in both plays, was one that some feminists used as a counterpoint to unemployed urban middle-class women, such as Madge's friend, Ella. Mary Ross wrote in her 1926 essay "Shall We Join the Gentlemen?" in Survey:

The farmhouse with its large families who worked in and about the place, and with the neighbors or hired help in for the crises, and the pageant of the seasons passing outside the windows, was a far less lonely place than the empty flat with a panorama of rooftops, or even the commuter's bungalow after the man has gone for the day and the children are at school. (72)

In both of Reely's plays the rural environment is shown to be one where people can develop. In Early Ohios it is made possible by having the right partner and in Bringing Up Nine support from the government and a balanced life between work

and leisure. Though this was not the experience of farm women found in most plays written about them throughout this period, Reely attempted through her entertaining didacticism to make rural audiences aware of alternatives to the habits and ways of thinking they had been raised with. Madge Shepherd and Mrs. McGregor are two versions of middle-class housewives too rarely found in literature of the 20s.

The few one-act plays in this chapter may have served feminist goals by showing, despite the vote, a change in fashions, and relaxed social mores, how far women needed to go to accomplish social change. And in the case of Mary Katharine Reely's plays, demonstrated for an audience the success gained from minor adjustments to traditional domesticity. Women dramatists preserved the experience of middle-class housewives, mothers, and home-bound women in one-act plays, and had their work performed in amateur clubs throughout the country. However, the undermining of this cultural production by women was occurring simultaneously.

Estelle Freedman writes in her 1979 essay "Separatism as Strategy," that one of the factors in the decline of feminism after 1920 was "the devaluation of women's culture in general and separate female institutions in particular." (73) In

their pursuit of equality with men, many feminists appropriated a male model and repudiated the trappings of their mothers' generation. Feminist activity did go on in the 20s, but much of it was conducted within women's clubs and organizations. It was in these sites where women met "in solidarity," Beatrice Hinkle wrote in her 1924 essay, that they became aware of "a new sense of themselves as individuals." (74) Unfortunately much of what was produced there and was of value to many women has either disappeared or has been tainted with the epithet of women's work. The few plays considered here, which evidence concerns of women from their vantage, did not make it out of the 20s. The plays about housewives and mothers which do remain are about the tyrannical homemakers, who, as John Gassner wrote, served to represent American housewives for years.

Endnotes

1. S.M. Tucker, "The 'LITTLE THEATRE'--What is It?" Drama 16 (February 1926): 181.
2. Ibid.
3. Walter Prichard Eaton, "Towards a New Theatre," Freeman 5 (12 July 1922): 418.
4. Ibid. "The Little Theatre Monthly" first appeared in Drama 14 (November 1924).
5. Thomas R. Edwards, "The Evolution of Play Publishing," Drama 15 (March 1925): 121.
6. Ibid., 122.
7. Barrett Clark, The Production of Amateur Plays: A Few Notes for the Use of Independent Producers and Players (Chicago: Drama League, 1926), 10.
8. Frederick H. Koch and Elizabeth A. Lay, "Plays for Amateurs," University of North Carolina Record (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1920), 23-48. For a list that includes Clarice McCauley's The Conflict and Evelyn Emig's The China Pig see "Plays and Readings Services 1927-1928," University of Kansas Extension Division (Topeka, KS.: B.P. Walker, 1927), 19.
9. Nellie Burget Miller, The Living Drama: Historical Development and Modern Movements Visualized (New York: Century, 1924), 415.
10. See the subject index in Hannah Logasa's play list for one acts divided according to holiday, religious observance, or school assembly topic. Logasa and Nooy's An Index to One-Act Plays, 307-349.
11. Sophonisba Breckinridge, Women in the Twentieth Century, 92-93.
12. Harold A. Ehrensperger, "Women and the Little Theatre," Drama 18 (October 1927): 19.

13. Ethel Theodora Rockwell, "Introduction," in A Study Course in American One-Act Plays, 9. For another course prepared for women's clubs see Elizabeth Lay Green's A Study Course in Modern Drama (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1927).

14. Increasingly drama was the favored tool of pedagogy. Creative dramatics had been used as early as 1912 to teach elementary school children to think imaginatively and act constructively. Children's Educational Theatre was chartered at the University of the State of New York in 1912. Frederick Koch wrote that "the extensive use of the acted drama [has been demonstrated] as an effective means of training the emotions of the child, of quickening the imagination, and of directing the will along constructive lines." See "Plays for Amateurs," 3.

15. Ernest R. Groves, The Drifting Home (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), 30.

16. Elsie Clews Parsons, "Changes in Sex Relations," in Our Changing Morality, ed. Freda Kirchwey (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1924), 44.

17. Ernest R. Groves, American Marriage and Family Relationships (New York: Henry Holt, 1928), 51.

18. Mary Ross, "The New Status of Women in America," Woman's Coming of Age, ed. V.F. Calverton and Samuel D. Schmalhausen (New York: Horace Liveright, Inc., 1931), 544. See also Lorine Pruette's Women and Leisure: A Study of Social Waste (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1924).

19. Ross, "New Status," 546.

20. Mary Ross, "Shall We Join the Gentlemen?" Survey 57 (1 December 1926): 263.

21. Breckinridge, Women in the Twentieth Century, 84. In 1924 Louise Driscoll wrote a pageant honoring achievements of women through history for the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs. See Driscoll's A Pageant of Women in Drama 14 (May-June 1924): 263-265.

22. Breckinridge, 345.
23. Estelle Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," Journal of American History 61 (September 1974): 378.
24. Ibid.
25. For an article that discusses women's reform work in the 20s see Stanley J. Lemons' "The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s," Journal of American History 55 (March 1969): 776-786. Plays about social issues continued to be written. For a play about the necessity for a national child labor law, see Rachel Lyman Field's The Fifteenth Candle (New York: Samuel French, 1921). Margaret Evans's Faith dramatizes the sacrifice of Negro soldiers who died during World War I; see Poet Lore 33 (Spring 1922) 132-137. For an anti-lynching play see Corrie Crandall Howell's The Forfeit in Poet Lore 36 (Spring 1925): 126-141.
26. Unless otherwise indicated page numbers of the plays refer to the following editions. Clarice Vallette McCauley's The Conflict and Evelyn Emig's The China Pig in A Treasury of Plays for Women, ed. Frank Shay (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1922). Eleanor Whiting's Common Ground in Poet Lore 32 (Spring 1921). Mary Katharine Reely's Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds (Minneapolis: Perine Book Company, 1921); Reely's Bringing Up Nine (Chicago: American Library Association, 1930).
27. Lois Scharf, To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 21.
28. Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Feminist--New Style," Harper's 155 (October 1927): 552.
29. Beatrice M. Hinkle, "Women and the New Morality," in Our Changing Morality, 244.
30. For a definition of companionate marriage as used by Melvin Knight in the 20s to designate a married couple's choice not to have children, see Ernest R. Groves' The Family and Its Social Function (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1940), 25.

31. Sidney Howard, The Silver Cord in Representative American Plays; Lewis Beach, The Square Peg (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924); George Kelly, Craig's Wife in Twenty-five Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, ed. John Gassner (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949). See also Alice Gerstenberg's farcical sketches about bored women of leisure lolling on beaches, waiting in hotel lobbies, and playing mah-jong. As Gerstenberg writes in her preface, "though a man never appears his presence rules," in Four Plays for Four Women (New York: Brentano's, 1924). For a discussion of the all-out literary "war against Mother," see Ann Douglas's "The 'Dark Legend' of Matricide," in Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 217-253.
32. Brenda Murphy, American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 151.
33. Ibid., 149.
34. Beach, The Square Peg, 6.
35. Kelly, Craig's Wife, 164.
36. Howard, The Silver Cord, 1017.
37. Kelly, Craig's Wife, 213.
38. John Gassner's introduction to Craig's Wife in Twenty-five Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, 162.
39. Whiting, Common Ground, 140.
40. Biographical information on McCauley precedes The Conflict in Shay's anthology A Treasury of Plays for Women.
41. See also McCauley's The Conflict (Baltimore, Md.: Norman Remington Company, 1921) and in Contemporary One-Act Plays of 1921, ed. Frank Shay (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1922).
42. Emig Mellon's Two Prize Plays and Four Others (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1929), vii. Emig's The China Pig, in a slightly revised version, can be found in Poet Lore 33 (Autumn 1922): 439-450.

43. McCauley, The Conflict, 243.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 255.
46. Ibid., 266.
47. Ibid., 264.
48. Emig, The China Pig, 83.
49. Ibid.
50. Una Chaudhuri, Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 57.
51. Ibid.
52. Emig, The China Pig, 91.
53. Ibid., 96.
54. Jane Addams, "The Snare of Preparation," in Twenty Years at Hull House (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 86-88.
55. Emig, The China Pig, 97.
56. Anna Garlin Spencer, Woman's Share in Social Culture (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1925), 175. Marxist Mary Inman would echo Spencer in the late 30s by claiming that the political activism of a housewife was of greater social value than that of an apolitical, self-supporting career woman. See Inman's In Woman's Defense (Los Angeles: Mercury Printing, 1940), 33.
57. Emig, The China Pig, 91.
58. See Eleanor Whiting's Ashes in Poet Lore 33 (Autumn 1922): 423-438.
59. Whiting, Common Ground, 147.
60. Ibid., 144.

61. Ibid., 147-148.
62. Felix Sper, From Native Roots: A Panorama of Our Regional Drama (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Publishers, 1948), 333.
63. Whiting, Common Ground, 147.
64. Sharon Friedman, "Feminism as Theme in Twentieth-Century American Women's Drama," American Studies 25 (Spring 1984): 70.
65. Dorothy Chansky, "Composing Ourselves," 258-260.
66. Katharine Kester, "The Farmer and the Play," Drama 15 (November 1924): 36.
67. The theatre activities at the agricultural school of the University of Minnesota are discussed in J.M. Drew's "The Play's the Thing," Rural New Yorker 76 (17 November 1917): 1324.
68. Reely, Early Ohios, 24.
69. Ibid., 25.
70. "Dramatization of county library service adapted from the author's state traveling library play, "Uncle Sam brings it to your door." The original appeared in the Wisconsin Library Bulletin, June 1923." From the frontpiece of Reely's Bringing Up Nine, 2.
71. Ibid., 4.
72. Mary Ross, "Shall We Join the Gentlemen?": 266-267. See also Lois Scharf, To Work and to Wed, 24.
73. Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," Feminist Studies 5 (Fall 1979): 524.
74. Beatrice Hinkle, "Women and the New Morality," 244.

Chapter Three: Lonely Farmhouses: Women and the Folk Play,
1925-1929

Regionalism in American drama, most popular after World War I through 1940, was greatly influenced by the 1911 tour of the Irish Players. In particular J.M. Synge's one act Riders to the Sea had an impact on the form and content of many of the plays written during the Little Theatre movement and became a model for the American folk play. (1) In his 1948 survey of folk drama From Native Roots Felix Sper wrote of the Irish:

The one-act plays on peasant life they introduced set in motion a current in the theater which was to culminate in the successful manufacture of native folk plays. Especially the pieces of John M. Synge suggested to young writers the need of exploiting our own native resources, our folkways, our local history, and rural types.
(2)

Regionally-specific folk plays dramatized the lives of country people, most of whom still farmed for a living. After World War I the depressed farm economy that persisted into the thirties was the condition of country life. (3) The farm crisis brought attention to the existence of an American

peasantry, the closest correlation the United States had to Synge's Aran Island fisher-folk. To a small group of university students, professors, and playwrights, the lives of rural people were a "native resource" for an American folk drama. (4) Regional drama reflected an interest in the lives of the rural poor, predominantly white and Anglo-Saxon, who were considered by many the true representatives of the nation's traditions and history. (5) Playwrights imbued rural characters with qualities of independence and individuality, values lacking, it was believed, in a majority of the urban middle-class whose defining feature was mobility.

The chapter examines how six women playwrights, who wrote one-act plays for their community or university theatres, or for publication in journals, dramatized the lives of women whose homes were in rural areas. The plays listed below, as well as many of the other one acts discussed in other chapters, were categorized as folk drama. (6) The playwrights depicted the lives of rural people using dialect to define region and showing the effect of environment on character. Folk plays with a woman as the main character were often similar in tone and theme, despite the difference in geographical location.

In this chapter from the South are Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money (1929), set on a tenant farm in Pickens County, South Carolina, and Margaret Bland's Pink and Patches (1928), set in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. Rural upstate New York is represented by Grace Kiner's Wedding Clothes (1928), set on a rented farm. From the Midwest there is Marion Lucy Felton's Goose Money (1928), set on a Wisconsin farm: and from the West are Alice Pieratt's Day's End (1929), set in the California mountains and Pauline Rodgers Young's Off the Road (1925), set on a ranch in Arizona. (7)

The plays illustrate what life was like for women living in the country and connect to the major problems that concerned them: loneliness, poverty, too much work, the primitive conditions of farm kitchens, their children's lack of access to good schools, and little or no control over the money they made. The main character is shown to be indispensable to her family, although her work is undervalued, her status low, and her position in the world negligible. The farm wife is treated as the unacknowledged cornerstone of rural America, with little to show for her incessant work. The irony of this position informs each of the plays. To understand the playwrights' choices of themes and their

sympathetic treatment of their main characters is to be reminded that they were writing for an audience of women sensitive to issues of status and money.

The interest in an amateur's one-act play about a rural family was due to a number of reasons: university courses that taught folk playwriting, contests searching for new writers to meet the demand for non-royalty plays, and federal money allocated to agricultural colleges and university extension divisions, which, along with new methods of farming and home economics, taught drama to country people. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, the farm recession and the low standard of life common to many farm families was the government's major domestic problem. (8) The scheme of rural sociologists was to eliminate the worst of rural ills by introducing new techniques of work that also taught people how to organize and to solve problems through cooperative action. Drama was often referred to as a vocational tool that promoted a "community feeling," which was considered an essential foundation to other improvements. (9) Attending a play, acting in a local production, or watching a home economics lesson in the form of a demonstration sketch, were some of the most successful methods used in rural education. (10) The

last half of the 20s saw a growth of rural dramatic activity underwritten by agricultural extension work.

Jonathan Kolb, chairman of the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Wisconsin, in a 1926 handbook for rural communities, wrote that drama "quickens the imagination of those who take part in productions; it cultivates the emotions to respond naturally and properly; and it directs the will along constructive lines." (11) In 1928 Kolb persuaded Marion Felton to write Goose Money, which he then distributed to farmers throughout the state as an example of "home-grown playmaking." (12) The popularity of Felton's play, sometimes referred to as the prototype of a rural comedy, encouraged other amateurs to write and local groups to produce plays for competition in home talent tournaments. Plays of rural life were circulated "with the hope," in the words of Ethel Theodora Rockwell, the University of Wisconsin Extension Division's Dramatic Activities Bureau Chief, "that they [would] help to push open the door to a better and happier farm life." (13)

A happier farm life, as evinced by the six plays discussed here, would only be achieved when rural people had access to what city people took for granted: good schools,

labor-saving devices in the home, and a life balanced between work and play. Framed by the discrepancy between city and country life, the plays need to be read as a protest against the unequal treatment experienced by many rural people, and most especially women. Even Felton's comic Goose Money is predicated on the assumption that the life of a farm woman is one of unending work. Though the complaints of inequity that rural female characters voice were similar to housewives in both cities and towns, they are shown to be compounded by isolation. Yet participation in local drama could put an end to just such scenes of loneliness. As Ethel Rockwell noted in 1931, community theatre was a form of recreation the whole family could enjoy.

Drama in the Country and the Plight of Farm Women

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the federal government was concerned that people living in rural areas were falling behind, which led to the steady migration from rural areas to the cities. In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt had appointed the Country Life Commission to investigate and report on the standard of living in rural

America. (14) In 1914 the Smith-Lever Act was added to the federal budget to provide an educational demonstration program for farmers and their wives that taught improved methods of farming and home management. The program was carried out by county agents and home demonstration agents, whose goal was to reach each rural county in every state.

The federal money was to be divided between farm and home. Farm women had long been ignored, and their needs, it was hoped, would finally be met. "There is no more important person," Roosevelt said, "measured in influence upon the life of the nation, than the farmer's wife." Martha Fcote Crow, in whose 1915 book The American Country Girl the quote from Roosevelt appears, also included a letter from Asbury Lever, co-sponsor of the 1914 Act. (15) Crow had written to Lever asking him if there was a special provision in his bill for women and children. She reprinted his response, which read in part: "I say unhesitatingly that the problem of the farm wife is one of the most vital of our rural problems and when this bill was drawn, I had in mind the use of a reasonable portion of the funds for the amelioration of her condition." (16) Lever knew of the plight of farm women, Crow pointed out to her readers, girls who were to be future farm wives, but it

was up to them to use the information available to them to improve their lives and those of their communities.

In 1913, David Houston, the newly appointed Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, solicited letters from farm women to tell him of their problems and to make suggestions as to how the government could help them. Extracts of the letters were published in a series of four pamphlets on farm women's domestic, social and labor, educational, and economic needs. (17) A woman writing from Virginia listed what she considered were the major grievances of farm women:

Isolation, stagnation, ignorance, lack of ambition, the incessant grind of labor, and lack of time for improvement by reading, by social intercourse, or by recreation of some sort are all working against the farm woman's happiness and will ultimately spell disaster to our Nation. (18)

Despite the individual unit of each farm family, and the necessary interdependence of all members, many women wrote that they were tired of having all of the money made on the farm invested back into the land or spent on farm machinery.

A woman from Michigan wrote:

The woman would not mind the work so much if she were working for something she needed or wanted, but when the hard-earned chicken money saved little by little goes to buy farm seed, pay the hired man, or pay for fertilizer, it is what wears her out. (19)

All four of the pamphlets from farm women included letters of contentment as well as of complaint. Yet, even women who were happy with their lives asked the government for help in starting women's organizations. "Educate the farm woman to the cooperative spirit," a woman from Wisconsin requested. (20) Sophonisba Breckinridge noted, in her 1939 history Women in the Twentieth Century, that farm women had been largely excluded from the club movement. (21) However, due to the federal funding of home demonstration agents, rural women began to receive the support they needed in organizing themselves into clubs for both work and recreation.

Although introducing better farming methods was the primary objective of the Smith-Lever Act, the heart of the Country Life Movement was elevating the quality of life in rural America. (22) After meeting the demand for increased crop production and the shipment of food to Europe during World War I, extension work expanded to include education, home beautification, and culture. (23) The comprehensive introduction of art, music, and drama into rural communities was primarily done through programs begun in university extension divisions of agricultural colleges. (24) Lucile Winifred Reynolds, whose 1935 dissertation "Leisure-Time

Activities of a Selected Group of Farm Women" was based on questionnaires filled out by women between 1927 and 1932, wrote:

Interest in amateur acting on the part of rural people has developed quite rapidly within the last two or three decades. It is part of a rather widespread revival of interest in this ancient art on the part of adults. In urban centers it has found expression in the "Little Theater" movement. In rural communities the impetus for activities in this field has come from members of the extension and resident teaching staffs of the state agricultural colleges. (25)

In contrast to the private sponsorship of the urban Little Theatre movement, the rural wing was underwritten by federal funding.

The precursor of using drama to help rural people was Alfred Arvold's founding of the Little Country Theater in Fargo, North Dakota in 1914. The theatre was located on the second floor of the administration building at the North Dakota Agricultural College. In his book The Little Country Theater, Arvold defines the sociological mission of theatre, which fits with the program of country life renewal.

If the drama can serve as just one of the mediums to get the millions of country people here and elsewhere to express themselves in order that they may find themselves there is no telling what big things will happen in the generations to come. (26)

At first, Arvold concentrated on student tours to rural areas where they performed classic plays and popular Broadway full-lengths. Later he assisted local people in creating pageants and showed them how to produce plays on their own in home talent productions.

Following Arvold's example, companies of university students began to tour small towns throughout their states. The best-known student troupe was Frederick Koch's Carolina Playmakers of the University of North Carolina, which began touring in the summer of 1919. Along with the formation of the Carolina Playmakers, Koch organized the Bureau of Community Drama, a unit of the Extension Division at the University of North Carolina. The Bureau provided a Field Director, who traveled the state assisting "schools and rural communities in the writing and production of plays, pageants, and festivals." (27)

Alfred Arvold made an important addition to producing a play for a rural audience when he requested that his students make a pre-show investigation of a town's economy, access roads, popular hang-outs, and group activities. Later, Frederick Koch would have his students use their observations of country people as the basis for their folk plays. Koch

will be discussed in further detail because of the system of folk playwriting he inaugurated and the dissemination of his techniques in colleges and universities throughout the 20s. Koch believed that anyone could write and used student-authored one-acts as texts in his playwriting courses. (28) A measure of his success was the publication of three volumes of plays written by students at the University of North Carolina between 1922 and 1928. (29)

In his 1929 history of the Little Theatre movement, Footlights Across America, Kenneth Macgowan observed that farmers were getting involved in local theatre with the help of college groups. As an example, Macgowan cited the work of Alexander Drummond, who took the Cornell Dramatic Club to the New York State Country Theater beginning in 1919. (30) Within four years student members of the Department of Rural Organization at Cornell University were responsible for organizing rural dramatic groups. The plays competed at "Little Country Theatre" sites, which were set up in county fairs. (31) In 1927, farmers from three Wisconsin counties competed in a one-act play tournament after participating in a workshop conducted by a drama specialist, who was sent by the agricultural extension service of the University of

Wisconsin. (32)

Though by the mid-20s established Little Theatres preferred to produce full-length plays, the one act was still being written by amateurs in university playwriting courses, and for contests and drama tournaments, and for publication. Roland Holt, a frequent contributor to Drama Magazine, wrote in 1927:

The one-act play is finding a new outlet in the Little Theatre tournaments that are now being given in state after state. It is hoped that more and more different little theatres in such tourneys may be represented by highly localized plays rich in the flavor of their native states.(33)

The publishing company of Longmans, Green and the Drama League conducted a playwriting contest in 1928 and 1929. (34) The purpose behind the national Longmans, Green-Drama League contest wrote Nathaniel Reeid, one of the judges, was "to foster the American drama, to aid the American theatre, and to encourage the American playwright." (35)

The Transcript: The Folk Play as Document

The first use of the term "folk play" in the American theatre is usually credited to Frederick Koch, who called the Carolina Playmakers' first program of one acts performed at

the University of North Carolina in 1919 "Carolina Folk Plays." (36) Koch defined folk drama "as concerned with folk subject matter: with the legends, superstitions, customs, environmental differences, and the vernacular of the common people." (37) Koch's work in folk drama dated back to his years at the University of North Dakota where his troupe, the Dakota Playmakers, staged one acts by Lady Gregory, Yeats, and J. M. Synge as well as student-authored plays set on the Dakota prairie. (38) Playwright Maxwell Anderson, once a member of the Dakota Dramatic Society, which was a precursor to the Dakota Playmakers, wrote of the prairie folk plays: "It seems to me that if the interest and enthusiasm keep up we may yet have [a dramatic revival] comparable to the recent flowering in Ireland." (39)

To authenticate his students' plays, Koch included descriptions of how the playwrights came to know the people, the dialect, and the region about which they wrote. As mentioned earlier, this was a practice of many of the women playwrights who wrote realistic plays. Koch described each of the playwrights in his anthology American Folk Plays as "a native of the region about which he writes; the people in the play are his own people." (40) In her 1942 subject index

Regional United States, Hannah Logasa wrote that short fiction, "a form of regional literature par excellence," showed "more clearly than fact the differences in attitudes, cultures, mode of thought and reactions of people in various and particular localities." (41) Felix Sper concurred when he wrote that the regional plays surveyed in his history From These Roots provide "poetry and incidental music which render the drama significant as document and sometimes great as literature." (42) A significant fictional document, in Sper's estimation, was "an honest yet dramatic transcript of the folk as they pass their days on native ground." (43)

For a realistic document of folk life, it was essential to capture their speech, as it was through the language of the plays that character was rendered. Perhaps Synge's most evident influence on American folk drama was his quite famous adherence to the use of dialect. (44) This important aspect was addressed in Koch's anthology Carolina Folk-Plays by the inclusion of a pronunciation guide for actors performing Carolina folk plays. (45) And for those producing plays set in other regions, Koch advised actors to speak "more or less in the manner of the country folk in whatever state the play is presented." (46)

Dialect was used to delineate the region and to mark class. Not all rural folk speak in dialect, and not all town people use Standard English. Broken language does, however, distinguish farm owners from farm renters, and the urban visitor to the mountain resort from the mountaineers. Another distinction of class occurs between the subject of folk drama and the writer. Playwright Paul Green, who had been a student of Koch's at the University of North Carolina, made the point explicitly in his definition of folk drama that it was never written by one of the folk:

Folk drama is not a folk-art and never has been. Only its subject matter is folk. Both the dramatist and the actors who create the folk-play may in no sense be of "the folk," and their piece may never be seen or heard of by the type of people it portrays, and yet it is folk-drama if its material is such. (47)

However, many audience members did identify with the characters they saw on stage, and the repertoire of the touring Carolina Playmakers consisted of student-authored one acts about the country people of North Carolina. According to Lenore Dunnigan, reporting on the Carolina Playmakers for The Farmer's Wife in 1925, the troupe was important precisely because it staged "the lives of its audience." (48)

Women and the Folk Play

The issues concerning farm women that were to be rectified by the Smith-Lever Bill found a forum in the pages of The Farmer's Wife, a magazine which began publication in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1906. In 1920 a series of articles that introduced the concept of the home demonstration agent, one of which assured women that the agent was "to get farm people thinking better together and working together for community betterment." (49) This statement reflected the plan of the Country Life Movement to make rural life more attractive by involving people in their own uplift.

The 1920 passage of the Suffrage Amendment was celebrated in The Farmer's Wife by a poem, "A Hymn to Women" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, proclaiming the 20s as the dawn of a new era of service:

They are waking, waking, waking,
In the East and in the West:
They are throwing wide the windows for the
sun;
And they see the dawn is breaking,
And they quiver with unrest,
For they know their work is waiting to be done. (50)

The poem was dedicated to Frances Willard, temperance leader and suffragist, and was prefaced with her words: "Women will

come into government and purify it, into politics and cleanse its stygian pool; for woman will make homelike every place she enters and she will enter every place on this round earth."

(51) The imprint of Willard's cultural feminism, which saw women as the moral authorities in society, informs the editorial view of The Farmer's Wife.

Willard's definition of domesticity, that of a married woman's condition of financial dependence, frames a series of articles concerning women's contribution to farm income, their unequal share in the profits, and an examination of women's legal rights. (52) Marjorie Schuler's 1927 article "Who Gets Your Earnings?" began with the question:

Who collects your butter and egg money, your husband or yourself? If he allows you to have it he is giving you something that the law says belongs to him, for states do not grant a wife the right to wages which she earns inside the family home. (53)

The domestic sphere was clearly marked in rural America, and the allocations of federal money to be divided between farm and home made this separation even more distinct. Women were expected to be moral guardians of both their homes and their communities. A 1920 article in The Farmer's Wife appeals to its readers' sense of responsibility: "Grandmother Goes Down the Mountain: This Story is True, Word for Word: Does it Not

Inspire Us, Who Have Advantages, To Do Better?" (54) The article tells the story of an old woman, who had lived sixty years in a mountain cabin without electricity or running water, before being "rescued" by a home demonstration agent.

Plays about poor and/or isolated women brought attention to the fact that there were real women similarly afflicted and in need of help. The realistic one-act play about a poor farm woman shares the moral ideology and audience address of the above title, and as it realistically detailed the main character's home and geographical placement, it operated as a true account. By dramatizing the most persistent and worrisome ills endured by women living in the country, the playwrights helped spread the message that many people continued to suffer, and, it was believed, suffered needlessly. Furthermore, unlike middle-class women in the cities, rural women did not need to find activities to fill their days, but needed to justify spending part of their time at "play." The women's one acts inform their audiences of the less than home-like conditions in many cabins and farmhouses to which many rural women were confined. They also indicate one of the purposes to which female-authored drama was often applied: to arouse the indignation of middle-class women.

Lonely Farmhouses: Off the Road and Wedding Clothes

On wide Western prairies, or anywhere in lonely farm houses, the women of today, confined absolutely to this strangling cradle of the race, go mad by the scores and hundreds. Our asylums show a greater proportion of insane women among farmers' wives than in any other class.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's alarming account of farm women's lives, from her 1898 Women and Economics, announced to the rest of the country the fate of those bound to family responsibilities exacerbated by isolation. (55) There was nothing, Gilman added, to distract them from the dreaded monotony of the family circle. Fifteen years later, a Minnesota farm woman, in a letter to Agricultural Secretary David Houston, contrasted the expansive land on which she lived with her feelings of suffocation: "We are on a splendid 320-acre farm with unlimited opportunities, yet it is almost intolerable here on account of being so shut off from the outside world." (56) Pauline Rodgers Young's two-scene one act Off the Road, set on an Arizona ranch, is also about the effect rural isolation has on women. The play opens in a dark kitchen where Laurie, an agitated young woman, is peeling potatoes. As she works she mutters to herself, repeatedly

stopping to tinker with her fancy alarm clock that is broken. Young describes it as a "top-heavy nickel clock (a novelty of a sort built for something other than performance)." (57) The only window in the kitchen is covered by a shade nailed down to keep out the dust. Even so, Laurie frequently turns from what she is doing to stoop down and crook her neck to peek underneath the shade.

It is Thursday, the day of the week she travels to pick up the mail and visit with the postman. When Les, her husband, enters he tells her that because of some repairs he must make on the ranch, she will have to round up the cattle and forfeit her weekly visit with her only friend, George, the mail carrier. The next day Les is to leave for two days on one of his frequent trips to ship cattle, which for Laurie means more days alone without seeing anyone and an entire week to wait to have a conversation.

In the second scene Les is alone in the kitchen repairing the broken clock. In the folk drama lexicon, an ornamental clock is a home expense called a "civilizin' trimm," or "fixin." The play is reminiscent of Erma and Paul Green's Fixin's (1923), produced by the Carolina Playmakers, about a husband, who withheld money for a doctor, which caused the

death of his child and did not allow his wife to spend money on home furnishings. This was a common complaint of farm women, and in Fixin's the wife leaves her husband. (58) In Young's description of the ranch kitchen there is the significant detail of a brightly colored tablecloth over the rough pine table. That in addition to the fancy alarm clock signals the presence of a concerned husband. As Les works on the clock he wonders about Laurie's increasing agitation. When Laurie returns and learns that Les has forgotten to get the mail, she plans to ride to the spot to see if George left it for them under a rock. Laurie says about George: "He talks to me--that an' my clock, its all I have." (59) When Laurie threatens to leave forever because she can no longer stand the "stillness pressin' in an squeezin' me back," Les decides that he will sell his ranch so they can move to town, or at least to the edge of it, where "a road runs by." (60)

The ending of Off the Road contrasts with Mary Katharine Reely's A Window to the South, about a farmer's neglect of his wife's request for a window. In Reely's play the depressed, near-mute farm wife sits in her dark, spare kitchen, while her husband drives a tractor in the fields of his thriving wheat farm. Though a window will finally be built, Reely suggests

that it may be too late to save Ma. The belief that suicide and madness among farm women was common, and the result of rural isolation, did not match the census findings, which showed that the suicide rate was actually higher in the city. However, in one account of a rural suicide, related by Martha Foote Crow in The American Country Girl, it is the description of the house that haunts the reader. All of the chairs in the tiny house, Crow writes, "had been scrubbed until not a particle of paint was left." (61) This is similar to Susan Glaspell's use of a farm kitchen interior to explain the reasons for the wife's murder of her husband in Trifles. (62)

Although Off the Road is one of many plays about women who are caught in the "strangling cradle" of rural America, the unusual marital compromise made by Les situates it very much in the 1920s romantic ideal of a modern marriage. In her 1983 essay, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love," Ellen Kay Trimberger discusses the interpretation of heterosexual equality in marriage as lived by three artist/writer couples in Greenwich Village between 1900 and 1925. (63) The ideal "girl," in the words of writer Floyd Dell's autobiographical hero, was one who could be talked to as well as kissed. (64) The companionate, heterosexual union may have had its

beginnings in Greenwich Village, but by 1925 it had moved to the country where its applications were more pragmatic. Fictional Les proves to be a more empathetic partner than his urban intellectual brothers Hutchins Hapgood, Max Eastman, or Floyd Dell. Trimberger's view is that the consequence of the companionate marriage as practiced by the Greenwich Village couples was that the artistic careers of the wives suffered as their husbands' writing benefitted from the women's incisive criticism. The rural terrain has tended to rout class and gender from its more familiar urban wrap to form instead a utopia of frontier ruggedness where men and women work together.

In Grace Kiner's Wedding Clothes the younger generation has already moved away from the farm, leaving behind their parents, a lonely, aging couple. The Moores are struggling to get by on their small plot of rented land in upstate New York. The play takes place in a combination kitchen and dining room that contains an armless rocking chair, mismatched furniture, and a coal burning stove. Mrs. Moore has received a letter from her younger daughter saying that she intends to return for a twelve hour visit to get married. Mrs. Moore is excited, but stricken. She does not want her daughter to be

ashamed of them or their house, and so she insists that her husband sell their one calf to buy wedding clothes, curtains, and a gift. The sale of the calf is a sacrifice to the Moores as it is sure to be worth more in six months, but the calf must be sold, and their neighbor, a young land-owning farmer has eagerly offered to buy it.

Kiner, who lived and worked on a farm in upstate New York, won first prize with Wedding Clothes, in a contest conducted "under the auspices of Cornell University with the cooperation of four rural organizations in New York State [that]...combined in offering two hundred dollars in prizes for country-life plays written by amateur playwrights." (65) The winning plays, edited by Alexander Drummond, were published by Samuel French and offered royalty-free to any rural group wishing to produce them. (66) The appeal of Kiner's play to any country folk would be the higher moral standard displayed by the sacrificial, long-suffering Moores. Both of their daughters fled to the city without thinking of their parents, or their isolation. Mr. Moore shakes his head when his wife mentions the older daughter, as she has not once visited since she left. In addition the play shows not only the class disparity between farmers, but the great difficulty

renters had in moving above the lower rung of the agricultural ladder, where many remained.

Mr. Moore sells his calf to the land-owning Mr. Sampson, who, the audience learns, left his automobile back home so he could tie the calf to his buggy. While the sale between the two men is going on outside, the two women sit and visit. Kiner does not bring on the character of Mr. Sampson, but instead describes Mrs. Sampson as "about thirty-five, large and red-cheeked, dressed in rather showy clothes....and she fairly radiates health and prosperity." (67) Further the conversation between the two women allows Kiner to refer to the volatile pricing for crops that decimated many farmers unable to hold out until they could make a profit on what they grew:

Mrs. Moore: ...you know how tight money's been lately.

Mrs. Sampson: I should say I do. You ought to hear Sam go on about it.

Mrs. Moore: It's worse for a renter. We can't hold the potatoes. The landlord wants his rent.

Mrs. Sampson: Pete's holding his. He says they'll go to a dollar before the winter's over. (68)

After the calf is sold, the Moores receive a second letter from their daughter announcing that she is already married and must indefinitely postpone her trip home. The excitement of

the event over, the Moores put off their trip to town and silently resume their chores.

The Desire to Escape Farm Life: Stockin' Money and Pink and Patches

Our girls and boys soon see that their city cousins have less of hard labor at long hours and comparatively much higher wages, with greater privileges and conveniences, and it is this contrast that makes the country girl and boy drift cityward, to the detriment of the farm. (69)

Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money, set in South Carolina, is about Martha Cantrell's struggle to give her grandson, Ralph, an education. She has saved enough money to send him to an Academy where he will study to become a minister. Martha has saved her chicken and egg money for five years to cover Ralph's tuition, and has spent the summer peddling her vegetables at the nearby mill to buy his school clothes. Martha bundles the money she has made in a black stocking that she wears hidden in her dress.

Stockin' Money, the winning one-act in the Drama League-Longmans, Green Publishing playwriting contest in 1928, documents the meagerness of tenant farm life and the difficulty children have freeing themselves from it. The play

is set in the Cantrells' kitchen, which Dean describes in detail:

The room is ceiled with boards and heavy beams overhead. The small cook stove is on the right side of the room near the centre, a box of wood nearby, and beyond the stove stands an old-fashioned sideboard. A kitchen safe containing dishes is placed against the left wall near the front and a small table holding kitchen utensils, glass fruit cans, and an earthenware churn stands against the wall at the rear left. The rectangular table in the centre is covered with blue checked oilcloth. A barrel with dough board and a bag of meal are in the right rear corner. Several stew pans, frying pans, etc. are hung along the right wall. The sideboard and safe are varnished brown...unpainted chairs...complete the furnishings. A glass lamp burns dimly on the table. (70)

The play opens with Martha, the farm wife, frying meat and baking cornbread. As the family sits to eat, their table lit by a glass lamp, Hiram, her husband wishes they had sweet potatoes and Ralph, her grandson wishes for pie, but they bless the food and after Martha passes the bread they spread it with butter that Martha churned, and eat rapidly. Ralph's father died in World War I and on receiving a letter informing her, Martha had to walk five miles to the nearest neighbor to have it read. Martha says of people in their situation: "Yer cayn't do nothin' yer wanten, hafter do like somebody else says always." (71) The family acknowledges their ignorance, but they aspire for Ralph to have a better life and feel

fortunate that they are not involved, as their neighbors are, in distilling corn liquor, feuding, and being in a gang.

Woman's time on a tenant farm, according to Martha Cantrell's story, equals how much work it takes to save for what she wants and how quickly she loses it. When the landlord comes looking for the back rent, Hiram "let[s] a word slip" that there is cash in the house, and Ralph's plan to go to the Academy is over. At least until Martha can save some more money. In response Martha says:

(wiping here eyes with her apron) Hit ain't never no differen' on the farm. I been five yers--(Turnin on him angrily.)--five yers, yer mind savin' thar little hund'ed dollars--I sweat blood in that thar cotton fiel' ter git hit. Done lost one eye pickin' boll weevils in the sun--cayn't see nothin' outen my right eye an' the t'other'n er goin too. (72)

The sacrifice has been for nothing. The play ends with Ralph on his knees with his head in his grandmother's lap. Sudden misfortune and disappointment is experienced as catastrophe precisely because of the long, arduous lead to it, and the finality of its loss.

Stockin' Money focuses on two of the borders of a poor, rural woman's region. For money she tends geese and chickens and sells vegetables; to cook she uses a wood stove and churns her own butter. Her world is narrow and her work the same

each day. It takes years of saving for her earnings to amass enough capital for it to become important. The play begins at the moment the woman's savings have accrued to the point that she becomes the pivotal character. Because of the money, the second border of the woman's region is introduced: that of the future of her children or in Martha's case, grandchild, who will soon leave the bound world of the home. The child's leaving serves to further narrow the woman's region; yet, that is his only chance to escape tenant farming.

What Stockin' Money does so well is depict stasis. There is little hope for rural people to change, if the characters remain, in the folk tradition, molded to their environment. Being left on the farm means being left behind, or as Martha says in disgust, "Jist keeps on er raisin' brats fer sich er doin's as this here." (73) Stockin' Money closely resembles Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up (1923), about an illiterate, but noble North Carolina mountain family. (74) The focus on the need for education and the high rate of illiteracy in the Carolinas is also part of Vollmer's play. A percentage of each Broadway performance of Sun-Up went toward an adult reading program administered by extension divisions in Southern states. (75)

Margaret Bland's Pink and Patches is another play about

a poor Southern family that focuses on the fate of children and the hard life of rural women. Bland had studied with Frederick Koch at the University of North Carolina, and an earlier play, Lighted Candles was included in his anthology.

(76) In 1928 the Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia won a two hundred dollar prize in the Little Theatre Tournament sponsored by the Manhattan Little Theatre Club and Samuel French. (77) Pink and Patches is set in the mountains of North Carolina and takes place in the yard next to a mountain hut. The play opens with fifteen year old Texie taking the wash off the clothesline, while her twin brother Rexie lounges on the ground. Their father's work is limited to the summer months, when he picks up tourists at the train station and drives them in his mule-led wagon to the new resort hotel. With the money he makes he can barely feed his family of six children, and yet, Texie's mother adds, he spent most his June earnings on liquor.

The mother, like all the other women in their mountain area, tends the small farm and does "all the washin' an' the runnin' after the cows an' the churnin' an' the cookin' an' the mindin' uv the baby." (78) Texie is still young enough to dream about a better life and most of her chores keep her

outside, but when Ma finally enters from the hut with her baby in her arms, she appears as what Texie will eventually become when she is married and consigned to her house. Ma is described as "a tall, thin woman with a pale face and bright eyes, somewhat drab and wary looking but possessing still energy and interest." (79) Texie, soon to be fifteen, a year younger than her sister was when she married, shudders when she thinks about her mother's life of "a-slavin an' a-slavin, a-washin' dishes an' a-hoein' corn," yet when she vows never to marry, her mother reminds her that marriage is inevitable. (80) But the resort hotel has brought in city people, which has allowed Texie a view of a different life, and specifically another version of a married woman.

Mrs. Allen, a friendly society woman, wears fashionable sports clothes and spends her days playing golf and hiking. On one of her trips she brings Texie a package that contains a dress that belonged to her sister; instead of a pink frilly one that Texie wants, it is a brown school uniform with a small hole that will require a patch, and it is identical to the one she is wearing. Seeing his sister crying, due to her disappointment, Rexie offers to round up the cows, but Texie says, "Nev' min'. I'll keep on a-goin' after the cows jes'

like I'll keep on a-wearin' ole brown calico dresses, but I'll keep on a-hatin' brown an' a-hatin' calico an' a-hatin' patches." (81)

Mrs. Allen, though charitable and concerned, dressed for a mountain hike, is merely passing through, which she does in the play as she is led off-stage by Ma, who has promised to show her the path to a site famous for its micah rocks. Texie is left behind carrying out the chores that she was doing when the play began. Ma, Texie, and the other mountain families perform a valuable service for the tourists. By remaining the same year after year they keep the land prices low and the countryside quaint. Although Bland only hints at this reading of the relationship between Mrs. Allen and the mountaineers, many folk plays of the thirties begin with this contrast between the tourist class and the rural poor, who serve them.

Acceptance and Servitude: Day's End

Alice Pieratt's Day's End was written while she was taking a class with Frederick Koch at the University of California, and the next spring the play became part of the repertoire of the Carolina Playmakers. (82) Pierrat writes in

the preface that the play was based on a story she heard while she was a child visiting her grandmother. Day's End takes place in the mountains above the Napa Valley, and like her grandmother's house, the ranch home of Sarah Kroan, the main character, is twenty miles from the nearest town.

Sarah Kroan was educated to be a school teacher, but instead she married one of the region's prosperous farmers. Otto, Sarah's husband, is a successful farmer, but he speaks to her only when necessary and has trained her to respond to his whistles. For the last thirty years Sarah has lived with him and cared for his ailing mother. The play opens after the family returns from the funeral of Sarah's mother-in-law. Now that her mother-in-law is dead, Sarah plans to leave the mountains with an old peddler, who promised her years before to fetch her as soon as he heard of the old woman's death. Despite Sarah's years of planning and Otto's brutish behavior, she is unable to leave. The peddler is ready, Sarah is dressed, but just as she is leaving her husband whistles three times, his signal that he wants her to come. The whistles stops her, and instead of leaving with the peddler, or answering her husband's whistle, she sits in a chair.

Like Elizabeth, the sacrificial mother in Evelyn Emig's

The China Pig, Sarah's ambition has been eviscerated by years of servitude. However, unlike Emig, who gives to Elizabeth a curtain speech that announces her promise to begin to write at home rather than to wait until she escapes from her husband, Pieratt leaves the end of the play ambiguous. Sarah sits and ignores Otto's whistle suggesting she may leave in the future. The play might also have been written to dramatize a passage from an actual farm woman that ran: "Until the women are awakened to their own needs and the interests and sympathies of the husbands are aroused, their condition will remain the same." (83)

The trap of marriage and the damage that it does to a woman that can not or will not leave is a familiar theme to the one-act plays written during this period. In a rural area a woman depended even more on a husband for interest and sympathy, such as Les in Off the Road, or the exemplary partnership between fellow-farmers, Madge and Oliver in Mary Katharine Reely's Early Ohios and Rhode Island Reds. Pieratt's play of Sarah's aging despair and dissolving dream is lodged in realism, underscored by its lack of closure. In a lively contrast there is Edna M. Harris's "fantasy" Windblown, set in a farmhouse, about nineteen year old Annie,

who dreads getting married and is blown off the edge of a cliff by her best friend, the wind. The play ends with her fiancé reporting to her parents that as Annie went over the cliff, "she laughed as she fell." (84)

"What is a Farmer's Wife?": Goose Money

In general, the farmer and his wife feel they must continually apply themselves to the work and find no time for anything in the way of entertainment. The rural population has become so accustomed to the grind that it never thinks of better things. (85)

Marion Felton's play Goose Money is about a Wisconsin farm wife, Mary Smith, who wears a patched gingham dress, worn shoes, and has about her a "self-sacrificing air." (86) Felton's play is about how Mary loses both her old dress and her self-sacrifice when she spends the summer goose money she has made on herself. She transforms herself from a tired, old-fashioned farm wife to a "spiffy" modern woman, and with the money she has left over, she buys her husband a new suit and takes him on a vacation to Madison for "Farmer's Week." (87)

Mary is married to a man who owns his own farm and allows

her to manage the money she makes raising geese. The threat to Mary's buying spree is her many years of sacrificial living. She is reminded that there is a world beyond her own farm when an automobile full of relatives come for a visit. The injection of an involved, extended family is another important element of Felton's farm comedy, and Felton's use of character types suggests she patterned her play on Zona Gale's The Neighbors. (88) The relatives create a community background making the Smith farm into a smaller version of Gale's Friendship Village, and assist Mary by showing her that she does not have to work so hard. The relatives are, after all, on a vacation visiting her.

Felton's play opposes the predominant picture of farm life as peopled with illiterate characters, who speak in heavy dialect. Felton takes a familiar plot of the a woman's savings discovered by her husband, and instead of Mr. Smith taking it for farm machinery, Mary uses part of her goose money to take her husband on a vacation. In the folk comedies women also are the hardest working members of the family, but they at least have happy endings. Goose Money is clearly a comedy as the play takes place in the Smith living room, which "gives the effect of comfort, and one realizes its mistress

has tried to make the most of what was at hand." (89)

In 1928 Felton's Goose Money won first prize in the Wisconsin Home Talent Tournament. The tournament, in which winning productions from twelve counties competed, took place during "Farmer's Week." Goose Money shows not only how to live wisely on the farm, but how to write a winning one-act play about rural life. Felton assured the readers of her play that she was not a college woman, but lived on a farm just like them, which she hoped would encourage other rural people to write plays:

Unquestionably, the most faithful delineation of rural life should come from the people who have experienced it in all phases, and I shall be happy indeed if Goose Money tempts other farm men and women to try their hand at developing real rural folk drama. (90)

Felton, who lived on a farm near Madison, was a member of the Hillcrest Community Club. She wrote her play for the club to produce in the Dane County Home Talent Tournament, which held its competition in Madison during the Farm and Home Week. (91) Goose Money is the first one-act play in Wisconsin to be advertised as authored by farmer's wife, and it marks the beginning of a flurry of playwriting by Wisconsin farmers that would help many communities get through the hardships of the thirties.

These plays, like so many others written during the Little Theatre movement for local audiences, were engaged in writing the American experience. All of the writers seriously addressed the requirement made of playwrights, which was to show the people of one's land as truthfully and authentically as possible. Though the plays could be considered part of the record of rural problems that concerned women--and many women in small towns and cities, too--they were also problems, it was believed, that could be solved. Women's folk plays were inspired by actual conditions and belong to the socially conscious literature written during the Progressive Era and through the 20s and 30s. The writers' claim to their audiences' conscience seems quite insistent and surpasses the desire to look back with nostalgia, or to exploit a local folkway.

Endnotes

1. For a discussion of the full-length folk play on Broadway see John Wentz, "American Regional Drama, 1920-1940: Frustration and Fulfillment," Modern Drama 6 (Winter 1963): 286-293. For a discussion of pre-World War I folk dramas written by Neith Boyce, Alice Brown, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, and Lula Vollmer, see Rachel France's "Apropos of Women and the Folk Play," Women in the American Theatre, ed. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), 145-152.
2. Felix Sper, From Native Roots, 35-36.
3. Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 108-109; and Grant McConnell, The Decline of Agrarian Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 55.
4. The rural type most often dramatized belonged to the agricultural ladder's "lower third," which was the classification for tenant farmers and day laborers. The agricultural ladder is mentioned in most rural histories. See Mary Neth's Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 219-220. William L. Bowers places the system of agricultural mobility within an urban-rural matrix in The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920 (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), 147-48.
5. On the Agrarian Myth and the estimation of the dirt farmer as America's "best and most reliable citizen," see Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Knopf, 1955), 24-25; and McConnell, 7. The myth often excluded women, as letters, plays, and other documents attest. Farm women wanted the modern conveniences becoming standard in urban homes. Upgrades in a kitchen's labor-saving devices could be made with very little money, such as an "iceless refrigerator" or a "fireless cooker." Madge J. Reese, "Farm Home Conveniences," Farmers' Bulletin #927 (September 1928). However, most rural women's knowledge of electrical appliances outstripped their ability to afford them, and many areas did

not have access to electricity. See Katherine Jellison's Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1-65. See also, Deborah Fink's chapter on "Agrarianism and Women," in Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 11-29. Folk drama was racially segregated. In Felix Sper's map of the "drama regions" of the United States, the book's frontpiece, there are thirteen regions, one of which is "The White South." Within the text, a section on Negro plays follows the chapter "The White South," but it is missing from the map, and is an identity without a place.

6. Many of the American one acts chosen as presenting a "cross section of the life indigenous to a specific locality" were written by women. Felton's Goose Money is anthologized in Wisconsin Rural Plays, ed. Ethel Theodora Rockwell (Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Company, 1931), 33-60. All six of the plays discussed in this chapter are listed in Felix Sper's bibliography in From Native Roots, 281-334.

7. Unless otherwise indicated page numbers of the plays refer to the following editions: Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money: A Folk Play in One Act (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1929); Margaret Bland's Pink and Patches (New York: Samuel French, 1928); Grace Kiner's Wedding Clothes (New York: Samuel French, 1928); Marion Lucy Felton's Goose Money (Madison: Agricultural Extension Division, University of Wisconsin, 1928); Alice Pieratt's Day's End in American Folk-Plays, ed. Frederick H. Koch (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1939); Pauline Rodgers Young's Off the Road in Poet Lore 36 (Summer 1925).

8. The agricultural depression began in the summer of 1920 and continued until 1935. See "The Farm Problem, 1920-1928" in Arthur Link's American Epoch (New York: Knopf, 1959), 263-267.

9. "Use the Home Talent," Farmer's Wife 23 (November 1920): 183.

10. Katharine Kester, "The Play in the Country," Drama 16 (January 1926): 153. An early example of a rural propaganda play is Merline H. Shumway's Back to the Farm (Minneapolis: Agricultural Extension Division, University of Minnesota,

1914), about a son who attends agricultural school at the local university's Extension Division, and returns home to save the family farm.

11. Jonathan H. Kolb and Arthur F. Wileden, Rural Community Organizations: A Handbook (Madison: Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Wisconsin, 1926), 32. Beginning in 1926 Kolb and D.E. Lindstrom directed the Home Talent Tournament, which was sponsored by the Agricultural Extension Division of the College of Agriculture of the University of Wisconsin. See Kenneth Macgowan, Footlights Across America: Towards a National Theatre (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 166.

12. The connection between Jonathan Kolb and Marion (Mrs. Carl) Felton is mentioned in Robert Gard's Grassroots Theater: A Search for Regional Arts in America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 94.

13. Ethel Theodora Rockwell, "Foreword," Wisconsin Rural Plays, 6.

14. Bowers, The Country Life Movement. 24.

15. Martha Foote Crow, The American Country Girl (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1915), 122.

16. Ibid., 245.

17. The Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women, Report #103: The Domestic Needs of Farm Women, #104; and The Economic Needs of Farm Women, #106, The United States Department of Agriculture (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915). Each pamphlet was preceded by the Secretary's statement: "How Farm Women May Get Help Under the Smith-Lever Extension Act: The funds appropriated under the extension act of May 8, 1914, are given to the State Agricultural colleges to enable them to employ men and women as county agents and experts who will move about among the farming people, demonstrate good methods of agriculture and home economics, cooperate with them in studying their farm and home problems, and assist them in the adoption of better methods of their farms or in their homes."

18. Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women, 14.

19. Economic Needs of Farm Women, 11.
20. Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women, 29.
21. Between 1928 and 1929 state and local funds were increased by \$1,500,000. See Sophonisba Breckinridge, Women in the Twentieth Century, 70-73.
22. At its formation the aim of the Country Life movement was to retain values from the rural past through moral and social uplift. After World War I many in the organization worked to make farming a business, which contradicted the initial impulse of preservation. See Bowers, The Country Life Movement, 28-29.
23. Gladys Baker, The County Agent (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 54.
24. Marjorie Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America: A Study of the Rural Arts Program of the Agricultural Extension Service (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 8.
25. Lucile Winifred Reynolds, Leisure-Time Activities of a Selected Group of Farm Women (Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 1939), 26.
26. Alfred Arvold, The Little Country Theater (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 65.
27. Frederick H. Koch, "The Carolina Playmakers," Carolina Folk-Plays: First, Second, and Third Series, ed. Koch (New York: Henry Holt, 1941), xviii.
28. For a former student's view of Koch's methods, see Ladell Payne, "Thomas Wolfe and the Theatre," in Thomas Wolfe and the Glass of Time, ed. Paschal Reeves (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 125.
29. Carolina Folk-Plays, ed. Koch (New York: Henry Holt, First Series, 1922; Second Series, 1924; and Third Series, 1928).
30. Macgowan, Footlights Across America, 166.
31. "The Little Country Theater," Farmer's Wife 30 (May 1926):

310. An advertisement announcing contests sponsored by the Rural Social Organization, New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, appears in Players Magazine 1 (November 1925): 13. For an article on Drummond's early career, see Drama 17 (October 1926): 19. See also in the same issue, Alexander Drummond, "The Theatre in Colleges and Universities," 16-17, 32.
32. Carroll P. Streeter, "Footlights for Farmers," Farmer's Wife 32 (October 1929): 7.
33. Roland Holt, "The Trail of the One-Act Play," Drama 17 (January 1927): 102.
34. "Final Lists in the National Playwriting Contest," Drama 18 (November 1927): 57 and winner's list in Drama 19 (December 1928): 57.
35. Nathaniel Edward Reeid, "Four National Contests in Playwriting," Drama 17 (October 1926): 27. "The problem of the local theater, of course, is to develop new playwrights or to persuade those we already have to let it act their plays. For this purpose both university theaters and little theaters have taken more and more to holding playwriting contests." Macgowan, 216.
36. Koch, "The Carolina Playmakers," xii.
37. Koch, "American Folk Drama in the Making," in American Folk-Plays, xv.
38. Productions and tours of the Dakota Playmakers listed in appendix of Carolina Folk-Plays, 475-478.
39. Maxwell Anderson quoted in Koch's "The Carolina Playmakers," x.
40. Koch, "American Folk Drama in the Making," xiii.
41. Hannah Logasa, Regional United States: A Subject List (Boston: F.W. Faxon, 1942), ix.
42. Sper, From Native Roots, 39.

43. Ibid., 38.

44. "In writing The Playboy of the Western World, as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only, that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read newspapers." J.M. Synge, "Preface," The Playboy of the Western World in The Complete Works of John M. Synge (New York: Random House, 1935), 3.

45. Tom Peete Cross, "The Language of the Plays: Observations on the Pronunciation of the Dialects of North Carolina," Carolina Folk-Plays, 483-491.

46. Koch, Carolina Folk-Plays, copyright page.

47. Paul Green, "Folk Drama Defined," in Carolina Play-Book V (December 1932): 98.

48. Leonore Dunnigan, "The Carolina Playmakers," Farmer's Wife 28 (August 1925): 316.

49. "The Idea of Home Demonstration Work," Farmer's Wife 22 (March 1920): 297.

50. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "Hymn of the Women," Farmer's Wife 23 (November 1920): 204.

51. Ibid.

52. See Suzanne M. Marilley, "Frances Willard and the Feminism of Fear," Feminist Studies 19 (Spring 1993): 123-146. Though Marilley does not mention the Farmer's Wife, the editorial slant of the magazine follows her description of Willard's ideology. Because a woman was not protected under the law, her well-being was the responsibility of the man to whom she was connected.

53. Marjorie Schuler, "Who Gets Your Earnings?" Farmer's Wife 30 (May 1927): 308.

54. Mary Reynolds, "Grandmother Goes Down the Mountain: This Story is True, Word for Word: Does it Not inspire Us, Who Have Advantages, To Do Better?" Farmer's Wife 23 (September 1920): 95.

55. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics, 267.
56. Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women, 13. Another play about a young girl desperate to leave the farm is Marie Baumer's Town in The American Scene, ed. Barrett H. Clark and Kenyon Nicholson (New York: D. Appleton, 1930), 216-231.
57. Young, Off the Road, 300.
58. Erma and Paul Green's Fixin's in Carolina Folk-Plays, 167-189.
59. Young, Off the Road, 304.
60. Ibid.
61. Crow, American Country Girl, 259.
62. Susan Glaspell, Trifles (New York: Frank Shay, 1916).
63. Ellen Kay Trimberger, "Feminism, Men, and Modern Love: Greenwich Village, 1900-1925," in Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 131-152.
64. Ibid., 136.
65. Contest information for Kiner's Wedding Clothes, one of the New York State Rural Life Plays, is on the title page of the pamphlets published by Samuel French in 1928. The four rural organizations were the New York Department of Farms and Markets, the New York State Grange, the New York State Farm Bureau Federation of Home Bureaus, and the Grange Federation. Kiner's play was part of an evening of staged readings at the symposium "Grassroots Theater" held at Cornell University October 1992, and reprinted in the conference booklet. See From the Ground Up: Grassroots Theater in Historical and Contemporary Perspective, ed. Dudley Cocke, Harry Newman, and Janet Salmons-Rue (Ithaca, N.Y.: Community-Based Arts Project of Cornell University, 1993), 27-38.
66. Macgowan, Footlights Across America, 167.

67. Kiner, Wedding Clothes. 9.
68. Ibid.
69. Social and Labor Needs of Farm Women, 14.
70. Dean, Stockin' Money, 11. In addition to the folk plays by women found in the Carolina Folk Plays series, examples of other regional plays from the South by women are: Ada Jack Carver's The Cajun, which won second prize in the 1926 National Little Theatre Tournament representing Shreveport, Louisiana Little Theatre. See The American Scene, 502-516. Stella Dunaway Whipkey's Door Mats, set in the Ozarks, is about a woman, who, after being jilted by her fiance starts living for herself. See Poet Lore 40 (Spring 1929): 92-108. Georgia Douglas Johnson's Blue Blood, a tragi-comedy about miscegenation in which a couple about to marry are discovered to be siblings, is listed in Felix Sper's From Native Roots. It was first anthologized in Fifty More Contemporary One-Act Plays, ed. Frank Shay (New York: D. Appleton, 1928), Blue Blood is available in Black Female Playwrights, ed. Kathy Perkins, 38-46.
71. Dean, Stockin' Money, 3.
72. Ibid., 8
73. Ibid., 25.
74. Lula Vollmer's Sun-Up in Representative American Plays, 981-1009.
75. Bess M. Rowe, "Sun Up for the Six Per Cent: A Truly Thrilling Story of Adult Education in South Carolina," Farmer's Wife 28 (February 1925): 46-47.
76. Bland's Lighted Candles in Carolina Folk Plays, 309-326. See also Bland's Dead Expense (Franklin, Ohio: Eldridge Entertainment House, 1929).
77. "Margaret Bland of Charlotte, an alumna of The Playmakers, is the latest North Carolinian to win recognition on Broadway as a playwright. One of the four two-hundred dollar prizes for the best plays entered in the Little Theatre Tournament in

New York in May was awarded to Miss Bland for her one-act play, Pink and Patches, produced by the Agnes Scott Players." See "The Carolina Dramatic Association," Carolina Play-Book 1 (June 1928): 20.

78. Bland, Pink and Patches, 6.

79. Ibid., 9.

80. Ibid., 12.

81. Ibid., 23-24.

82. In 1928 Day's End was produced by the Carolina Playmakers at Chapel Hill and became part of their repertoire. Day's End is also included in The American Scene, 651-674.

83. Economic Needs of Farm Wives. 15. For another play about farm women and the trap of marriage see Rachel Field's The Londonderry Air in her volume The Cross-Stitch Heart and Other Plays (New York: Scribners, 1927); and for a "suburban" folk play about marriage see Josephine Henry Whitehouse's Daily Bread, set in the living room of a tract house in Fernald Crossing, Long Island. The play concerns a wife, whose husband has stopped speaking to her; in exchange for room and board she performs light household duties. Her role as dependent wife is contrasted with her unmarried friend, a career woman, and her Negro servant Lily, who the wife envies because Lily gets to leave the house at the end of the day. Poet Lore 40 (Spring 1929): 129-141.

84. Edna M. Harris, Windblown in Poet Lore 38 (Autumn 1927): 426-434.

85. Social and Labor Needs of Farm Wives, 13.

86. Felton, Goose Money, 1.

87. Ibid., 21.

88. Zona Gale, The Neighbors in Wisconsin Plays, Series One, ed. Thomas H. Dickinson (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1914).

89. Felton, 3.

90. Felton, "Author's Statement," 25. See also Glenn Frank, "Toward a People's Theater in Wisconsin," in Goose Money, ii.

91. Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 145.

Chapter Four: The Social Contribution of Amateur Drama,
1930-1938

In 1931 Ethel Rockwell's third study guide, American Life as Represented in Native One-Act Plays, was published. (1) The course was prepared for members of civic groups and women's clubs, who, in sixteen meetings, were assigned to read approximately one hundred twenty-five plays and perform twelve of them. Rockwell drew from the bounty of one acts that had been written during the previous twenty years of the Little Theatre movement, and her bibliography of anthologies and play publishers referred the reader to an even larger number. Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, Rachel Crothers, Alice Gerstenberg, and a few of the other playwrights are still read today, but of the rest, relatively obscure then and now, Rockwell's description still fits:

Many of these writers are, doubtless, like those mentioned in other studies, young men and women still in college, or earnest workers in Little Theatre groups. Though frequently unknown beyond their immediate circle, they are far from unimportant in this wide-flung movement which is bringing drama back to the people. (2)

Rockwell's course includes nine of the one acts mentioned in

earlier chapters of this study, and Elma Ehrlich Levinger's The Cow with Wings, which is discussed below. (3)

Rockwell chose the plays as representative of "life indigenous to a specific locality," and the purpose of studying America by sections, in regional drama fashion, was, she wrote, to "broaden the sympathies of both actors and audience." (4) Rockwell's definition of "native" drama was basically the same as Frederick Koch's folk play--about the farmer, fisherman, and laborer--expanded to include middle- and lower-class subjects living in cities and small towns. Rockwell had worked with Koch in North Carolina as director of the Bureau of Community Drama from 1924 to 1928, before moving to the University of Wisconsin to become an Assistant Professor of Speech and head the Bureau of Dramatic Activities in the University's Extension Division. (5)

As Bureau Chief, Rockwell concentrated on developing playwrights. In 1928 she formed the Wisconsin Dramatic Guild, started an annual playwriting contest, and edited two collections of the winning one acts from the Guild's "Original Playwriting Contests," Wisconsin Rural Plays (1931) and Wisconsin Community Plays (1935), intended for amateur clubs looking for "tested" plays. (6) Rockwell toured the state

encouraging "original playwriting by anyone who show[ed] creative ability." (7) Frederick Koch's dictum that students should limit themselves to familiar subjects inflects Rockwell's advice to beginning writers that appears in her foreword to Wisconsin Community Plays. Rockwell said:

In my talks over the state I have reiterated again and again the necessity of writing about the life around us, of interpreting our own experiences, hopes and dreams, or those of our kinfolk and neighbors. When we know the conditions, atmosphere, and customs, we may interpret the history, tradition and folk tales of our locality or our family, but for the most part we will find people more interested in the life about them today. (8)

The plays in the Native drama course served as examples to beginning writers of the successful use of local stories.

This chapter considers the growth of community theatre activity in the first half of the 1930s, the opportunity it afforded amateur writers, and nine one-act plays published between 1930 and 1938. The economic depression and financial insecurity that many rural people felt throughout the 1920s, most of the country experienced in the 1930s. Theatre at the local level, prescribed by rural sociologists after World War I as a method of beneficial recreation for farmers, was an increasingly popular "leisure-time" activity across the country. The growth of community theatres throughout the

country was helped in large part by teachers such as Rockwell, who were part of university theatre departments, or workers employed by the recreational division of the Agricultural Extension Service. Although the Little Theatre movement paved the way, community theatres developed according to local interests and proliferated outside a national information network.

As noncommercial theatre activity grew, non-royalty plays were needed. Writers, mostly students and some professionals, submitted their one-act plays for inclusion in anthologies used by colleges and high schools, farm clubs, and various other civic organizations eager to produce plays. Production rights to the plays in many of these anthologies were free to amateur groups if they ordered a minimum number of copies. Row, Peterson, and Company published The Gateway Series of Tested Plays, all requiring a royalty fee, but because of the deluge of requests for non-royalty plays, in 1931 they began The Yearbook of Short Plays series that ran until 1940. The contributors to the Yearbook, editor Lee Own Snook wrote in 1938, were people who got "more pleasure from seeing the fruits of their labors made available to a boundless drama fraternity, than from the necessarily slender monetary

rewards." (9) By then he had seen Yearbook playwrights publishing professionally, yet continuing to submit one acts for the non-royalty series. Four of the plays discussed below, Louise Sublette Perry's Saturday Market (1931) and One Fine Day (1934), and Ida Benjamin Burroughs' Handsome Is (1931) and Anne Coulter Martens' Blue Beads (1938) were included in Yearbook anthologies. Calista Clark's Dreams (1931) in Wisconsin Rural Plays and Marcia B. Cox's Just Debts (1935) in Wisconsin Community Plays, edited by Rockwell, were offered royalty-free to amateurs. Jack Stuart Knapp's The Son's Wife (1931), the one male-authored play included in this study, was one of the Country Life Plays, a collection for "community use." (10)

The other two plays, both published in 1930, Lydia Glover Deseo's Never the Twain in Poet Lore, and Elma Ehrlich Levinger's The Cow with Wings included in The American Scene, an anthology of thirty-four one-acts edited by Barrett Clark and Kenyon Nicholson, are similar to each other and different from the rest. (11) Both plays show a middle-class housewife, who feels trapped by marriage and motherhood, yet is unable to break free from her traditional role. Because of the fierce debate over the issue of whether a wife and mother should have

a career outside the home, which the plays dramatize, they most likely served to facilitate discussion at women's meetings or study groups such as Rockwell's course. Though the depression temporarily eliminated the question of whether a married woman should have paid work, if she had a husband who could support her, these two plays indicate the extent to which this concern troubled middle-class women at the end of the twenties.

The playwrights of the other one acts published after 1930 evince a particular sensitivity to the need of their audiences to see softened images of contemporary conditions. In March 1931 the Drama League of America responded to the national economic gloom by adding a special plea to their announcement of the annual play contest, which was co-sponsored by Longmans, Green Publishing Company. The following appeared in Drama:

It will be of interest to all writers to know that Longmans, Green feels so acutely the need of the country for an effective comedy suited to amateur production that they will give an additional cash prize of five hundred dollars if the winning play should be a comedy with one setting suitable for amateur use. (12)

The contest folded with the termination of the Drama League two months later, but more tournaments took its place, though

none conducted on a national scale. And comedies were in demand. Thus, for example, Just Debts, a play about a widow being evicted from her home, ends happily. Villainy, such as it is in comedies Handsome Is and Saturday Market, is characterized by a self-absorbed rich woman, and who, in Handsome Is, is foiled when she attempts to take advantage of two farm women. The plays about rural life reflect a changed attitude toward farm women, and in Dreams and The Son's Wife, a need for as many improvements in the farm home as there were in the barn.

It is here that the plays break from the dominant model of one acts that depict the physical and psychological hardships of women's lives. The one-act plays by women, which Rockwell covers in her Native course, and which I have discussed in other chapters, are unstinting in their criticism of women's subjugated status inside and outside of the home. Yet, after the onset of the depression, many plays show women characters heroically facing a grim economy and making the best of it, often with the help of other women; or, celebrating the few modern home conveniences that they have acquired. For the moment, the uncertainty of the national depression deflected women from focusing on the inequity of

their lives, or the numbing sensation of having missed something important by devoting themselves entirely to motherhood.

These one-act comedies are a small sample of a type written for amateur groups, which provided participants with a time-consuming activity that distracted them from the drudgery of their work. In 1930 Arthur Wileden, a Professor of Rural Sociology in the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin, addressed farmers in a radio speech, "Five Years of Rural Dramatics." Wileden commended people in Wisconsin communities who had started producing plays "to satisfy the social side" of their lives, which set a healthful trend he urged his listeners to follow:

Are rural people justified in taking part in dramatics at a time when their income has been so decidedly depleted? The answer seems quite clear: when are they more justified in providing their own entertainment? At a time when less hours of work are really needed, leisure is one of the biggest problems. (13)

Community theatre helped to keep local people entertained through the depression, and the staunch supporters of the plays written for it--college professors, agricultural extension workers, tournament and play contest directors--were those who realized its important recreational purpose.

Jack Poggi points out, in Theater in America, that the result of Hallie Flanagan's initial plan for the Federal Theatre Project, to link regional theatres together, each theatre encouraged to develop "native" plays that would then build a more interesting and democratic professional theatre, was disappointing because most of the plays remained on "the amateur level." (14) Certainly one of the great achievements of the Federal Theatre was bringing plays to communities that had never seen one before. (15) However, an increasing number of people wanted to act in their own productions. Amy Gessner, an agricultural extension worker based in Wisconsin, predicted in her 1933 circular "Selected Short Plays for Rural Groups," that "more people than ever will be making their own recreation instead of buying it." (16) This was not only for reasons of economy, Gessner continued, but because farmers were "finding out what fun it [was] to leave their every-day role and take quite a different one." (17) A surprising number of plays by amateurs were published over the decade to be used for local contests or tournaments, many of which followed the rule that no two groups could perform the same play. (18) To keep up with the demand for non-royalty plays, these "various authors"--as some title pages read--rarely

worried about reaching an audience beyond that of a community theatre. (19)

Community Theatre: Recreation for Audience and Participants

In 1933 Burns Mantle reported that despite the slump on Broadway, activity in community theatre showed "marked progress." (20) Dixon Wecter noted in The Age of the Great Depression the wide-spread popularity of noncommercial theatre, adding that the "popular label 'little theater' tended to yield to 'community theater'." (21) According to a few critics the term "community" was preferred by noncommercial theatre participants because it avowed local purpose, a wider membership, and it distanced the venture from its "arty" and feminine associations. Norris Houghton, in his 1940 survey of noncommercial theatres, Advance from Broadway, reasons that when the Indianapolis Little Theatre changed its name to The Civic Theatre in 1927, it was because along with getting a new building "more and more men were becoming involved to make a better balance." (22) Albert McCleery and Carl Glick, in another history of regional theatre, Curtains Going Up, claimed 1930 as the year that in amateur theatres

"menfolk declare[d] their independence" and relegated "fluttering society women" to the position of helpers and fundraisers. (23)

Throughout the 1930s "little" was still used to denote amateur theatre activity, and though most artistic directors of the best-known regional theatres and artistically important university theatres were men, women outnumbered them in most other community theatres. In 1931 Edith Isaacs, editor of Theatre Arts Monthly, helped to form the National Theatre Conference, the aim of which, Isaacs wrote in The American Theatre in Social and Educational Life, was to create a national drama by supporting the work of the many community and university theatres across the country. They were "tributary theatres," Isaacs wrote, which "would, eventually, serve to feed and strengthen the main stream of the professional theatre." (24) Isaacs divided the nation into nine areas with a regional representative for each, most of whom were prominent drama professors: Frederick Koch, of the University of North Carolina; E.C. Mabie, of the University of Iowa; George Pierce Baker, of Yale; and Glenn Hughes, of the University of Washington; or, leading artistic directors of regional theatres such as Frederic McConnell of the Cleveland

Playhouse and Gilmore Brown of the Pasadena Playhouse.

However, the two types of membership of the National Theatre Conference pretty much excluded most community theatres. To be an active member with voting privileges, a theatre had to produce a minimum of three full-length plays and have a budget of at least \$1000. All others were relegated to associate memberships for which groups paid \$25 and received information which they did not need or could get for free elsewhere. (25) The result, wrote McCleery and Glick in Curtains Going Up, "was that the majority of active members were representative of college and university theatre...[and were] not representing the Community Theatre Movement." (26) In the twenties many little theatre productions sought national attention and a distance from the category of amateur. Walter Hartwig, director of the Little Theater Tournament held each spring in New York City from 1923 to 1930, introduced the category of little theatre as a hybrid of professional and noncommercial theatres. Hartwig's essay, included in Burns Mantle's Best Plays of 1923-24, attempted to clarify for the confused public the difference between "amateur theatricals" and "little theaters":

With the advent of the little theater a new classification is being recognized. In amateur

theatricals we have the untalented and the talented (by accident) but untrained--coaching is quite another thing than technical training. In the little theatre we have only the talented person in training under good technical direction. (27)

Entries in the contest, competing for the Belasco Trophy and cash prizes, were primarily from Little Theatres or colleges and universities, though there were also some high school groups. For plays produced far from New York, the tournament exposure was especially important. Ada Jack Carver's The Cajun (1926), produced by the Shreveport Little Theatre, and Margaret Bland's Pink and Patches (1928), written by a Carolina Playmaker and produced by the Agnes Scott College of Decatur, Georgia, both won prizes before they were published. The initial publication was followed by inclusion in anthologies and study courses. (28)

The separate tiers of the noncommercial theatre continued into the 1930s, though many community theatres were content to entertain themselves and were unconcerned with the artistic direction of their theatre. Helen Deutsch's 1931 article, "The Social Contribution of Amateur Groups" for Drama magazine, praised the recreational value of community theatre, and in it she defended participants, who she felt were being judged by the wrong standard: "Their intentions are social

(despite occasionally stated policies); why then revile them for a lack of accomplishment in art?" (29) A member of an amateur theatre in a New York suburb explained to Deutsch her group's decision to reject an invitation to join a federation of little theatres: "Our actors, directors, and playwrights are amateurs in every sense of the word, and our productions are terrible, but all this is admirably suited to our purpose, which is recreation." (30) Deutsch added that this statement reminded her of George Cram Cook's belief that the success of The Emperor Jones in 1921 put an end to the "fine communal life in art" that the Provincetown Players shared, something he thought was only possible in an environment of "outer confusion" and critical obscurity. (31)

In 1952 Thomas Dickinson, retired English professor, playwright, and Little Theatre pioneer, attributed a large portion of the growth of the community theatre movement in Wisconsin and the rest of the country to Marjorie A. Starr Best and the work of the Drama League. Responding to a query from a graduate student who was researching its origins, Dickinson wrote her a letter, later published in Wisconsin Stage, in which he credited the League with creating an audience that became aware of the "crippling artificialism of

the old theatre," after being persuaded to read and (sometimes see) plays by continental masters, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Shaw and American dramatists Clyde Fitch, William Vaughn Moody, and Percy MacKaye. (32) The Wisconsin Players, which Dickinson started, was one of the first regional theatres to take advantage of the support of League members. Dickinson acknowledged the activist audience the Society attracted--members of women's clubs, students, and faculty--who came to their first productions of Wisconsin plays after the Chairman of the English Department, John W. Cunliffe, had forbidden the use of university facilities for any theatrical performance. Dickinson's esteem of the League, nearly twenty years after it ended, is an important postscript to an organization that lost strength during its last years.

In June of 1931 the Drama League disbanded and Drama magazine folded. Marjorie Best's last article for Drama, "The Drama League at Twenty-One," which appeared in the May 1931 issue, summarized the League's history and added that its most important contribution to the American theatre was an "enlightened" audience, "drama-wise and cognizant of the best plays of the ages." (33) This was due in part to the years of study courses undertaken by members of women's clubs--the base

of the Drama League--and the pressure they exerted on local schools to introduce drama classes into the curriculum. Best was most proud that "drama-consciousness" had spread even to "communities cut off from ever seeing the roadshow, [who then] aroused themselves to their own Little Theatres supported by their own producing committees." (34) When the League dissolved, it left behind a number of amateur thespians, not artistically distinguished perhaps, but versed in little theatre rhetoric, which fervently espoused the belief that anyone could produce a play and that each community should have its own theatre.

To learn more about the work of community theatres, in 1938 the American Association for Adult Education, financed by the Carnegie Corporation, published Everyman's Drama, a national study by Jean Carter and Jess Ogden. (35) Carter and Ogden, a wife and husband team, traveled the country to get first-hand knowledge of noncommercial theatre groups, as did Norris Houghton for Advance from Broadway and Albert McCleery and Carl Glick for Curtains Going Up, all of whom followed the example of Kenneth Macgowan's 1929 Footlights Across America. Carter and Ogden's report covered the activities of groups from "the most pretentious and well-organized little theatre

with full-time workers...to the most humble dramatics club with volunteer leadership in rural North Carolina or Wisconsin." (36) They excluded most college theatres, except the few groups whose theatres were an integral part of the communities in which they were located. Specifically, they were Frederick Koch's Carolina Playmakers at the University of North Carolina and the Dramatic Guild of the Extension Division at the University of Wisconsin, under the leadership of Ethel Rockwell. They also mentioned the rural dramatics of New York State as conducted by agricultural extension employee Mary Eva Duthie, who was assisted by Alexander Drummond, Professor of Speech and Drama at Cornell University.

In their tour of theatres Carter and Ogden summarized the gender imbalance they found, which differed from either Houghton or McCleery and Glick. by noting "the number of women in little theatres and dramatic groups everywhere was greatly swelled by homekeeping women who seemed to be in search of an avocational career." (37) Women had been the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of the Little Theatre movement since its beginnings over twenty years earlier. Before World War I through the 20s, middle-class women's increased leisure time afforded them the opportunity to participate. In the

30s, many women encountered discrimination when they attempted to get a job or keep the one they had, making leisure compulsory. Enforced leisure due to a national emergency or cultural conditioning did not sit well with many women.

A 1939 editorial in Woman's Home Companion addressed the need many homemakers had for jobs outside the home, and the obstacles they encountered both by laws and by convention. They were not "deserters" from the home, but eager to work, and, the editorial asked:

What if they don't have enough to do at home to keep them busy? Should they rot in idleness? What if their good brains and high energies demand that they do something more than tend a house? Should they be denied the right to use their natural capacities up to the full just to save an economic system that may be shaky but is certainly not sacred? (38)

Nine years earlier Lydia Glover Deseo and Elma Ehrlich Levinger each wrote a one-act play about the need a "housekeeping" woman had for a life beyond the home. Though the topic simmered through the 30s, it would not disappear.

Woman's Dilemma: Never the Twain and The Cow with Wings

According to many feminists, a major problem of modern times was the discontent of women; through the 1920s women

such as Carol Kennicott and her fellow co-eds were educated for careers, yet programmed to pursue marriage. Sinclair Lewis described this confused cluster in Main Street:

Daily, on the library steps or in the hall of the Main Building, the co-eds talked of "What shall we do when we finish college?" Even the girls who knew they were going to be married pretended to be considering important business positions. (39)

Alice Beal Parsons, author of the 1926 monograph Woman's Dilemma, alluded to Lewis's bewildered heroine when she wrote that "a novel describing her discontent was more widely read and aroused more discussion than any similar book of our time" precisely because the problem was so prevalent. (40)

As feminist politics split after the passage of the Suffrage Amendment between the National Woman's Party, advocates of the Equal Rights Amendment, and those who opposed the ERA as inimical to protective legislation for working women, there surfaced a third group whose focus was on the career aspirations of the individual woman. (41) These were "career and marriage" feminists, as described by Lois Scharf in her history of American women between the wars To Work and to Wed, who were white, middle-class college graduates eager to enter the work world on an equal footing with men and find ways to balance marriage and a career. (42) However

exaggerated the economic goals and career attainments that middle-class women were purported to have achieved by the end of World War I and the passage of the Suffrage Amendment, the image of the new woman was powerful enough to provoke a debate about whether a married woman with a family should work. (43)

Parsons, who advocated the need for women to leave housekeeping and join the industrial age, saw jobless married women as dependents (or the often-repeated epithet, parasites), who drained the family finances and whose work at home was both inefficient and trivial. Worse, their "nagging tasks" wore away their sense of self. Parsons defined the average mother as a victim of her decision to sacrifice herself to her family:

She finds herself more than a little jealous of the outside activities of her continually departing family, and all too often confronted as she is with vacuity, she loses both zest in doing things and efficiency in doing them. (44)

Woman's dilemma was frequently debated in advice literature and in women's magazines, but for most middle-class women, especially those with children, it was a complicated issue fraught with guilt. Those who wanted to break from tradition found resistance in popular literature as well as in their own families.

Kathleen Norris, novelist, playwright, and Hearst columnist, in 1928 wrote Home, an essay-length tract which cautioned young girls (and their mothers) that they were on the precipice of a fateful decision; if they did not choose marriage over a career, Norris warned, they would end up friendless and alone, and contribute to the destruction of the American home. (45) Norris referred to the desire for clothes, travel, and amusements beyond the hearth as the ideals of those who also advocated companionate marriage, divorce, and birth control, all of which undermined the family. "Homemaking," Norris wrote. "is a slow, discouraging process, and it demands all that a woman can give it. not for one generation, but for two--for all the generations that there are." (46) As Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses noted in New Girls for Old, their 1930 study of the dreams and aspirations of young women, most "new girls" did not want careers and viewed paid work as a way to fill time before marriage.

This change in attitude toward work is one of the first signs of disillusionment with the new freedom. Once the advocates of feminine independence may have believed that it would truly be the way of happiness. But the modern girl who has seen the loneliness of older, unmarried friends, is beginning to discount the rewards from a material success that must be

accomplished at the expense of love. (47)

However, after women married and renounced their work lives, years later they often looked back with misgivings. That at least is theme of the following two plays, which echo each other in situation, in plot, and in the depiction of the main character's unhappiness at having abandoned her career when she married. After 1930, the year the plays were published, the economic crisis seemingly rendered the question irrelevant, yet the solution--a woman's adjustment--was far from sanguine.

Lydia Glover Deseo's Never the Twain and Elma Ehrlich Levinger's The Cow with Wings illustrate the ambivalence the women feel about the decision to give up their work when they married, which has intensified over the years. Ethel Rockwell introduced Levinger's play in Native Drama as a problem play of the middle class:

There is scarcely a middle-class family that has not had to struggle with the problem presented in The Cow with Wings. Whichever way it is settled, there is always a lingering suspicion that the other solution would have been better. (48)

Lydia Glover Deseo was a playwright, peace activist, and co-editor of Looking at Life Through Drama, a textbook that used plays to focus discussion of social issues. Two-thirds of the

book consists of four play texts dramatizing the topics of race, war, poverty, and prison conditions; the final third is an annotated play list and the social problems with which they connect. (49) Many of the one-act plays by women discussed throughout this study were listed, including Elma Levinger's play about the problem of immigration and Americanization, At the Gates. (50) Elma Ehrlich Levinger was a prolific writer of plays and stories of Jewish life, many of which were published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Circinnati.

When the plays begin the women, Betty in Never the Twain, and Frances in The Cow with Wings, have been married fourteen and ten years, respectively, and each has three children, the eldest a daughter and two sons. Both women are well-educated and once were quite talented, Betty as a poet and Frances as a violinist. And both women are discontent: Betty: "I can not go on living this way...making this pretense at happiness"; and Frances: "I'm just at the end of my rope." (51) The plays concern the decision process each woman goes through when she is offered a chance to resume her career: Betty as a literary critic for the daily newspaper, and Frances as a concert violinist. After weighing their

happiness against that of their families, both women reject the offers and decide to stay home with their children.

The typicality of this situation is best expressed by Levinger, who begins The Cow with Wings by describing the town where the Gordons live:

Mortonville is one of the many little college towns scattered through Ohio. Visitors are always shown its one beauty spot, the campus of the denominational college, dominated by the ivy-covered chapel. The other buildings are shabby and inadequate. To the Mortonville faculty...the State Capital, about fifty miles away, represents all that the world holds of gaiety and culture. (52)

Although there are slight differences between the plays, they both dramatize concerns of educated women who gave up their careers at marriage: a woman's unhappiness; the waning of her talent and discipline due to a long period away from work outside the home; the effect her choice has on her children; and finally, the consequence of a life mired in ambivalence. Both playwrights have their characters pushing against the weight of tradition, and neither can budge it. The point of view of the playwrights is that as life was now arranged, and except for the very rich, it was impossible for women to have a family and work. Betty says to a young woman who is a writer and has just married that she will have to relinquish

her career goals and devote herself to her husband: "You can not serve two masters." Frances says to her husband after he wonders why she threatens to break up her violin, "I can't hold two jobs, so I'm giving up my music for good." (53)

Never the Twain is set in a mountain cabin where the Trowbridges run a boarding house in the summer. The play opens with Betty typing her husband's lecture, "The Psychological Basis for a Happy Marriage." Roger, a professor of psychology, is dictating his thoughts on marital compatibility, but breaks off, unsure of how to complete the thought. Betty finishes it with:

--and it is every bit as important that the husband shall show consideration for the wife's interests. If she be possessed of special talents, he should do all in his power to encourage her, and should share with her all the responsibilities of their united lives. (54)

Roger rejects it as a weak ending to the paragraph, but it gives Betty a chance to admit how unhappy she is. Throughout her marriage Betty has given her time to her husband and children, but her emotional life has gone to her poetry. She gets a chance to begin writing again when a friend offers her a job as literary critic for the local newspaper. However, Roger has been offered a job at another college in a larger

town, and she must choose between her job offer and moving with her family. The significant detail is that the larger town will provide her children with a superior education.

Betty's decision is paralleled by a young couple, Alice and Fred, who have just married. Alice wants to continue her career, but Fred wants her to stay home and start a family. Alice tells her one of the reasons that she and Fred decided to get married was the model she and Roger set, especially Betty's managing to care for her husband and children and continue to write poetry. She manages, she says, by ignoring her children when she writes, adding: "I think in some ways it would have been better had I never had them." (55) The conflict is not between marriage and a career, but between motherhood and a career. Her daughter Anne is only 12, and Betty changes her mind and decides to move to a larger town for her benefit. It is for Anne and not for Roger. This is made clear in the last scene between mother and daughter, when Anne tells her mother that she wants to go to the new school because she wants to learn to write poetry.

Betty: Do you want to write poetry, Anne?

Anne: Oh, more than anything. (A pause) Aren't you glad we're going to move, Mother? (Betty looks deep into her eyes, then, with a sudden firm gesture she gathers up the papers and casts them into the flames.)

Anne: Oh, Mother, why do you burn your poems?
Betty: Because we're going to write new ones,
Anne, dear--Mother and you--together. (She
gathers Anne to her.) CURTAIN (56)

It is the mother-daughter bond that "rekindles" Betty's passion, and her act of sacrifice suggests that unless she finally commits herself to one job and accepts her role as mother she will remain unhappy. The slight talent she has as a writer, she feels, is not enough to justify neglecting her children. She has been withholding herself from them for years, which Deseo implies has damaged her work more than it has the children.

As sociologist Anna Garlin Spencer writes in her 1925 study Woman's Share in Social Culture, the basic problem of a woman's "vocational divide"--between her career and family--is that "she must balance the claims for self-expression on the one side, for family service on the other." (57) Spencer believed that only very rich or very talented women could afford to forego their child rearing responsibilities, and further, that professional child care services could never adequately replace that of a parent who would give a child "a rich and generous sharing of some larger life always near when needed." (58) It is precisely this act of withholding from her children for which Betty castigates herself and which she

vows to rectify--beginning first by burning her poems.

The Cow with Wings is set in the dining-room of the Gordons house in Mortonville, where Frances' husband is a professor of zoology and botany at the Mortonville College. Frances, once a promising violinist, is scheduled to play at the president's reception, which she has decided not to do. She even refuses to attend the college concert "to hear those amateurs murder Chopin." (59)

Then a friend from high school, Alice Graves enters, with a proposition to restart Frances' career. Alice has been living in Europe for the past ten years and is described as "about Frances' age, but seems at least ten years younger; trim figure, set off to advantage by expensively simple suit and light furs, modish bod, etc." (60) Alice's father left a fund so Frances could study with a European master teacher, and Alice proposes that Frances leave with her next week. This is the second chance Frances has been given. When she was at the Conservatory Alice's father offered to help her then, but Frances quit to get married and have a family. Alice says when Frances becomes a successful violinist she'll earn more in a month than Ralph earns in a year. Frances answers with: "I wasn't thinking of the money, but the

freedom." (61) Frances asks her husband for permission to go, he allows it, but a series of events occur that make Frances realize she can not leave. She decides her children need her, and that she is too afraid to leave home.

Frances: I said I wanted to be free; but I'm
afraid to break away.

Alice: You were discontented when I came;
you'll be more so if you give up your only
chance to make something of yourself. You
can't really kill the music in you--

Frances: (Half sobbing.) I will--I will--

Alice: It will be murder. And in revenge
you'll go on hurting him and the children
and yourself. You're giving up your freedom
to stay and make a merry hell for them
the rest of your life. (62)

Though Frances decides to stay and gives her violin to her daughter promising to teach her how to play it, she does not experience the new commitment to motherhood that Betty does. Instead as Marion practices her bowing stroke in front of a mirror, Frances reaches for her darning basket, sobbing: "I've made my choice. But it hurts a little...it hurts...O God, it hurts so much! And it's going to keep on hurting...." (63)

The point of both plays is to underscore the necessity that women accept their situations. Both Deseo and Levinger characterize their characters as living in denial about what they have been doing and what they will do, though neither character is deluded about the consequence of years of

homemaking. Betty has never published her poems because, she admits, "they're not worthy" and adds, "I'm not brilliant, I know." Frances confesses to her friend that after years of childrearing, "I'm lazy, I know it." (64) Even when she does have time to practice her violin, she prefers to lie on the couch and read a magazine. These are not the women Lorine Pruette mocks in her 1931 essay "Why Women Fail," those who "do not know what they would like to be, except that they would like to be great" and trust that "womanly intuition" can substitute "knowledge and technique." (65)

However, neither Betty or Frances accepts being just a mother. They both dream about doing what they did before they were married, and though they haven't been working outside the home or even been practicing their craft with the sort of discipline it requires, they also have not committed themselves to motherhood, either. Instead of treating their characters harshly for their ambivalence toward their families, both Levinger and Deseo are sympathetic. Yet they do not refrain from showing the confusion and loneliness that the eldest daughters feel. Both plays end by the mother transferring her dreams to her daughter through whom she is beginning to live. The resolution of the dilemma is deferred,

and the hope of a better one is passed on to the daughter. One will be a writer, and the other will play the violin, that is if their professional identities have been planted early enough to override the cultural training. But that seems doubtful, as both daughters are the eldest of three and have already been caring for their brothers for years. Yet the daughters may also be perplexed by their own maternal futures, as they have seen their unhappy mothers pushing them away for years and dreaming of a life without them.

After the onset of the depression the question of whether a woman's career would interfere with her family life was replaced by the struggle of getting by and making do. Instead of debating whether a married woman should work, activists rallied to protect the jobs and attempt to increase the wages of working women, who had received "less attention than any other employed group," admitted Henry Hopkins, Federal Relief Administrator, in 1933. (66) The feminist desire of the twenties to realize one's talent, advance in a career, and improve one's social position became in the 30s a sign of upper-class selfishness. The American Communist Party, for instance, derided the National Woman's Party as a group of elitist, rich white women indifferent to the needs of working-

class women. The proof of this was their fight for the ERA and their belief that women would get fair and equal treatment though trade and labor unions without the provisos of special protection. (67) The shelving of woman's dilemma was also apparent in Lorine Pruette's introduction to the study made by Iva Lowther Peters of white collar female workers, Women Workers Through the Depression in 1934. Pruette wrote: "The old agitation over a 'career' dies away in a world that is seeking no longer cake and trimmings but the good bread of a daily job." (68)

Pruette and Peters' report was made under the auspices of the American Woman's Association, an organization that owned a residence hotel in New York that housed 1250 members, operated an infirmary, and provided a place for women to gather. One conclusion of the study, that women workers adapted more easily than men because they had less to lose in salary and status, was borne out in a chapter of case histories titled "Depression Silhouettes," which narrated the extraordinary survival strategies and optimism of a few jobless women. (69) Some women said they appreciated unemployment because it forced them out of old habits, which the editors claimed, they had heard surprisingly often.

However, the important aspect was club members' interdependence. Psychologist Beatrice Hinkle, writing in a 1932 article for Harper's on "Woman's Subjective Dependence on Man," believed that a woman's sense of freedom came when she separated herself from her biological role, and for this Hinkle prescribed the company of other women.

Finally...the modern woman needs to attain an inner sense of personal dignity and of respect for herself as an individual apart from the man and the child. In attaining this end, no one factor is more important than women's relations with one another. Indeed, it is only through an understanding of one another's problems that they can forge ahead. (70)

This was not an isolated observation. Home demonstration agents had frequently said that teaching farm women was only secondary to getting the women off the farm, "bring[ing] neighbors into closer touch and persuad[ing] them to think along the same lines about their individual problems or mutual community." (71)

Theatre for Farmers

Marjorie Patten's 1937 The Arts Workshop of Rural America, a study of the arts programs in eight states administered by the United States Department of Agricultural

Extension Service, reported on the development of rural recreation from its introduction in 1921. (72) Patten's book has sections on puppetry, opera, folk dancing, and handicrafts, but most of the chapters are devoted to describing community theatre activity in the various states she visited. (73) Theatre was the most popular form of recreation in rural areas, Patten wrote, because play presentation--getting on a platform or performing in a grange hall--was similar to the method used by county and home demonstration agents to show how to farm more efficiently or make such conveniences as an iceless refrigerator.

Patten refers to the many skits written by agents to teach homemaking lessons with self-explanatory titles: "Beans and Bottles" and "The Romance of Bread." (74) Farm club members would be assigned parts and then perform the skits at farm meetings or sometimes at county fairs; the staging depended on the topic, but usually they were done with characters facing front. Some of the homemaking plays even had a plot, such as Elizabeth Lay Green's Balanced Diet that was written for a contest sponsored by a federation of New York rural organizations and published by Samuel French in the series of "New York State Rural Life Plays." (75) Most plays

about and for farmers were laden with messages that were embedded in comic plays or skits. In a 1930 article for The Farmer's Wife, "Plays for Farm Meetings," Edna La Moore Waldo noted the use of skits prepared by state agricultural college staff members:

Close upon the organization of Farm Bureaus, 4-H clubs, and Homemakers' Clubs, has come a demand for plays suited to farm meetings. Usually plays are wanted which will offer a desirable means of putting over some project, or showing the doubters better than any speech or book can do the value of improvements of various kinds, and they must be "sugar coated" with real comedy. (76)

As an example Waldo mentioned Wheels vs. Heels, a play demonstrating the need for a wheeled tray to save time in preparing dinner, written for four men to act so they could experience the inconvenience of an old-fashioned kitchen.

The 1930s saw an increase in home demonstration club membership. Fern Yowell's account of her club, the Community Helpers of Anthony, Kansas, is included in Jeanne Westin's history of women during the depression, Making Do. Yowell recalled the need women had to work together:

Women were encouraged to form clubs in those days by the state agricultural college. They'd have us send one of our members up every month to learn some kind of thing; then she'd come back and teach the rest of us. It wasn't like

a school, you understand; it was more like inspiration to get us to see that we could make do with very little. (77)

Mary Neth's essay "Building a Base," in the 1991 anthology Women and Farming, describes the careers of two Wisconsin farm women whose community leadership began in the mid-30s with their involvement in women's clubs. (78) One of the women, Isabel Baumann, lived on a farm in Dane County, and described the activities of the Homemakers' Club, the women's auxiliary of the Farm Bureau formed in 1934. Along with learning new methods of performing household tasks, Baumann said, "The Dane County Women's Farm Bureau Federation and the Dane County Rural Federation helped local clubs give programs, organize discussions of issues and write and stage plays." (79) According to Carroll Streeter, writing in The Farmer's Wife, by 1935 the Dane County Rural Federation listed fifty-five rural clubs, and the Federation sponsored a county drama tournament "renting the largest theatre in Madison." (80) The lead actor in a troupe from Paoli, Streeter wrote, was a farmer who, a year earlier, had never been in a play until the "the local play committee got him on the stage by appealing to his loyalty to the club and explaining that 'somebody has to be in this play'." (81)

Baumann's memory of events grants a particular significance to the effect that Marion Felton's writing of Goose Money had on some of the community club activities in Dane County. In 1927 Marion Felton had been persuaded to write a play for the Hillcrest Players so they could compete in the Dane County Home Talent Tournament in 1928 and enter their production in the first Wisconsin Dramatic Guild contest, juried by Ethel Rockwell. (82) Felton's Goose Money raised the play-consciousness of the county and the state, first by being published by the University of Wisconsin and then circulated as an example of "home-grown playmaking" by and about a real Wisconsin farm woman. (83) Marjorie Patten attested to the enduring success of Goose Money, writing that she had seen it staged in Wisconsin, Iowa, and North Dakota, and heard of it being performed throughout the Midwest. (84)

The main character in Goose Money, a Wisconsin farm wife who becomes a more active and decisive partner on and off the farm, may have inspired other women to become involved in their communities and home economics clubs. It most definitely was the model after which other rural comedies were fashioned. Not rustic farces such as Walter Ben Hare's Aaron Slick from Punkin Crick featuring the character of "Al Falfer,

the hired man," but plays where, as Felton wrote in her Author's Statement, "the audience could laugh with, not at, the farmer." (85) And as the over-worked and under-appreciated farm wife was at the center of most farm plays, a farm comedy necessarily featured a woman whose say in the family budget was evidenced by a cheerful kitchen appointed with a few modern gadgets.

Marjorie Patten described the popularity of plays like Felton's as helping farm people "forget their dilemmas, to build up stronger foundations of understanding and friendliness, to enable them to continue the struggle with the elements and to work out better social and economic plans for the future." (86) This was precisely the goal of the cultural branch of the Agricultural Extension Service and the reason state agents and rural leaders organized community theatricals, folk dancing, choral fests, and other leisure-time recreation. However, Patten wanted the rest of the nation to know about the tremendous poverty and devastation that she saw in each rural district she visited and from which farm people valiantly worked to escape, at least for a few comic or tuneful hours. Patten believed that someone who had lived in rural poverty should write the theatrical correlative

of the film documentary The Plow that Broke the Plains, "to send home the idea that all is not well in our farm country."

She continued:

Pages and pages in our rural drama story are still empty. If filled, they would make permanent valuable records; and at the same time they could bring America up-to-date on the things that really matter far from the main highways in isolated areas. (87)

Much of the muckraking drama about the poverty endured by country people had been written in the twenties, and many of the farm plays about rural poverty, featuring the plight of women, were written by students, professors, and concerned housewives living near but not on farms. With the exception of Grace Kiner, who wrote Wedding Clothes in 1928, and who lived on a farm in upstate New York, there are few examples of farm people dramatizing the tragedy of rural life.

In fact, the following plays, written to be performed before rural and community theatre groups, show women to be resourceful and supportive of one another during difficult times. There is appreciation and sympathy for men of their own class and scorn for the rich. Complaints of boredom, misery, and unhappiness are banished. Women continued to write about issues of concern to themselves and their audience, yet, keeping in mind the needs of their audience and

actors, they refrained from dour depictions of contemporary life.

A New Generation of Farm Women: Dreams, The Son's Wife,
Saturday Market, and Handsome Is

The treatment of the farm wife was a measure of the farm's success; a farmer who knew about a woman's need for as many nice things for the kitchen as he could afford was also aware of the latest information in scientific farming. Calista Clark's Dreams, the 1929 Wisconsin Dramatic Guild winner, which was presented at the Drama Festival of the Guild, contrasts the old farm wife, who still uses a wash tub and scrub board, with the new one, who wants what they have in the city. Though Clark was not a farm wife, but an unmarried school teacher from Muscoda and director of the Muscoda Little Theatre, she wrote Dreams for the University of Wisconsin's Country Life Club, a group dedicated to improving conditions on the farm. (88) Since the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 to improve rural conditions, the treatment of women and children had become the barometer of progress. It is not surprising then that plays about farmers to be performed for them, written by people invested in their well-being, should

focus attention on the benefit of upgrading the farm home.

The older woman, the widowed mother of a young farmer, Clark describes as a "bent, hard-faced farm woman of sixty.... querulous, more from habit than for any reason." (89) Her daughter-in-law, a city bride, has moved with her husband, who has returned to the family farm after being an instructor at the state agricultural college. The mother is taken aback when her daughter-in-law appears late one morning in a "little sleeveless silk dress, dainty rather than fussy, and high heeled slippers and sheer silk hose" wanting her husband to take her for a drive. (90) The daughter-in-law is the character with whom the audience is to sympathize and whose side they are to choose, as her dream for a life is one balanced between work and leisure, a philosophy advanced by rural sociologists and Extension Service staff since after World War I. However, there is also room for the older woman, who tells her daughter-in-law that though her dream of hard work is old fashioned, it was one that she and her husband shared. A 1935 editorial in The Farmer's Wife claimed that young women were not willing to marry farmers unless the men "believe[d] that farm homes should be equipped to take away burdens as water `toting,' hand laundry, and the like." (91)

Another play about the old and new farm wife was Jack Stuart Knapp's 1931 one act The Son's Wife. Knapp led dramatic institutes sponsored by the National Recreation Association, which instructed rural leaders and agricultural extension workers in directing, acting, and make-up. (92) The Son's Wife, even more vehement in its message of fair treatment for rural women, has as its victimized farm wife, the character of Ma, who at forty-five, is "bent and worn from over-work" with wrinkled, gnarled hands. (93) She is contrasted with Sally, her son's bride of two weeks, who begins the play vacuuming the rug and commenting on her husband's new books--on soil preservation and farm economics--by saying: "Farming's like every other profession. You have to keep modern and up to date to succeed." (94)

When the son's family visits, most of them are aghast at the couple's house that boasts electric lights, a radio, a coffee percolator, and a waffle iron. Sally assures them that it was quite inexpensively done and that they merely followed instructions found in magazines and pamphlets "full of fine articles on how to fix up a home." (95) Ma, impressed and a bit awed, has been silently watching until Pa scoffs, "I'd like to see my wife spend my money for all this foolishness,"

and she responds "(rising slowly)" with a monologue that lists the major grievances that farm women had been making public for over twenty years. (96) The play ends with an instructive apology from Pa, who says, "huskily," that though it is too late to make her hands smooth, he is going to get the catalogues and addresses--most from the USDA--that the young couple used so he can make over their home. (97)

However exaggerated the number of appliances mentioned, which was not usual for most rural women, and the fact that rural electrification had yet to reach many areas, The Son's Wife indicates that the complaints of rural women had been heard by country life advocates, agricultural college teachers, and most rural leaders. (98)

A farm woman's liberation from the drudgery of washtubs and scrub boards did not free her from isolation. What did was the formation of market collectives, club meetings, and helping neighbors in times of crisis.

Every Saturday morning thousands of farm women, in many communities scattered over the United States, pack the family automobiles with a wide variety of good things to eat, drive to town and sell the products through their own co-operative markets.

The curb market, as Carroll Streeter described in an article for The Farmer's Wife, "Building Markets by Cooperation," was

an important source of income for farm women beginning in the mid-20s. (99) Louise Sublette Perry writes of her play, Saturday Market (1931), that the collective of farm women "represents, in the chronology of social history, a transition point between the isolated mountain folk of a generation ago and the much more cosmopolitan type that will be represented by the children who are growing up today." (100) The six women of this Asheville, North Carolina market, Perry adds, are not mountain eccentrics, but cultured, college educated, with children enrolled in the State University. Though Louise Perry was raised in Missouri, she studied playwriting at the University of North Carolina and was familiar with the state, as she served as President of the Dramatic Arts Section of the North Carolina Education Association. (101)

The market depicted in the play, like most across the country, was formed with the help of the county's Home Demonstration Agent. Each Wednesday and Saturday the women appoint their individual stalls with vegetables, eggs, butter, baked goods, and crafts, all of which they have grown, raised, or made. On this particular Saturday one of the women is bringing in the rug she has finished, which a wealthy patron ordered weeks before. The sale of the rug will allow her to

marry a young college professor, who has a teaching job, but not enough money for them to get married. The farm women's support of each other and their collective is contrasted with that of the wealthy housewife, Mrs. Hanson, who has ordered the rug, and who, the women complain, thinks their prices are too high and that "her dirty money can buy anything." (102) There is a near calamity when Mrs. Hanson arrives, buys her groceries, and ignores Jeanette and her rug. The resolution is brought about by the least among the collective, Mrs. Sara Henry, who still speaks in a heavy dialect, smokes a corn cob pipe, and whose stall "is a scrry jumble of everything." (103) Yet she has a purpose. After Mrs. Hanson drives off leaving Jeanette in tears and the women furious, but uncertain of action, Mrs. Henry follows in her own car. After confronting Mrs. Hanson at her house, Mrs. Henry brings about the sale of the rug a few minutes later, and the play ends with Jeanette planning her trousseau.

Although there would be no market without the consumer, many rural plays treated urban characters with disdain. They were depicted as bargain-hunters, rich and parsimonious, ready to take advantage of diffident rural folk. Ida Benjamin Burroughs' Handsome Is, set in an old-fashioned living room in

a remote village in Vermont, shows kindly rural innocents being preyed upon by a city matron. (104) Ida Burroughs was a drama student at the University of Montana where, as her short biography relates, Alexander Dean, visiting Drama Professor from Yale, encouraged her to write plays. (105) This one opens on newlywed Gladys replacing some of her mother-in-law's furniture with items she has bought from a mail-order catalog. Until her husband George makes a little more money, the couple must live with his mother, who has agreed to move her old fashioned things into her bedroom. Before this can be done, they are interrupted by a couple from the city who are out "antiquing," and whose car has broken down.

While the men are out inspecting the car, Mrs. Carlton, the woman from the city, examines the Paxson living room. She offers to buy some of Mother Paxson's plates for \$10.00, a fraction of what they are worth in New York stores. When Mr. Carlton hears how little his wife has paid, he gives the couple all of the money he has been told to carry to pay for antiques--\$600.00--which is still a bargain for the valuable English plates. The money will allow the couple to move to their own house. In addition, Gladys re-evaluates her mother-

in-law's furniture and decides to return the new bedspread and accept the one her mother-in-law gave her. She also plans on selling some of her new things to a neighbor girl, who does not yet know the value of the old.

The play illustrates what Mary Inman wrote in her 1940 Marxist analysis of women's oppression, In Woman's Defense, that bourgeois women are more disliked than men of their class.

Actually the rich woman is not very important, separated from her class, and it is significant that those who think she is have not infrequently substituted the owning class woman for the owning class. when talking about women's grievances, and there seems to be much less resentment felt for owning class men than for owning class women. (106)

Inman believed in the class basis of women's oppression, though she added that men--of any class--who control the money of the house affect both women and men. Handsome Is shows Mrs. Carlton to be a predator swooping down on rural people, as she takes advantage of their ignorance, yet is, in the end, powerless over the money and the final price of the plates.

In the Communist Party's magazines for women, Working Woman and Woman Today, published between 1933 and 1938, were articles, letters, and cartoons reviling bourgeois women. (107) Though most of the women to whom the magazines were

addressed--"Negro and White Working and Farm Women!"--were not Communists, they were in sympathy with the assault on parasitical rich wives or the single career girl characterized as coyly asserting herself at the expense of others. (108) Inman, in fact, asks her readers to take into account the activities of the working-class housewife as a measurement of her worth, reminding them that the attitude of a family-- liberal or reactionary--affects her happiness. Inman asks:

Does she herself belong to a progressive social or political organization? If she does, this of itself will make her life more livable, even though she is a dependent housewife than that of the woman wage earner who is economically independent, yet does not come into contact with organized social groups favoring equality for women and liberty for the people. (109)

When the character of the rich woman appears in Handsome Is and Saturday Market, she is shown to be insensitive, self-involved, and calculating. Money is her only asset, and in each case she has come by it through marriage. Handsome Is also shows that though the rich woman's actions are underhanded, her taste and method set the fashion, which young Gladys follows. Not only does Gladys keep her mother-in-law's things, which now are precious antiques, but she plans on selling her shoddy plates and store-bought furnishings to a neighbor, "who doesn't know any better." (110)

The Fate of Poor Women: One Fine Day and Just Debts

Louise Perry's One Fine Day, set in the mountains outside Asheville, is about how an impoverished woman, her mother, and daughter struggle to make a living on their farm. The women live in a log cabin, which Perry writes, is not typical as:

[they] are fast disappearing, to be replaced with more comfortable, if less picturesque, frame buildings. This is one of the surviving few and is retained because the two "widow women" have not been able to do better. It, however, does not bear a run-down appearance....Close to the cabin are growing a riot of marigolds, zinnias, dahlias, and nasturtiums--the means whereby these mountain women express their passionate love for color and the rhythms of life. (111)

The main character, Melissa White, is a thirty-four year old widow, who is described as "rather worn-looking...with graying hair, work-roughened hands, and a stooped figure " (112) On this particular day Melissa and her mother, wiry Granny Patton, are awaiting the visit of Henry Brown, a man Melissa was engaged to years earlier before he decided to join the navy, and who both women think will, on his return, marry Melissa. However, when Harry does arrive he first sees Marie, Melissa's eighteen year old daughter and thinks it is Melissa. Marie is wearing a kimono, which Harry sent Melissa years

earlier, and is humming "One Fine Day" in preparation of her school's production of Madame Butterfly. When Henry finally does see Melissa he is shocked that at thirty-four, the same age he is, she looks decrepit. So, when Henry decides to leave and return in three years to marry Marie, Melissa warns him, "You better hurry. We marry young and git old soon here an' you might be too late." (113)

By 1935 regional one-act plays were, as Ethel Rockwell wrote in the introduction to Wisconsin Community Plays, those of "a wider range, reflecting life in the rural home, the small village, and the city." (114) People in small towns and cities were becoming acquainted with conditions long familiar to rural people. As Jude Storm wrote in the preface to her 1934 one act Woman's Might:

The locale for this play is the farm, but the subject matter is an everyday problem for most of us, anywhere. The women of a truck-farming valley instinctively gather to save a widow's home. As they gather they discuss various schemes, rather hopelessly. They don't know what they're going to do--but they decide to do it together! (115)

Marcia B. Cox of Green Bay wrote Just Debts in 1934, while enrolled in a playwriting class of Ethel Rockwell's. (116) The comedy of small town life is about a seventy-year old woman whose house is to be sold at a public auction the next

day. She says that the agent who is evicting her told her that she "can be thankful the county looks after such cases as mine." (117) Mrs. Lane, soon to be an "inmate" at the county poor farm, is only worried about the fate of her beloved parrot, Andrew Jackson. To this end she appeals to her neighbor, Mrs. Bryant, who willingly adopts the parrot and promises to bring it on visits as long as her husband can afford to keep their car. Mrs. Bryant would let Mrs. Lane move in, but she has already taken in seven family members who have lost their homes.

The eviction is prevented when, during a council meeting held at the Bryants' house to decide on what to do with a bequest left to the village, Mrs. Bryant reminds the three councilmen of their past debts to Mrs. Lane, who had lent them money without interest. Mrs. Bryant shames the men by making them aware of how they are preying on their vulnerable old neighbor, so eager to acquire her attractive property in the center of town. The men promise to buy the house, turn the property into a village park, and let Mrs. Lane live there as long as she likes.

During the depression many writers of one-act plays made a special effort to keep the spirit of their plays light and

their endings happy: an old woman saved from a poor farm, a dirt-floor cabin surrounded by flowers, and a marriage date finally set because a hand-made rug was bought. Despite poverty, the plays indicate that progress had been made due to the education and cultural programs carried out by the agricultural extension service, which escalated after World War I, not the least of which was the ability of communities to entertain themselves. Amateur theatre gave some people their first real excitement. Marjorie Patten tells the story of a seventy-year old woman from Pigeon, Iowa who performed in a play that the local post-mistress had adapted from a story by Bess Aldrich Streeter, another Iowan. This old woman, Patten writes, who had not been off her poultry farm in years, described to her the many thrilling months she spent playing the part of "Uncle Daniel" as she and the rest of the cast trouped around Iowa in a "jolty school bus." (118)

However, what did not get resolved in rural America--nor the rest of the country--after electrification and more modern conveniences, was a woman's acceptance of herself as only a wife and mother. A coda to Never the Twain and The Cow with Wings, is Anne Coulter Martens' Blue Beads, a 1938 one act about a farmer's wife, who has "heroically remodel[ed] her

life to meet conditions for which she had not by rearing been prepared." (119) The woman saves money to buy a set of water colors for herself, so she can finally begin to resume painting, and a string of blue beads for her fourteen-year-old daughter's birthday. Yet, when the package arrives, the girl thinks the paint box is for her and is thrilled as she longs to become a painter, and as the synopsis reads, the mother, "in line with her sacrificing nature, quietly defers to the child." (120) The mother's desire for life beyond her kitchen--bright and cheerful though it may be--is still there, but her ability to express it is gone. The mother's attempt to tell her daughter she has made a mistake is drowned out by the girl's shouting and dancing around the room. The play ends with the happy daughter hugging her mother as the woman's eyes fill with tears.

Editor Lee Owen Snook called Blue Beads a "serious play of maturity," certain to appeal to women in farm clubs. (121) Marten's play indicates that middle-class women living for others and keeping the home unchanged for the next generation, as Kathleen Norris so vehemently urged them to do in her book Home, had become an entrenched idea. However, the tone of sadness in Martens' play gives hope that farm women, in their

kitchens slowly accruing a few modern conveniences and blessed with electrical hook-ups, were ready to begin thinking about what was left undone.

Endnotes

1. Ethel Theodora Rockwell, American Life as Represented in Native One-Act Plays (Madison: University of Wisconsin, Extension Division, 1931).
2. Ibid., 52.
3. The following plays and playwrights are listed in Rockwell's course: Mary MacMillan's The Shadowed Star, Mary Katharine Reely's The Lean Years and A Window to the South in Chapter One; Clarice McCauley's The Conflict in Chapter Two; Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money, Margaret Bland's Pink and Patches, and Alice Pieratt's Day's End in Chapter Three; and in this chapter, Elma Ehrlich Levinger's The Cow with Wings, 8-14.
4. Ibid., 39.
5. Ethel T. Rockwell, "Harlequinading in North Carolina," Drama 17 (February 1927): 133-35, 160.
6. Wisconsin Rural Plays; Wisconsin Community Plays, ed. Ethel Theodora Rockwell (Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Company, 1935). By 1935 sixty plays had been submitted to the "Original Play Tournament." See Albert McCleery and Carl Glick's Curtains Going Up (New York: Pitman Publishing, 1939), 356.
7. Rockwell, "Foreword," Wisconsin Community Plays, 5.
8. Frederick Koch, "The Carolina Playmakers," xii. Rockwell, "Foreword," Wisconsin Community Plays, 6.
9. Lee Owen Snook, Fourth Yearbook of Short Plays, ed. Snook (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Company, 1938), vi.
10. Unless otherwise indicated the page numbers refer to the following editions: Louise Sublette Perry's Saturday Market and Ida Benjamin Burroughs' Handsome Is in Yearbook of Short Plays, Series One, ed. Claude Merton Wise (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Company, 1931); Louise Sublette Perry's One Fine Day in Second Yearbook of Short Plays, ed. Lee Owen Snook (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Company, 1934); Anne Coulter Martens' Blue Beads in Fourth Yearbook of Short Plays;

Calista Clark's Dreams in Wisconsin Rural Plays; Marcia B. Cox's Just Debts in Wisconsin Community Plays; Jack Stuart Knapp's The Son's Wife in Country Life Plays: Eight One-Act Plays for Community Use (Boston: Walter H. Baker, 1936).

11. Page numbers refer to the following editions: Lydia Glover Deseo's Never the Twain in Poet-Lore 41 (Summer 1930); Elma Ehrlich Levinger's The Cow with Wings in The American Scene.

12. Mrs. A. Starr Best, "The National Playwriting Contest," Drama 21 (March 1931): 39.

13. Arthur F. Wileden, "Five Years of Rural Dramatics," quoted in Marjorie Patten's The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 32.

14. Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 162.

15. John O'Connor, "The Federal Theatre Project's Search for an Audience," Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980, ed. Bruce A. McConachie and Daniel Friedman (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 171-184.

16. Amy Agnes Gessner, Selected Short Plays for Rural Groups (Madison: Agricultural Extension Division, University of Wisconsin, 1933), 1a.

17. Ibid.

18. Mabel Foote Hobbs, "Lo, the Poor Judge," quoted in McCleery and Glick, Curtains Going Up, 390.

19. See Country Life Plays and Folk Plays for Contests: Seven One-Act Plays (Chicago: T.S. Denison, 1940).

20. The Best Plays of 1932-1933, ed. Burns Mantle (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1969), 19.

21. Dixon Wecter, The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 262. As a measure of the increased numbers of amateur theatre groups, Theatre Arts Monthly's "Tributary Theatre Issue" of 1938, an annual list of noncommercial theatres across the country, saw a six hundred

per cent increase in submissions from its first issue in 1924. Rosamond Gilder, "More Fields to Conquer," Theatre Arts Monthly 22 (July 1938): 471-481.

22. Norris Houghton, Advance from Broadway: 19,000 Miles of American Theatre (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1941), 76.

23. McCleery and Glick, Curtains Going Up, 16-18.

24. Edith Isaacs, The American Theatre in Social and Educational Life (New York: National Theatre Conference, 1932), 7.

25. McCleery and Glick, Curtains Going Up, 354.

26. Ibid.

27. Walter Hartwig, "The Little Theatres," The Best Plays of 1923-1924, ed. Burns Mantle (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1969), 21. According to Burns Mantle, Hartwig was forced to abandon the Little Theatre Tournament in 1930 as groups found it too expensive to travel. See Mantle's Best Plays of 1930-1931, 15.

28. See program information for The Cajun in Best Plays of 1925-1926, 592 and for Pink and Patches in Best Plays of 1927-1928, 551. The Cajun is anthologized in The American Scene. See Chapter Three for bibliographical information on Pink and Patches.

29. Helen Deutsch, "The Social Contribution of Amateur Groups," Drama 21 (March 1931): 22.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Thomas Dickinson, "A Letter from Thomas Dickinson," Wisconsin Stage 8 (Summer 1954): 20.

33. Mrs. A. Starr Best, "The Drama League at Twenty-One," Drama 21 (May 1931): 35. On the end of the Drama League see Karen Blair's The Torchbearers, 158-161.

34. Ibid., 36.
35. Jean Carter and Jess Ogden, Everyman's Drama: A Study of the Noncommercial Theatre in the United States (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1938).
36. Ibid., vi.
37. Ibid., 97-98.
38. Editorial, "Working Wives," Ladies Home Companion 66 (October 1939): 1. For a longer version of the same topic see Anna Steese Richardson's "Working Wives," in Ladies Home Companion 66 (November 1939): 8.
39. Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1920), 3.
40. Alice Beal Parsons, Woman's Dilemma (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1926), 209.
41. For a discussion of the fight for the ERA and the subsequent division among feminist in methods and goals see Chapter Four in Nancy F. Cott's The Grounding of American Feminism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 117-142.
42. Lois Scharf, To Work and to Wed, 22.
43. William Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 51.
44. Parsons, Woman's Dilemma, 194.
45. See Kathleen Norris, Home (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1928), 66.
46. Ibid., 48-49.
47. Phyllis Blanchard and Carlyn Manasses, New Girls for Old (New York: Macaulay Company, 1930), 237.
48. Rockwell, Native, 43.

49. Looking at Life Through Drama, ed. Lydia Glover Deseo and Hulda Mossberg Phipps (New York: Abingdon Press, 1931).

50. The women playwrights and their plays listed in Looking at Life: Elma Ehrlich Levinger's At the Gates; Mary Katharine Reely's The Lean Years, Daily Bread, and A Window to the South; Evelyn Emig's The China Pig; and Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money.

51. Deseo, Never the Twain, 281; Levinger, Cow with Wings, 339.

52. Levinger, 333.

53. Deseo, 285; Levinger, 339.

54. Deseo, 274-275.

55. Ibid., 286.

56. Ibid., 292.

57. Anna Garlin Spencer, Woman's Share in Social Culture, 151.

58. Ibid., 173.

59. Levinger, Cow with Wings, 337.

60. Ibid., 340.

61. Ibid., 342.

62. Ibid., 353.

63. Ibid., 356.

64. Deseo, 285; Levinger, 353.

65. Lorine Pruette, "Why Women Fail," in Woman's Coming of Age, 242. See Parsons, Woman's Dilemma, 269.

66. Genevieve Parkhurst, "Is Feminism Dead?" Harper's 170 (May 1935): 744. See also Winifred Wandersee's "The Economics of Middle-Income Family Life: Working Women during the Great

- Depression," Journal of American History 65 (June 1978): 60-74.
67. See their magazine for women, Woman Today 1 (March 1936): 11.
68. Lorine Pruette, "Introduction," Women Workers Through the Depression, ed. Pruette and Iva Lowther Peters (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 5.
69. Ibid., 34-48.
70. Beatrice M. Hinkle, "Woman's Subjective Dependence Upon Man," Harper's 164 (January 1932): 204.
71. Editorial, "Use Your Home Demonstration Agent," Farmer's Wife 23 (August 1920): 63.
72. Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 3.
73. Ibid., 14. Iowa's fourteen year plan of music appreciation culminated in a production of The Bohemian Girl staged by the Iowa State College Extension Service, directed by Fannie R. Buchanan and cast with local talent. The evening began with a song fest sung by fifteen hundred 4-H girls. See Miriam J. Williams, "Farm Folks Turn to Opera," Farmer's Wife 38 (September 1935): 7, 29.
74. Ibid., 108-109.
75. Elizabeth Lay Green, Balanced Diet (New York: Samuel French, 1928).
76. Edna La Moore Waldo, "Plays for Farm Meetings," Farmer's Wife 33 (October 1930): 24.
77. Jeanne Westin, Making Do: How Women Survived the Depression (Chicago: Follett Publishing, 1976), 273.
78. Mary Neth, "Building the Base: Farm Women, the Rural Community, and Farm Organizations in the Midwest, 1900-1940," in Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures, ed. Wava G. Haney and Jane B. Knowles (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1988), 344.

79. Ibid., 344
80. Carroll P. Streeter, "Getting What They Want," Farmer's Wife 38 (February 1935): 30, 33.
81. Ibid., 30.
82. Marion Felton, Goose Money, 25.
83. Ibid.
84. Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 146.
85. Felton, Goose Money, 25.
86. Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 150.
87. Ibid., 151.
88. Biographical information about Calista Clark is included in Rockwell's foreword to Wisconsin Rural Plays, 5.
89. Clark, Dreams, 13.
90. Ibid., 12.
91. "[Women] are not unwilling to bear their fair share of the load in making a farm successful, but they want at least an even break with husbands who buy every known equipment to make their part of farm labor easier." Editorial, "An Old Question Bobs Up," Farmer's Wife 38 (July 1935): 3.
92. Jack Stuart Knapp, How to Produce a Play (New York: National Recreation Association, 1937).
93. Knapp, The Son's Wife, 112.
94. Ibid., 113.
95. Ibid., 115.
96. Ibid., 119. For a discussion of farm women's complaints see Jane B. Knowles, "'It's Our Turn Now': Rural American Women Speak Out," in Women and Farming, 305.

97. Knapp, The Son's Wife, 119.

98. In 1935, according to Carroll P. Streeter, states with the highest percentage of farms that had electricity were Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Streeter wrote: "FDR 'earmarked' one hundred million dollars for rural electrification. At this writing five and a half million farms are without electricity." See Streeter, "More Power to You," Farmer's Wife 38 (August 1935): 10.

99. Carroll P. Streeter, "Building Markets by Cooperation," Farmer's Wife 31 (June 1928): 9. On the importance of Home Demonstration Agents in getting women to form market collectives, see Bess M. Rowe, "The Farm Woman's Income," Farmer's Wife 30 (October 1927): 516, 527. A farm woman's isolation was still the subject of folk plays. See Margaret Radcliffe's Sigrid in American Folk Plays, 420-444.

100. Perry, Saturday Market, 97.

101. As with all writers whose plays were included in the Yearbook of Short Plays series, a brief biography of Perry precedes the text of the play, 96. For mention of the first production of Saturday Market see "College Drama News," Drama 21 (February 1931): 34; for more information about Perry and her work in high school dramatics see Nettina Strobach, "The Director's Meet," Carolina Play-Book 3 (March 1930): 8.

102. Perry, Saturday Market, 101.

103. Ibid., 99.

104. For other plays about rich city antique hunters browsing the homes of rural people see Walter Prichard Eaton's Grandfather's Chair (New York: Samuel French, 1930); and Margaret Miller's Hannah's Pitcher in Country Life Plays, 37-58. Urbanites flocked to the country for inexpensive lodgings and meals. Two plays written from the view of the rural dweller are Dorothy Canfield Fisher's Tourists Accommodated (New York: Samuel French, 1932); and Marion Felton's This Way Out! in Wisconsin Community Plays.

105. Yearbook of Short Plays, Series One, 176.

106. Mary Inman, In Woman's Defense, 33.
107. Sasha Small, "Life a la Ladies Home Journal," in Working Woman 5 (July 1934): 10, 15.
108. Working Woman was published as a newspaper between 1928 and 1933 before its magazine format under the same title that ran from 1933 to 1935. The magazine ran as Woman Today from 1936 to 1938.
109. Inman, In Woman's Defense, 35.
110. Burroughs, Handsome Is, 190.
111. Perry, One Fine Day, 394. For a play about a young woman forced to remarry to provide her mother and aunt with a man to do their farming, see Margaret Bland's Lighted Candles in Carolina Folk-Plays, see note 74 in Chapter Three. For a play about a home demonstration agent coming to the aid of a mountain woman, who is blind, poor, and living in a dark hut, see Bessie P. Gerhardt's Blindness (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1937).
112. Perry, One Fine Day, 391.
113. Ibid., 409.
114. Rockwell, "Foreword," Wisconsin Community Plays, 5.
115. Jude Storm, Woman's Might (New York: Samuel French, 1934), 5.
116. Rockwell, "Foreword," Wisconsin Community Plays, 8.
117. Cox, Just Debts, 52.
118. Patten, The Arts Workshop of Rural America, 108.
119. Lee Owen Snook, "Preface," to Fourth Yearbook of Short Plays, ix.
120. Snook, "Preface," ix.
121. Ibid.

Conclusion

The title of this dissertation corresponds in part to the geographical location of many of the playwrights and their producing groups. Cincinnati, Lake Forest, Illinois, and Minneapolis were the homes of Mary MacMillan, Mary Aldis, and Mary Katharine Reely, respectively, who were part of the first generation of Little Theatre practitioners. In addition, the internal combustion of the non-commercial theatre was fueled by the Drama League of America, begun in Chicago, that, in the words of its founder Marjorie Best, "swept its way through the middle west victoriously, before eventually reaching to both coasts." (1)

The women's plays in this dissertation were written specifically for middle-class women to read, to act in, and to produce. In doing so the writers created a one-act canon devoted to contemporary issues certain to attract civic-minded, socially-involved women. The scale of the plays, with their small casts and scant forty-five minutes' running time, was a large part of their appeal. A program of three one-act plays allowed many actresses to participate and with the right

selection, an audience could see a variety of homes, marriages, and family relationships. The domestic scenes, played in the intimacy of the Aldis Playhouse, a room in a woman's club, or a little theatre venue such as Baltimore's Vagabond Players' converted bar-room, encouraged a female audience member to identify or contrast her own life with the characters in the plays.

The plays written at the end of the Progressive Era by Aldis, MacMillan, Reely, Louise Driscoll, and Evelyn Emig created a model that other women writers would follow. The playwrights' depiction of urban tenements was intended to arouse the indignation of their middle-class audience. Their muckraking one acts, critical of workers' conditions as they affected the home, connected with the use of drama for social improvement. The campaign to reform the American theatre was to be achieved, many thought, by the writing of plays that entreated an audience to take an active part in improving their communities. The stories of urban lower-class heroines were replicated in the 20s in farm plays by students and housewives, who wrote about the rural poor.

The two plays by Driscoll and Emig, set in run-down village bungalows, show the fate of financially dependent

women, who hold on to the vestiges of middle-class gentility before slipping through the cracks. This was a slightly different version of poverty written before 1920, which focused on a woman's unwitting collusion in her sad fate. Subsequent plays about middle-class women stuck at home avoid the dire endings of The Poor House and The Old Order, but they also clarify that it is often the woman's own decision to stay home, which results in her feelings of uselessness.

Of the twenty-six plays I have discussed, nineteen are about domestic confinement and only seven are about women happy with their lives. These latter plays, written in the 20s and 30s about farm women, veer from those one acts about rural desolation by showing that the woman's work was essential to the family's income and further, that the woman had control over the money she made. Happy farm women were those few whose work was valued and whose stories were written to serve as an example for others. Unlike Martha Cantrell, the tenant farm wife in Eloise Earle Dean's Stockin' Money, these women spent the money they earned raising chickens on bright curtains or a new oil-cloth covering for the kitchen table, which the playwrights make a point of in their set descriptions.

On the other hand, for the middle-class suburban or urban woman, whose modernity was measured in terms of her ability to distance herself from the home by a job or volunteer work, a neatly appointed kitchen was not always a cheerful sign. In Clarice McCauley's The Conflict, the cozy interior was the site of the over-involved mother, whose meddling caused harm. And though the mother in Emig's The China Pig had money to spend, her threadbare furniture reflected her years of malingering in domesticity.

Throughout this period of conflict and contradiction, when middle-class women were alternatively ridiculed for being "just housewives" and yet entreated to create a harmonious environment for their families, women wrote about it. Not only were the writers documenting people and things with which they were familiar, but their plays were published and most were performed. Karen Blair writes in her study of amateur women's involvement in arts associations, The Torchbearers, that despite the popularity of little theatre activities through the 20s and women's tireless work in it, their contributions were ignored. Blair notes that "the efforts of women were obscured, then and now, by the women's willingness to contribute their energies to a product, that is a play,

that was not plainly identified as a women's effort." (2) However, in the case of the playwrights discussed in this study, writing and publishing was a way to circumvent anonymity, or at least for a while. In addition, the writers contributed an artistic product, which gave their audience a forum for self-expression and perhaps contributed to women's understanding of their dilemmas.

The plays have served feminist goals by demonstrating how much still needed to change before women would achieve a semblance of equality with men. As Mary MacMillan's play Honey makes clear, "salvation"--in the guise of the always off-stage Teacher, who never ventures past the threshold of the mill-town cabin--is sometimes only possible for women outside of the home. The realistic one-act plays did provide a viable form for promoting women's feminist identities and consciousness, if one is to judge by the influence the early playwrights had on those who came later. Clearly, in their serious treatment of domestic life, all of the writers believed that the situation of women was not only one of social import, but the material for an artistically important play.

Endnotes

1. Marjorie A. Starr Best, Drama League of America: Its Inception, Growth, Accomplishment and Promise, 3.
2. Karen J. Blair, The Torchbearers, 147.

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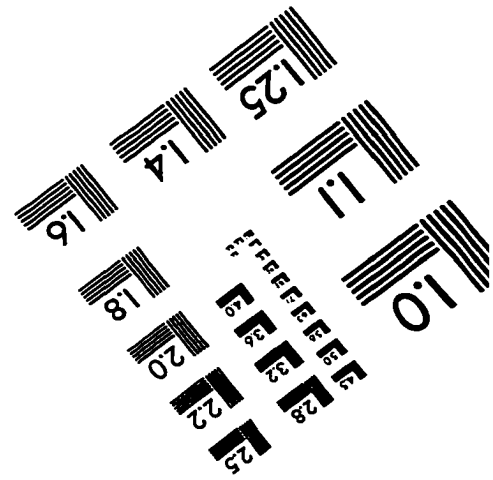
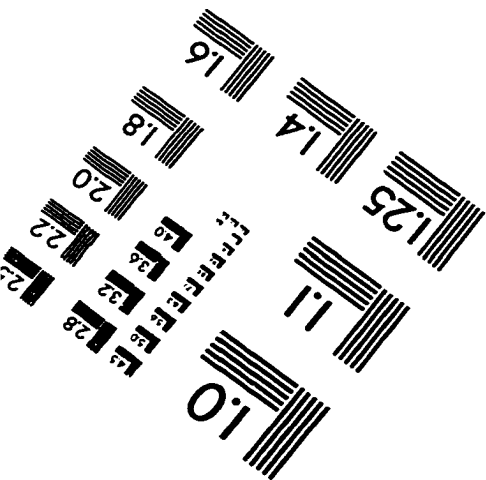
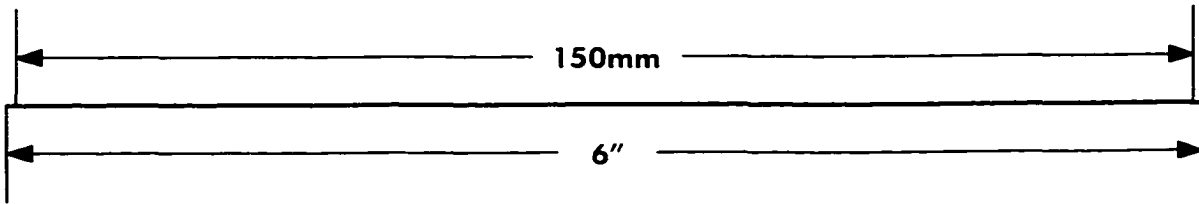
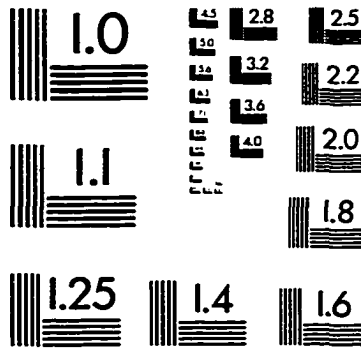
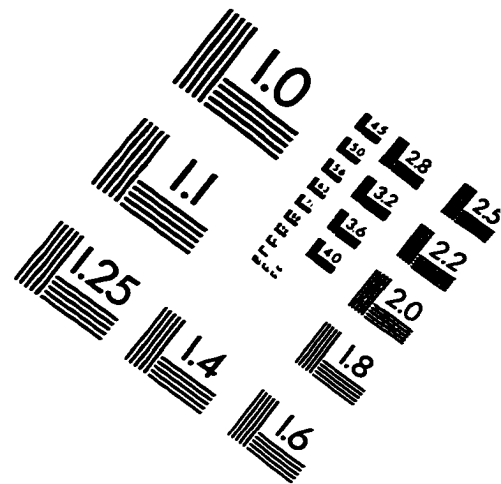
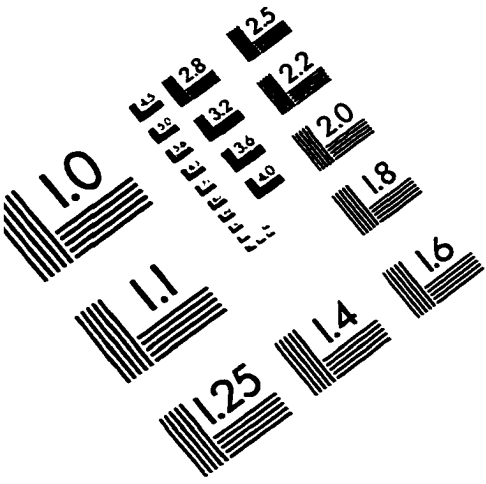
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