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SOPHIE TREADWELL: THE CAREER OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AMERICAN FEMINIST PLAYWRIGHT

City University of New York

PH.D. 1982

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SOPHIE TREADWELL: THE CAREER OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY
AMERICAN FEMINIST PLAYWRIGHT

by

NANCY WYNN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Theater in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The
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ii.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theater in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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PREFACE

In 1973, while writing a paper concerning avant-garde drama between the two world wars, I read Sophie Treadwell's expressionistic play, Machinal (1928), and became curious about her life and career. After discovering she had written a number of plays (the complete tally was unknown to me at the time), and that she had been a noted American journalist, I was disappointed and puzzled to find that she did not appear in current theatre history textbooks nor in such reference works as The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama or The Oxford Companion to the Theatre. It seemed a safe assumption that the playwright who wrote Machinal also wrote other plays which merited recognition from scholars and artists of the theatre.

I traced Treadwell to Tucson, Arizona, and found that the final disposition of her estate (she died in 1970), was just being made. Her lawyer, Emory Barker, told me of the existence of several packing crates of manuscripts. I flew to Arizona and as a result of my meetings with Mr. Barker and Phyllis Ball of the University of Arizona Library, I supervised the organization of the Treadwell Collection at that Library. Over the years I have acquired or gained

access to other Treadwell material including scrapbooks, diaries, and correspondence. Taken together, these memorabilia reveal a remarkable woman of the Theatre and the fourth estate who seems somehow to have been overlooked or deliberately ignored by historians. The following study attempts to reintroduce to theatre practitioners and scholars this playwright and her work so that she may assume her rightful position in American theatre history.

CHAPTER I

Exposition and Preparation

A mixture of Mexican, English, German and Scots ancestry combined in Sophie Anita Treadwell, born October 3, 1885, in Stockton, California.¹ She was the daughter of Alfred Benjamin Treadwell and Nettie Fairchild. She described herself as "a Californian, a mixture of the old 49er and the original Mexican . . . with a strain of Pennsylvania Dutch . . . Scottish Presbyterian . . . and English."²

Treadwell's maternal grandmother, Anna (Gray) Fairchild, was born in Scotland in 1837, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. She emigrated to California and married William H. Fairchild, a Pennsylvania Dutchman who brought cattle and horses across the plains to California

¹The birthdate given in Treadwell's obituary, on her last passport, and driver's license was October 3, 1890. Various other birthdates were November 29, 1885; October 3, 1886 or 1887; and October, 1895. The author of this confusion was Treadwell, herself. Her actual birthdate was October 3, 1885. Page 1120--San Francisco, of the Census of 1900 enumerates Sophie A. Treadwell in the family of Alfred B. and Nettie E. Treadwell and lists her birth as October, 1885. Also, that date is recorded in her own handwriting on her application to the University of California at Berkeley. Among her papers are indications that Treadwell altered official documents to reduce her age.

²Sophie Treadwell, Letter to Mr. Harris (first name unknown), architect, January 27, 1940. University of Arizona Library Special Collections, Tucson (hereinafter referred to as UALSC), Box 1.

in 1837, before the gold rush. Their daughter, Nettie, was born in 1861.

Treadwell never knew her paternal grandparents who died when her father was a child. Her grandfather, a painter named William Treadwell, was born in England in 1807, and emigrated to Mexico, where he married Susan Walker, the daughter of an American from Tennessee, who went to Mexico as a soldier and later became the Spanish Consul,³ and Dona Viviana Evara of Mexico. After great-grandfather Walker died, great-grandmother Evara-Walker traveled to California with her daughter and son-in-law, Susan and William Treadwell. There Alfred Benjamin was born in Stockton in 1856, orphaned four years later and cared for by his grandmother until her death in 1864. Alfred then was taken to Mexico and, at the age of ten, contracted smallpox which left his face discolored and deeply pitted. In later years he referred to himself as the ugliest man in San Francisco because of his face, but declared the ladies loved it.⁴ Alfred was educated at a Catholic College in Mazatlan and later in Guaymos, studying languages: Spanish, English,

³It is possible that Treadwell had more Spanish/Mexican heritage than appears in official documents. The following is entered in her 1943 diary, July 28: "I am now convinced that what my father always said--that his grandfather came from Spain--is the truth." Diary in Nancy Wynn Archive, Aurora, New York (hereinafter referred to as NWA).

⁴Pauline Jacobson, "Rough Riding As a Cure for Civic Ills," The San Francisco Bulletin, March 16, 1907, p. 15.

French, Italian and Latin. He taught in a college in Culiucan from 1873 to 1875. In 1876, Alfred returned to San Francisco and opened a school of languages and, in 1879, founded La Republica, publishing and editing that newspaper until he sold it to the Mexican consul. Beginning in 1877, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1882. After that, he held a variety of elective and appointive positions including Justice of the Peace, Secretary of the Judiciary Committee of the State Senate, Stockton City Prosecutor and, later, Police Court Judge in San Francisco. He married Nettie Fairchild in 1884.

Treadwell was entered in kindergarten in Stockton in 1888. She later recorded her earliest memory:

One day I ran away from kindergarten. I was the littliest [sic] girl, very very much the littliest girl. This condition of affairs evidently impressed itself deeply on my mind for even now, when I have stretched into unreasonable length . . . I still believe a good part of the time, that I am yet the littliest. The kindergarten was a long way from home, around the corner and two blocks down. A little freind [sic] who was four years old took me the journey back and forth each day. One morning I was scolded out loud before all. Everybody stopped and listened and heard and saw the whole terrible affair. It was a bitter humiliation, especially for any one as distinguished as the littliest. I remember feeling all swelled up inside like the red whistle baloons [sic] we blew up; and at recess I darted out the front gate to run the horrible journey home. How I suffered! What a terrible fear it gave one to be all alone and so much closer to the sidewalk than everybody else who went towering by. Oh the terror of dread creatures behind . . . and the vast unknown distance to safety! Ah what enormous relief at last to find oneself safe at home.

The dreadful emotions of this time have fixed the incident and all the surroundings clearly in

in my mind. I was nearly three, but it is the first thing I seem able to remember at all.⁵

Within a year or two, Judge Treadwell moved to San Francisco. Of him, Treadwell says: "The first thing I remember of my father is that he wasn't there."⁶ Soon he sent for his family, and for a time they lived in the Commercial Hotel near the Judge's office on Montgomery Street. Treadwell didn't like living in the hotel because the halls were dark and she could not run up and down the stairs with the other children. But there were advantages to living in San Francisco, a city which took pride in its culture. Judge Treadwell enjoyed the theatre and began taking his young daughter to plays. It was during this period that Treadwell was taken to see Helena Modjeska, the great Polish actress who was to help Treadwell after she graduated from Berkeley.

In 1892, she was sent to Miss Bolte's Private Academy on Sacramento Street. However, within a year her father was stricken with what was called rheumatism and confined to bed. Treadwell and her mother went home to the ranch in Stockton where her Scottish grandmother, Anna Gray Fairchild lived. Treadwell was to return to the ranch as a refuge throughout her life until its sale in 1954. After a short stay at the ranch, Treadwell and her mother

⁵Sophie Treadwell, The Story of My [sic] Life by One Who Has None, autobiographical TS, circa 1908, NWA, Case 4, n.p.

⁶Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

returned to San Francisco. In the next year-and-a-half, Treadwell advanced rapidly in school to the fifth grade. Inexplicably, she was taken out of school for approximately a year because her mother, following the advice of a friend, felt she was too young to go regularly to public school.⁷ However, problems still existed between the parents. Treadwell recalls that, once again, her father was never home in the evenings.

And then incidents came [sic] too painful to be disturbed even in memory now. One day after a time of suffering my mother called me into the dining room and advised with me as to what we should do . . . We decided to go away. . . . I was then but eight . . . it seems to end my childhood of itself.⁸

The Treadwell family never lived together again. However, Mrs. Treadwell's courage failed to carry her through the ordeal of achieving her freedom. Treadwell says her mother got to the door of the courtroom but could go no further, and when the humiliation of divorce was averted, her father lost all personal interest in them. He allowed Treadwell's mother to set up another home and agreed to support them but would not live with them. However, he failed to fulfill this promise of support, and over the next few years they moved to progressively cheaper accommodations.

Treadwell spent the fifth grade at Moulton Primary and sixth and seventh grades at Crocker Primary. She liked

⁷Since this is Treadwell's own statement, based upon her recollection of events, it is possible that her mother did not tell her the whole story.

⁸Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

school immensely and was considered a smart student. As Treadwell describes herself:

Mother always kept me prettily dressed. I carried myself rather haughtily, I'm afraid, because the fact that I so easily outstripped the other children gave me the idea that I was born to be on top. In fact I was convinced at this time that I had a future. I used to tell my mother every day of the great things I was going to do for us when I grew up until I really believe that through hearing it so often she began to have some hope of me herself though she would never admit it.⁹

By 1897, Judge Treadwell's support for his wife and daughter had become so meager and uncertain that they had to return to the ranch in Stockton. Treadwell's mother went to work as an attendant in an asylum and boarded her daughter with a family across the street from the asylum so that she could go to school. These were unhappy times for Treadwell.

One of the few happy memories of her father came in 1898, when she was twelve. She spent two months of vacation with her father. He had a "stylish flat" of which she was immensely proud. He lived there with two servants and a collection of numerous hangers-on. Her father gave her all the money she could spend and let her charge to an account at a local store. She said the experience was "delicious." A photograph of Treadwell dated 1898 shows a solemn, pretty child dressed in a woolen plaid with a high neckline and leg-o-mutton sleeves. Her thick, brown hair is combed in a center part and gathered into two full braids.

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Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

Between 1899 and 1900, Judge Treadwell called for his family again, this time settling them in Sausalito, but once again they found themselves alone. For the next two years Mrs. Treadwell tried to supplement their small income while Treadwell was away in San Francisco going to school. She speaks of herself and mother as very poor and always worried about money. There were dreary years in which Mrs. Treadwell seemed to have lost her joy in living and in which Treadwell's grades suffered. However, in the spring of her senior year, 1902, she played Mademoiselle Jeanne, a French teacher, in the senior class play, The Chaperone, and within a month graduated in a class of seventy-seven from Girls' High School in San Francisco. She describes herself as a "gawky, uninteresting girl of sixteen, hands cold with nervousness and thin back aching with fright."¹⁰ This is the first statement in her writings concerning the nerves which were to plague her the rest of her life. Perhaps she was constitutionally sensitive and highly keyed. Perhaps the instability of her childhood made her permanently insecure and nervous. Her diaries indicate that these physical and nervous ailments recurred periodically throughout her life, necessitating stays in sanitariums, usually in Europe. This difficulty with nerves and frail health was to become an increasing problem while she was in college.

Initially, Treadwell refused to go to college because she felt the financial strain of the past two years

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Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

had been too great a hardship. When she announced her alternative, which was to go on the stage, her mother said she talked like a fool. This ambition to be an actress had been with Treadwell since she was a child. She has given various accounts of her attempts to make a career, and why she gave up the idea of being an actress. Probably, the truth is that she never really gave up the desire to perform, but was intimidated by the rejections most performers are forced to endure.

Taking her mother's advice, she enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1902. Her father promised to help her financially but his contributions were sporadic at best. Treadwell comments that her first year of college passed without event; the work was not hard for her. She studied botany, mathematics, English, French, history and physical culture (physiology). During her four years at Berkeley, she concentrated on foreign languages--French, Spanish, German and Italian--but elected a wide range of subjects: political science, jurisprudence, English, philosophy, chemistry and agriculture.

In the spring of 1903, she also enrolled at the commercial high school, learning shorthand and typing. Although she seemed to be able to carry the double class load, she developed insomnia and was exhausted by the end of the school year. Instead of earning money over the vacation, she had to spend the summer visiting friends on a ranch in Lake County to recuperate.

Treadwell's sophomore year was a good one. She was enthusiastic about her classes and participated in all the extracurricular activities including the girls' crewing team. Her mother was getting along financially by re-renting two furnished houses. It was during this year that Treadwell began to exercise her performing talents. She started off the year by writing and performing a song called "Mama Doesn't Approve," for the Girl's Masquerade. She then appeared in the Sophomore Minstrel Show in a one-act farce, Of Royal Blood, and she wrote the songs for a sketch, "Tom, Dick and Harriet." She was favorably reviewed in the college press; and, of her experiences this year Treadwell said, "I had my picture in the paper and a paragraph in Town Talk! [a San Francisco magazine]. Altogether, mama was quite pleased and I was in seventh heaven." She was able to work that summer in her father's law office at a salary of sixty dollars per month.

Her junior year was the best one of all in Treadwell's estimation. Her mother was earning money as companion to an invalid. Treadwell comments that, dreary as this may sound, her mother liked it because she was independent. Her father paid Treadwell's board for two months but then stopped, and she pawned two rings to finish the year. She was feeling resourceful and independent during this period, however. She chaired several student committees; played Iva Notion in a three-act farce, Just About Now; and appeared as Ruth Rolt in Sweet Lavender. In this year she was also

one of the editors of the women's edition of The Pelican, the college humor magazine. However, she was attending classes during the day and participating in campus literary life, rehearsing in the late afternoon and working at night in the circulation department of the San Francisco Call. Once again her health began to deteriorate. A sealed envelope in her college papers contains a letter to her mother announcing that she was dropping out of college. She speaks of poor health and pain, some of it apparently spiritual as well as physical.

Treadwell did not drop out of school but her senior year was a difficult one. Mrs. Treadwell's job had come to an end and once again there was no money. They attempted to take in boarders, but that venture was a failure. In the spring of her senior year, she lived in a boarding house while her mother returned to the ranch in Stockton. Treadwell cooked breakfast and lunch in return for her keep. She took a night job teaching English to foreign adults. Once again she was holding two jobs, going to school full time and rehearsing in the late afternoons. It was too much.

Then, on April 18, 1906, the San Francisco earthquake hit and Treadwell went to investigate.

A young boy, my particular chum, came for me early in the morning to go to the city with him. We got over by the sheerest good luck in a little launch. All day long we tramped the burning city, everywhere that we could think of where there might be something more to see. We got home late at night, exhausted with excitement and the miles we had walked.¹¹

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Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

Of course, everything was disrupted, including classes at Berkeley and the evening school for adults. Nevertheless, that spring she received her Bachelor of Letters in French but the whole class graduated in absentia because of the earthquake. Moreover, she was experiencing what she termed the first real illness of her life. A week after tramping around stricken San Francisco, she was suddenly unable to walk, and was confined to bed for two months, May and June. In a diary entry years later, she called this illness a "breakdown." Her periodic collapses were also referred to as nervous exhaustion. Fortunately, after the two months' bedrest, she was able to move about with a cane. Then a letter came from the Board of Education saying that one hundred fifty dollars had been awarded to all teachers who were employed at the time of the earthquake. Treadwell paid her debts and went home to the ranch in Stockton.

An examination of Treadwell's high school instruction and years at Berkeley discloses no playwriting nor journalism courses. She studied English four years in college and all the papers she saved from those courses are examples of creative writing. Most of them are untitled, handwritten, and about two pages in length. Some are exercises in description. Others depend upon exchanges of dialogue between men and women, enlivened by a sharp eye for detail and clever use of irony. They were excellent preparation for the verbal duels between the sexes in her plays. The following untitled, handwritten piece, (NWA),

dated September 13, 1905, is an example:

The well-trained voice of the young minister floated over the table. "That is why I believe in the new Metaphysics--the new Thought, if you prefer."

"Ah, you have found life," murmured Mrs. Bennett.

"I have found truth," corrected the young minister, gently but firmly. "The Truth. The Ego. The I am."

I raised my eyes quickly from my paté and gazed at the man. He was smiling round the table with that inane distortion of features with which some men finish their remarks. Young, he was very young--and well-built enough to have punched his way through life, satisfied with the truth in his own right arm. But the hand thrown out in explanation would never do in a fight. It was white and without hair, the fingers short, the palms thick through. He had a well-shaped head on those shoulders of his. His hair would have been a woman's glory--golden brown and standing out with curls. Good blue eyes were set back under a dome of a forehead. The nose was indeterminate, the mouth, large and without poise.

The voice went on, "Happiness is self realization; and self-realization is self-resignation."

I returned to my paté.

The available evidence indicates that Treadwell was a self-made playwright, arriving at the craft through the usual process: writing, rewriting, having the dialogue read or observing preprofessional production, and the out-of-town tryout--all these steps affording the playwright the opportunity to tighten and polish the script. As a child, she was taken to the theatre frequently, and had grown to love it. As a result of this love, combined with her own talent, she decided on the stage as a career. These two elements at least encouraged her to think in terms of writing for the stage.

There are sketches and songs available from her college years and two one-act plays. The earliest of her one-act efforts is untitled, the other is A Man's Own. Treadwell's partisanship for women's equality already is apparent in both the comic sketches and plays.

There are only two characters in the untitled one-act, a middle-aged musician and his twenty-four-year-old daughter. He is an accomplished pianist and composer, she is a singer. Her father had sent her to New York at the age of twenty-one for vocal training. She felt lonely and rejected when her father sent her away. Now she returns, confident in her ability and earned reputation as a singer, to confront him with the cruel effect of his quiet and withdrawn ways, his dispassionate interest in her achievement and apparent disregard for the unhappiness she had suffered. This eight-page confrontation allows the young woman to express her resentment toward a father whom she felt did not love her enough.

In A Man's Own, a young working woman slips into the boss's office to rifle his desk. He discovers her at the theft and after ostensibly phoning for the police, he questions her about her circumstances. She is independent, proud and resourceful. She had asked the boss's assistant for a raise in salary from six to seven dollars but he had refused and suggested that she get herself a man to augment her income. She decides to take what she feels is owed to her, becoming a spokeswoman for herself and others:

CURTIS

I'm glad you told me this, Martin had no right to talk to you as he did.

GIRL

You are his boss.

CURTIS

Yes. But I cannot know everything that goes on among my 1,400 employees.

GIRL

But you do know that you hire about a thousand girls at from six to eight dollars a week.

CURTIS

Some of them have homes.

GIRL

Some of them haven't.

CURTIS

You for one?

GIRL

I--for one.

CURTIS

That is not my business. Just your bad luck. Hmm, so you say I do not pay you enough so you have just come to collect. Nevertheless I don't regret having sent for Martin--and the police.

GIRL

Well, send for the police--sent for them--do you suppose I care? I would just about as soon go to jail as anything else. There doesn't seem anything much for a woman to do in this world anyway but marry somebody or go to the devil or teach school. . . .¹²

This is the outcry of Treadwell's female protagonists: what are women to do with their talents and ambitions in a world ruled by institutions or men who do not take those women seriously? Eventually Girl and Mr. Curtis

¹²Sophie Treadwell, A Man's Own, TS, UALSC, Box 5, pp. 12-13.

discover that they are father and daughter, an improbable circumstance, but one which permits Treadwell to explore once again the possibilities of frank confrontation between father and daughter.

In these two early works, we see some of the attitudes and tendencies which mark all of Treadwell's later works: a concern for women's talents, opportunities, conflicts, and oppressions; and the relationships those women form with men in a world controlled by men. In the future, her concerns were to expand to include civil rights, ethnic equality, ecology, the damage of societal pressures on both men and women, the troubled passage of unconventional people through the mainstream of America.

At this point in her life, however, Treadwell found herself living the dilemma of her female characters: how to combine the practical need for earning a living with artistic ambitions and to accommodate the societal expectation that women get married. She clearly yearned for a stage career but had trained herself for journalism. The need for immediate action was postponed. In June, 1906, with the San Francisco earthquake and Berkeley behind her, Treadwell's physical and emotional health dictated a recuperation period. Ultimately, she went to the California mountains where she felt free and at peace with herself.

CHAPTER II

Development and Practice

Treadwell refers to the three months she spent on the ranch (August-October, 1906), as the best time she ever had.

When I went there I could not walk as far as the outer gate. When I left I rode and drove anywhere and anything; went on long dove hunts with my uncle; milked Rose, the cow, as dry as any farm hand; made crates and drove the grape wagon in packing season. I weighed more and was stronger than I had ever been in my life. Nobody asked anything of me. I attired myself in the free, comfortable costume of a young boy; and I just played all day long.¹³

She also kept a scrapbook covering this period and the following two years which she titled Vagabondage, perhaps indicating her subconscious attitude toward what appeared to be a carefree, happy time. By October, Treadwell felt she must get on with making a living but she didn't want to work in the city. As the Girl commented in A Man's Own, "Doesn't seem much for a woman to do but marry somebody, go to the devil or teach school." Treadwell chose the third alternative. She requested the placement secretary at Berkeley to send her to the mountains. The next day she was notified that there was a vacancy in a one-room school at Yankee Jim's in Placer County. Eagerly, she took the job.

¹³Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

Yankee Jim's was an old mining camp. It was said that in 1852 it yielded the greatest surface diggings ever found in the state of California. At the time Treadwell arrived there, November, 1906, it was nearly deserted. There were several old men who lived alone in little shacks, and a few women with children whose husbands worked in mines some distance away. A photograph of the school with Treadwell standing by the door shows a small frame building with a bell on top, standing in a grove of pines. Treadwell taught six children of all ages in this school and lived with her cousin, Yoland, in an old miner's cabin. They were snowed in all winter and slept in layers of clothes in the kitchen next to the stove, to the amusement of the community.

Treadwell utilized the confinement of the long winter to write her first full-length play, Le Grand Prix, a drama in four acts. The play concerns a woman artist who must make the choice between developing her talent and pursuing her art, or marrying. As a first effort the plot and structure are strikingly skillful.

Kate Morgan, the artist, leaves home to go to New York. In seeking her freedom she disregards the advice of her mother and aunt, and refuses the proposal of marriage from Freeman Ryder, an engineer. In their first scene together, Act I, p. 11, Treadwell exposes one of the areas of misunderstanding between male and female--both of whom desire independence.

RYDER

I have a plan for you. . . .

KATE

But I don't like to have anyone plan for me. I want to do all that myself. But tell me--perhaps it is just the thing.

RYDER

I have just received and accepted an offer from a big English company to take charge of all their bridge construction in British Columbia. It's better than anything I ever dreamed of. I have more than a chance to make good. It's all there--money, reputation, and the glory of watching my own plans grow from paper into realities, perfect in the tiniest detail--I--

KATE

I thought it was my plan.

RYDER

(Smiling, a bit taken back)

It is your plan, all yours. Will you come, little girl--come with me and let me take care of you and work for you always. I've always wanted you--but never before felt I had enough to offer . . . little girl.

Treadwell's use of irony to point up Ryder's unconscious paternalism was to be a literary device she used many times. Here in his last line, Ryder tries to strike the bargain that many men in Treadwell's future plays attempt: "Become my possession! I have enough money to buy you." Kate cannot accept the attitude nor the proposal.

Kate shares an apartment in New York with Jane Tillinghast, art critic for the Times. Years before, Jane had been a student artist in Paris. She became involved with another artist who wanted to marry her. Fearing that marriage would divert her energies from art, she left Europe, came to New York and eventually turned from painting to writing about art. In Act II Treadwell's feeling about what marriage means for a woman is spoken to Jane by Kate:

"I can't bear the idea of marrying. Think of being bound forever and ever, bound by oaths and papers and witnesses and ink. People change--ideals and realities both change--your love might change and there you would be bound." This attitude toward marriage recurs in Treadwell's plays through the years and finds its most vehement expression in Machinal, which will be discussed later.

Kate's talent is guided by a well-known artist. When Jane learns that Kate's mentor is John Northrup, her former Parisian lover, she leaves New York. In Act III Kate and Northrup plan to marry but Jane returns to the apartment to visit and encounters Northrup. Kate enters as they are realizing they still love each other. Faced by this untenable situation, Kate cannot marry Northrup.

In Act IV, it is five years later. Kate has spent the time in Europe studying, and she has won the Grand Prix in Paris for a painting of a little boy. She receives thousands of dollars for her paintings; she is a successful artist. A studio reception is being given for her, attended by Jane and Northrup, now married. Jane wishes to speak to Kate alone. As the men leave, (pp. 36-37), one says:

JENKY

Latest Paris styles?

KATE

Why do all men--even clever ones--think that when women are alone they must talk of clothes?

JANE

Or babies. Tell me Kate, how are you? You look splendid . . . and you must work hard.

KATE

I have . . . but when work holds your interest absorbed from daylight to dark, it becomes play, the most intoxicating of play.

JANE

Yes, when one succeeds--and you, Kate, you have succeeded as few women ever have done.

KATE

Work and success! I should be perfectly happy, shouldn't I?

JANE

(Hurriedly)

You are, aren't you, Kate?

KATE

Yes, I think I am.

Kate is alone at the end of the play and even though she has neither a husband like Jane nor a child like Freeman Ryder, who reappears in the final minutes of the play, she has gained a measure of happiness in her artistic achievement. She made a choice between marriage and career. Clearly, Treadwell thought the two elements could not be combined in the life of the serious woman artist.

Treadwell makes Kate's independent stance clear in the structure of the play. All the other characters are paired: Kate's mother and aunt function as a pair of mouth-pieces for conventional societal attitudes toward appropriate behavior for women; Kate's friends, Jenky and James, both staff artists on the Times, function as cheerleaders for her ambition; Jane and Northrup serve as the romantic pair who achieve the marital state Kate eschews.

During her stay in 1906-7 in Placer County, Treadwell was writing feature articles as well as her first full-length

dramatic effort. Personal experiences were always grist for her literary mill. She wrote an article, "Spirit of '49 Rising from the Tailings at Yankee Jim's," a brief history of the gold-mining days, which appeared as a full-page article in the San Francisco Sunday Chronicle in the spring of 1907.

Treadwell comments in a letter to a friend that she was not a glowing success as a teacher because she was unable, even in this small school, to maintain discipline. However, in May when she turned in the school register and keys to the clerk of the board of trustees, he set her mind at rest and she couldn't resist recording his dialogue in dialect: "Wall, so yer all through are ye? Wall, you done all right. You done as good as any of 'em. Er course, there are been some complaints; but then hell! There always is complaints."

By this time Treadwell knew where she was going next. In April, she had written a letter of application to Mrs. George Williams for a job as governess in which she described her preparation:

My college course was broad in the extreme-- a sort of general training for journalism. English and the languages first, history, politics, law and some science, etc. I did special writing on the Chronicle until the earthquake--and shall return to it just as soon as I feel strong enough for the strenuosity of the life.¹⁴

¹⁴Treadwell, Scrapbook 2, NWA, Case 7.

Within two days of the school's closing, she was on her way to be governess to two girls on a cattle ranch in Modoc County, where she stayed from June to October, 1907. She was already adept at getting good press coverage. The headline in the June 24 San Francisco Examiner read, "Girl Will Break Bronchos and Write Her Experiences." According to the article, she was "passing the summer riding bronchos to get the necessary experience for a series of magazine articles." Photographs in her album show Treadwell in culottes, wearing a Roosevelt rough-rider hat, neckerchief, leather fringed gauntlets, and riding boots, astride a horse. Her own description of this experience in Modoc captures the exuberance she felt, and the regret at leaving:

Modoc was great! The two young girls I governed were clever and charming. We had lessons in the morning and in the afternoon we rode. It was a great, free, generous country, filled with fine horses and cowboys and Indians. Everybody spent money freely and had plenty. I loved the life better with every fine breath I drew. Before it was time for me to leave, the family took me for a fishing trip into the mountains on the east of the ranch. We went on horseback up into a glorious country through pines up to peaks of snow and dazzling skies and mysterious blue, blue, bottomless lakes. It seemed like the last virgin country and no man did we see.

But it had to end. I had to go back to cities and to men.¹⁵

In October, Treadwell and her mother went to Los Angeles. Treadwell commented that it seemed to her that she had always thought of the stage as a place where she could find success. Considering her experience up to this

¹⁵Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

time, her own words seem surprisingly naive.

My plans were made. While in college I had had success and compliments for some little songs I had written and for the way I sang them. I saw no reason why I should not do these stunts on the stage and so earn money, much money. And then after a year or so go to Paris and London and Germany and study the stage there, to return to go upon the legitimate stage, if not an artist, assuredly a young person of deep knowledge, etc., etc. It never dawned on me for a minute that it was going to be any different earning money, much money, than it was to get through college, or go to the mountains, or to get out on a cattle range. Money was the next thing on the program, that was all.¹⁶

After sight-seeing for a week, Treadwell went to the Orpheum Theatre and told the manager she had a "fine stunt" for the circuit. He was not impressed. She returned time after time and finally achieved a singing audition. His comment was, "Very nice," and she never heard from him again. She tried other theaters but, predictably, did not hold up well under repeated rejections. She wrote three vignettes at this time, "A Visit to a Manager," "Amateur Night" (in which she participated), and "The Holy City," the first two of which afford insight into Treadwell's attitudes towards making the rounds in theatre.

While auditioning, she also submitted her play, Le Grand Prix to Hobart Bosworth, manager of the Belasco Theatre, and Otheman Stevens, drama critic for the Los Angeles Examiner. Bosworth returned the play but sent a letter of criticism which greatly encouraged her.

¹⁶Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

. . . Yours is by long odds the best of the local scripts submitted to me yet. The dialogue is delightful and of the best sort for dramatic work, crisp and plain and terse with no attempt at "fine writing." And you have a good sense of dramatic contrasts. 17

Bosworth further commented that her construction was weak (his specificities did not relate to construction [structure]), and that Katherine did not have clear dramatic reasons for renouncing the man she loved--a more accurate criticism. But, he did not produce Le Grand Prix. The significance of his letter to Treadwell was that it provided a positive contrast to her rejections as a performer and encouraged her in the direction of writing plays for the stage.

At the same time she was receiving compliments for playwriting efforts she was being rebuffed as a potential performer.

I tried other theatres but I hated them. It took the starch out of me. Finally one man gave me a tryout. It was a pitiful failure. I suddenly realized that the next step must be something very different. I had really counted on myself absolutely. The disappointment was so great it about swept me off my feet. . . . I tried to get work at all the theatres. Everywhere I was rebuffed. Our money was about gone. Suddenly and inexplicably a fear of this city where I knew no one came over me; and then a terror of life itself. My nerve was giving way and I was afraid, afraid, afraid.¹⁸

¹⁷Hobart Bosworth, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, October 17, 1907. UALSC, Box 1.

¹⁸Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

Treadwell made two important contacts at this time: Otheman Stevens, powerful dramatic critic for the Hearst Los Angeles Examiner and Constance Skinner, former critic for the Examiner, now working on the memoirs of Madame Helena Modjeska, the actress. Treadwell had personally approached Stevens, asking for advice on how to break into the theatre profession. Skinner had chanced to read the play, Le Grand Prix, while visiting Stevens and had been impressed with both the manuscript and the young writer's struggle for recognition as related by Stevens. Both writers befriended Treadwell. It is certain that Stevens assisted Treadwell in securing a job as super (walk-on) in a Los Angeles stock company and her debut in vaudeville. The stock company was performing The Holy City, a religious play concerning the life of Christ. Treadwell appeared as part of the reverent (or screaming) mob for eight dollars a week.

Her vaudeville act ran the week commencing Monday, December 9, 1907, at Fischer's Theatre in Los Angeles. As usual, Treadwell had advance publicity, but this time, under one of her pseudonyms.¹⁹ The headline, "Pretty San Francisco Girl Will Seek Fame on Stage," is accompanied by a photograph of Treadwell in costume.

¹⁹Treadwell used a number of pseudonyms during her career: Miss Stepgood, Mary West, Marion Stevens, Willia Williams, Millie Williams, Constance Eliot, Alexander West. There are hints in her papers as to why she may have used pseudonyms but she did not directly comment on the matter.

Miss Willia Williams will make her debut today at Fischer's Theatre. The name conceals the identity of a very widely known young woman of San Francisco, a graduate of the University of California, who, for better reasons than those often ascribed to society folk who go on the stage, has chosen the theatrical profession.

Miss Williams, during her college days, achieved a remarkable success as an amateur entertainer. When the reasons for her entering some profession became potent, the clever little musical stunts she formerly used to amuse her friends with were thought of. Miss Williams has written three songs and composed the music for them. She will give them in costume beginning at this afternoon's performance at Fischer's.

One ballad is that of a 'Sweet Sixteen' girl, the second is that of a somewhat Frenchy sou-brette, and the third is the song of a very swell youth in evening clothes; the turn is not what is known as a 'lightning change' act; but is one that is said to be thoroughly artistic and well considered.²⁰

On the program she was listed as Miss Millie Williams, Character Change Artist. A brief review appeared in the Examiner the next day: "Miss Willia Williams . . . was eminently successful. She established herself at once with her audience, and was recalled until her repertoire was exhausted. Her songs with their dainty acting and illustrative music, are a novel and refreshing form of vaudeville."²¹ Treadwell's own comment on this week in vaudeville provides insight into her personality and attitudes.

²⁰ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA, Los Angeles Examiner, December 9, 1907.

²¹ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA, Los Angeles Examiner, December 10, 1907.

I was greener than grass. At first I seemed to do all right, I got a big hand, etc. But day by day, instead of getting better, I got worse. An overpowering disgust and shame of the place and the work overcame me. I loathed the people who applauded me. The lowness of the surroundings affected me with physical nausea to such an extent that for the whole week I was there I could hardly swallow food. What a comedienne!²²

It is not apparent in Treadwell's comments nor in the newspaper reviews that she had potential as a singer. She was asked to sing by a vocal teacher who determined that she had a contralto voice worthy of training. This man, an operatic basso profundo, offered to train her as a singer without cost; his fee was to be her success. Stevens urged Treadwell to give up vaudeville (her success was limited, at best), and take formal vocal training. Work would be found for her that would permit her to study and rest for a year before trying to sing again. Treadwell's precarious health (or nerves), were breaking down again. Her mother returned to the ranch, the experience having been a difficult one for her. At this point Treadwell had sixteen dollars left. She tried to find work as a secretary, teacher, tutor, governess or clerk, and found nothing. She makes another revealing statement: "Again the terrible terror seized me, coupled with humiliation at my helplessness and the favors I had received from strangers, where was I to turn?"²³ She wrote a registered letter to her father

²²

Treadwell, The Story, n.p.

²³ Certainly, these experiences contributed to the fact that, throughout the rest of her life, she was intensely

asking for money. The registry card came back signed but without reply. For a few weeks, she typed play manuscripts for Constance Skinner and poetry for her vocal coach.

In February, 1908, Skinner accepted a job with the Hearst papers in Chicago. She contacted Treadwell with the following proposal: Skinner had been typing the memoirs of Madame Helena Modjeska.²⁴ Since Skinner was leaving, she had proposed to Modjeska that Treadwell finish the work. Modjeska's husband wrote to Treadwell February 3, 1908:

Miss Constance Skinner told us you would be willing to take some work for Mme. Modjeska, my wife, who lives here in Tustin. It consists in copying about 200 pages of badly typewritten, and probably as many more pages of well written M.S. The work has to be done on the spot, therefore, if you accept, you would have to come here and spend here a few days with us. We should be pleased to give you room and board in our house. Miss Skinner told us that your price is 50 cents for 1,000 words, which would suit us. . . .

The association with Modjeska made a strong impression on Treadwell, particularly since at the age of six,

self-reliant; always aware of the poor preparation many women received for coping with financial realities, and, determined to make herself financially secure.

²⁴ Helena Modjeska was a famous Polish actress at the turn of the century, married to a titled nobleman, Count Charles W. Bozenta Chapowski. The Count, Modjeska, and a group of Poles including writer Henry Sienkiewicz, envisioned a utopian commune in the San Joaquin Valley; and, for a time, they all lived together. The situation proved unworkable. When Sienkiewicz returned to Poland, he tried to persuade Modjeska to join him but she elected to remain with her husband in California. In order to support them both, she learned roles in English, phonetically, and built a new acting career in her adopted country. By 1908, she was nearly retired because of ill health and engaged in writing her memoirs.

she had seen Modjeska perform in The Merchant of Venice. According to Treadwell, that had been the experience which captured her interest in a stage career. Treadwell gave a more colorful description of her initial meeting with Modjeska in interviews and a biographical statement: "Out of college she went to Los Angeles, played in stock and made extra dollars singing in vaudeville. It was in vaudeville that Mme. Modjeska heard her and shortly thereafter adopted her as a sort of protégée."²⁵

Treadwell moved to the ranch in Tustin, Orange County, February 10, 1908, and lived there for more than four months. During this time she edited and finished Modjeska's memoirs, although her name is never mentioned in them.²⁶ Also during this time she was probably coached in acting by Modjeska; and certainly she wrote her second full-length play, The Right Man, and began her third, Constance Darrow (later copyrighted under the title, The High Cost). When The Right Man was completed, Modjeska personally endorsed it with a letter and it was sent to a producer in New York, Jules Murry. His reply, July 9, 1908 (addressed to Mr. S. Treadwell), elated her:

In reply to your letter of a short time ago, with letter to me from Madame Modjeska, and the receipt of your manuscript of "The Right Man," I am somewhat favorably impressed with the same,

²⁵Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1928-29 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1929), p. 272.

²⁶Helena Modjeska, Memories and Impressions of Helena Modjeska: An Autobiography (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969 reprint of 1910 edition).

provided some very important changes are made, with which, however, I will not bother you until it has been positively decided that I do the play, but I would suggest that upon receipt of this you advise me fully as to what terms and conditions you would expect should I decide to do it. . . .²⁷

According to Treadwell, Madame would not permit her to make any changes since that constituted a sacrifice of artistic integrity. Whatever the reason, another letter of July 30, 1908, from Jules Murry informs of his decision not to produce the play after all.

The Right Man is a comedy in four acts written from Treadwell's experiences on the Williams' ranch in Modoc County. Acts I and IV take place in a sorority house in Berkeley, Acts II and III on the Double-cross Ranch in Modoc. Ned wants to marry Phoebe, but she is going to a ranch to be a governess. After six months on the ranch, she is in love with Tex Wharton, the superintendant. They are engaged to be married, but Tex has concealed a former love affair with Nettie, a half-breed Indian girl who still loves him. Phoebe's friends arrive from Berkeley, including Ned, and, while the whole group is attending a dance, Nettie announces that Tex is her man--Phoebe will be cursed if she marries him. Phoebe is still reeling from this shock, when Tex is shot at by a drunken bronc rider. Nettie shields Tex with her body, is shot and dies, still maintaining that Tex is her man. Act IV takes place on the third day of the fire

²⁷Jules Murry, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, July 9, 1908, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA.

following the San Francisco earthquake. Phoebe is volunteer-nursing, Ned is helping clear the rubble. They have lost much but have each other.

This early effort is one of Treadwell's weakest plays. The action is arbitrary and episodic. There is neither clear antagonist nor protagonist. Phoebe is not an admirable character: she is contemptuous of Ned because his father has money and he's never had to work; she loves Tex because he's a "real man" (rides horses, throws a rope); she thinks white men's relationships with dirty half-breed Indian girls are "disgusting," and that half-breeds are much lower than full-blooded Indians (who are noble). The love games played by the college girls are amusing but insincere and don't contribute to the dramatic action. The characters are artificial and, to a certain extent, stereotypical: the father of one of the sorority girls is a captain in the army but is duped by the feminine wiles of a coed who pouts prettily. The chauvinistic attitudes of the major characters toward rural people and Indians is atypical of Treadwell's writing, although perhaps influenced by her time. This element, combined with the lack of any theme makes The Right Man Treadwell's least characteristic dramatic work.

When Modjeska's memoirs were finished, Treadwell was to accompany the Count and Modjeska to New York to deliver the manuscript to the publisher. However, her mother became ill so, in July, 1907, she returned to San Francisco, continued working on her new play, and began free-lancing as a

theatre critic for the Bulletin.

For several months she boarded at Mrs. Osborne's at 1100 Lombard Street, and worked on her play, Constance Darrow. On September 20, 1908, she reviewed her first play for the Bulletin: The Conquerers by Paul Potter; played by the stock company at the Valencia Theatre. A month later she reviewed Graustark at the same theatre where a friend invited her to share a box with other newspaper reporters. There she met William O'Connell McGeehan, her future husband. Between October 18 and 30, she was given a full-time job on The San Francisco Bulletin. Her first story was a humorous feature article about the abbreviated spelling in the new telephone directory. Improbably, she was also assigned coverage of the baseball games and among her papers (NWA), was the following reminder to herself:

When batter is struck out: he wiffed. He found his way to the bench. He hit the ozone three times. He retired to the bench on strikes. He fanned.

When batter is walked: he was ticketed to the initial sack. He was issued a free pass. He was given his base on balls.

Second base is called the keystone sack.

When they refer to third base they usually say that he will cavort around the difficult corner.

Outfielders are usually called fly chasers.

Pitchers are referred to in the following manner: Griffin will officiate for the Seals today. Griffin was on the mound. Griffin will do slab duty for the Seals today.

During the next few months she was assigned celebrity interviews and wrote a number of feature articles. Evidence points to the probability that she was an interesting and popular newspaper writer. One fan letter to her lauds:

Permit me to congratulate you on the article: "Bulls and Bears in Green Hats."

I know how these articles are written up and the short space of time one has to complete an instructive, readable, interesting and attractive sketch.

The write-up shows you to be extremely observant, especially the little character study you made of "Jimmie Degan." It is possibly more clever than you know for you have been able to give in a short space what his friends have loved in him for many years. . . .²⁸

In July, 1909, Treadwell rented a bungalow at 415 Lombard Street and moved into the first home of her own. She also changed jobs and joined the Daily News where she worked July and August. In September, her physical stamina and nerves gave way, and she returned to Yankee Jim's, where she had first been a school teacher, "to find peace."²⁹

In December, the Oakland Enquirer announced: "Drops Pen for Footlights: Miss Sophie Treadwell, Newspaper Writer, Goes on Stage."

. . . Miss Treadwell is now a member of Ye Liberty Stock Company in Oakland, and has been assigned to a minor part in "Texas," the drama of Western Life written by Sidney Ayers and J. Maudlin Fellows.

Miss Treadwell has always told her intimate associates that she hopes to shine before the footlights. Her original intention was to enter stock or vaudeville in San Francisco, but the opportunity presented itself in Oakland so she accepted an offer from the Bishop management.³⁰

²⁸B. W. Dennis, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, January 4, 1909, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA.

²⁹W. O. McGeehan, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, n.d., NWA, Case 5.

³⁰Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA.

That same month she played Miss Simmons in The Admirable Crichton. Nothing more is known about her activities with Ye Liberty Stock Company. Within a month (January 27, 1910) she was married to William O'Connell McGeehan. For working purposes, Treadwell retained her maiden name all her life. Both Treadwell and McGeehan vigorously pursued their separate careers; there are indications that this may have been a condition of the marriage.

Treadwell spent June and July, 1910, in St. Helena Sanitarium. Her health had broken down again. She was treated with sun-baths, cold water, and various kinds of diets to improve her digestion. Evidently, she had suffered an alarming weight loss in the spring of 1910 because she was unable to eat. The sanitarium doctor described her as a "nervous, high-strung, high-tensioned patient."³¹

For the next two years, although Treadwell wrote a weekly column of book reviews and occasional drama reviews for The Bulletin, her major interest seems to have been her plays. The two years between 1909 and 1911, she wrote The Settlement (copyrighted August, 1911) and The High Cost (copyrighted December, 1911). The High Cost is the final title of Constance Darrow which she had begun in June, 1908, while still living with Madame Modjeska.

The High Cost is a three-act drama, partly autobiographical, set in the apartment of Constance Darrow.

Constance is a private secretary and administrative assistant

³¹

Sophie Treadwell, Letter to W. O. McGeehan, n.d., NWA, Case 5.

to the head of a business firm. She supports her mother, who lives with her, quite comfortably although Mrs. Darrow peruses the classified ads hoping to find a job so that she won't be dependent on her daughter. Constance has been postponing marriage to Ben because Ben insists his wife may not work. Obviously, she is competent in her work and proud of her independence; but when Ben threatens to walk out if she doesn't marry him now, she succumbs to this emotional blackmail.

After two months, Constance realizes that Ben's income is inadequate to cover their expenses and that she does not feel gratified by performing household tasks. Her former employer, Mr. Mathews, for whom Ben works, comes to dinner and Treadwell's argument concerning women's rights comes from his lips. In Act II, pp. 17-18, her handling of the argument in this way presents a stronger case.

MR. MATHEWS

. . . I've often wondered about you, Mrs. Collier. Just how you were making it with house work. Tell me, do you like it?

CONSTANCE

I'm learning to like it, yes.

MR. MATHEWS

(shaking his head dubiously)
The things we learn to love, we never really love after all.

CONSTANCE

There is a great deal in that.

MR. MATHEWS

Is it true, Mrs. Collier, that all women are essentially housekeepers and mothers?

BEN

Of course, given their natural environment.

MR. MATHEWS

I had begun to think that as fatuous as that all men are born warriors and providers of game.

BEN

That's just it! Men have digressed, differentiated, changed through civilization. But women, well, nature has not allowed women to go very far from the primitive.

MR. MATHEWS

You mean men have not allowed women to go very far from the primitive--

BEN

From one point of view that is a distinction without a difference.

MR. MATHEWS

But that point of view is not the only one. Tell me, Mrs. Collier, do you find your business success any help to you in the new metier, the new--career?

CONSTANCE

Not a bit.

BEN

That's one thing I can't understand. Women never seem able to apply any system to their work. Now, if men had been doing housework all the thousands of years women have been at it, it would be an absolute science by this time.

MR. MATHEWS

They have have, of course, been spared the interruptions of child birth and child rearing that women have had to contend with.

In time, Constance becomes pregnant. Ben insists she have an abortion. He offers a number of reasons: she'll stay younger and happier without children; or perhaps children don't want to be born into the world's mess. But his major concerns are for money and his own comfort. Constance has an abortion but feels cheated in both public and private life. When Ben threatens to leave her if she returns to work, it becomes clear that he wants Constance

in a subservient position, attending to his creature comforts and personal needs. Sadly, she acquiesces as the play ends.

The High Cost is one of Treadwell's most skillfully-woven plays. Each character is a mirror for another. In Act I, Constance insists that Mrs. Darrow not work since Constance feels she makes enough money to support them both. Consequently, she limits her mother's opportunities as Ben later limits hers. Constance's friend, Nan, mirrors Ben in her opportunistic use of others. Nan also provides contrast for Constance, since Nan seizes her freedom while Constance is unable to change her situation. Terrance, Nan's fiance, is oppressed by Nan as Constance is oppressed by Ben.

In this play, as well as in The Settlement, Treadwell is exploring the possibilities for talented, ambitious women, but, so far, the women fail to seize these possibilities.

The Settlement, a play in three acts, is a serious drama concerning a young newspaper reporter, Beth Ahlmer; a young man, James Crery, who runs a settlement house in the poor section of San Francisco; Laura Brighton, a millionairess who supports the settlement house, and Stanislaus Benda, a waiter. The plot is that of melodrama: Laura loses a valuable necklace, but claims it has been stolen and falsely accuses, in turn, Benda and Beth. Both lose their jobs because of Laura. The third act concerns Crery's efforts

to expose Laura and clear both Benda and Beth.

There are several protagonists in the play. In this version, Treadwell seems not to have decided where she wants the character emphasis. Beth Ahlmer is a typical female character of this period in Treadwell's writing career--obsessed with succeeding on her own; but, Crery is more enlightened than Ben of The High Cost. Ben insisted his wife could not work outside the home while Crery offers the possibility of both home and career (Act I, pp. 26-27):

BETH

You must forget marriage, Jimmie.

CRERY

Why?

BETH

Because it can't be.

CRERY

Why?

BETH

Oh, Jimmie, I've told you so many times--my work! I must make good by myself. I must make good.

CRERY

You're killing yourself for a fancy! You could have your home, dear, and a career or whatever it is you want, just the same.

BETH

Jimmie, you can't understand. All my life I've promised myself that I would make good--alone. I've just got to do it! I've got to make good to myself. I've got to.

Male still dominates female at the end of the play. Crery prevents Beth from turning in the real story of Laura's fraud, which would have ensured Beth's being rehired by the newspaper. Crery substitutes what he thinks is best:

BETH

(nervously)
Why didn't you let me do my work, Jimmie?

CRERY

(Puts her in big chair by desk--stands
looking down at her)
I've a new job for you.

BETH

Where?

CRERY

To go in pardners with me!

BETH

Pardners--we--here?

CRERY

No. In a new place--somewhere! All new!

An interesting aspect of The Settlement is the source of the characters, all of whom were derived from people Treadwell knew. Beth is based partially on the author, herself. Laura and Crery also appear in The Right Man and are based on acquaintances of hers in college. Belle Palmer, a sophisticated madame, also appears in Treadwell's last novel, The Great Name Story, and possibly is based on a relative of hers. The waiter, Stanislaus Benda is based on Count Bozenta Chapowski, husband of Helena Modjeska. Modjeska had told Treadwell that when Count Bozenta came to America after having been banished from Poland for political activity, he worked as a waiter in San Francisco. Treadwell wrote the scenario for another play, untitled, in which another titled nobleman works as a waiter in San Francisco.³²

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Sophie Treadwell, Papers, UALSC, Box 2, File 11.

In 1912, Treadwell again performed on the stage, this time in a starring role. In the Forest Theatre at Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, July 3 and 4, she appeared as Ismar, Queen of Acortis, in Bertha Newberry's The Toad, a play of ancient Egypt. This play was part of an annual festival by the colony of literary figures, painters and professors in this old city by the sea. The entire artists' colony participated. According to the critic, it was

a tremendous tale of B.C. intrigue and A.D. humanity. . . . The merit of the production clamors for notice. Sophie Treadwell and Helen Cooke shared honors in the tragic unfolding of the story. The former is really Mrs. O. McGeehan, wife of a well known San Francisco journalist. . . . One of the most effective scenes visualized in a decade was presented tonight when these two players . . . in their roles of Queen of Acortis and Seeress of Amon, battled for the life of the hump-backed dwarf, the favorite of the king. . . .
Sophie Treadwell distinguished herself .³³

Another review by Edward F. O'Day in Town Talk, July 12, 1912, was more particular: "The one player who stood out was Sophie Treadwell who plays Queen Ismar. Miss Treadwell was a stunning queen. She had a queenly carriage and made queenly gestures. Besides, she showed dramatic intensity. She read her lines well, but alas! They were not very good lines."

In 1913-14, Treadwell gained prominence as an interviewer of celebrities, a type of writing for which she had a

³³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 2, NWA, Walter Anthony, San Francisco Call, July 3, 1912, n.p.

knack. She wrote articles on Jack London, Fritz Kreisler, Mary Garden, De Wolf Hopper, and others whose names are not familiar now. Also during this time she covered her first sensational jury trial, the Van Baalen murder, committed by Leah Alexander, his mistress. It was for her coverage of these kinds of trials that Treadwell was sometimes referred to as a sob-sister; in journalistic terminology, a writer of mawkishly sentimental stories.

Two events occurred in late 1914 which were important to Treadwell. She was a charter member of the Lucy Stone League, an organization championing women's rights and the vote. She participated in their one hundred fifty-mile walk with Dorothy Dix, Emma Bugbee and General Rosalie Jones, from New York City to the state capitol at Albany carrying a petition to the State Legislature urging suffrage for women.

Fremont Older, editor of The San Francisco Bulletin, provided the second event when he hired Treadwell full-time on special staff as a writer of serials. Her first effort was immensely popular. To gather material for "An Outcast At the Christian Door," an undated clipping reports Treadwell, "in the guise of an outcast, wandered for days in San Francisco, seeking aid from all manner of men and women who claim to devote themselves to uplift work. Her story gives a vivid description of the reception accorded her." This serial is of interest in the context of this study for several reasons. Treadwell disguised herself and "performed"

the role of May Bertin for two weeks as an undercover reporter gathering information. Also, the installments she wrote are largely dialogue exchanges between herself and persons of the various social agencies she contacted. In addition, Treadwell's partisanship of women in all circumstances was reinforced by this experience. In her introduction to the serial, she wrote:

. . . I had never had . . . any particular sympathy for prostitutes. Perhaps because I had felt so keenly the tragedy of the world of women who are just poor and just good; the young girls in the shops, struggling to be decent on six and seven dollars a week--and getting away with it--some of them, the girls in the factories.

I have a friend in a bisquit factory, 24-years old . . . who supports her two children on \$10 a week. . . . She has worked there for six years to arrive at this wage. The president of the company has put in a player piano now to keep the girls off the streets at the noon hour. He hates to think of the men who are hanging around the corners to flirt with them. He hates to think of the stories of easy money they might hear when they are tired. But he doesn't hate it quite enough to raise their wages.³⁴

Treadwell's next serial was "The Story of Jean Traig: How I Got My Husband and How I Lost Him." It was from this lengthy, sentimental serial that Treadwell wrote the one-act play, Sympathy, her first ever produced, which opened at the Pantages Theatre in San Francisco, January 31, 1915.

³⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 5, NWA, Sophie Treadwell, "An Outcast At the Christian Door," The San Francisco Bulletin, October 28, 1914.

Supposedly, a young woman named Jean Traig had told her story to Treadwell, who simply reported it in a series of articles in The Bulletin. In fact, The Bulletin hired a young actress who posed for all the pictures which ran with the serial. The story itself was clearly a creation of Treadwell, heavily relying on her own childhood and experiences she'd had while trying to get a start as a performer. The articles were immediately popular and Treadwell determined to write a play from the series. Sympathy was billed as "an unwritten chapter" in the story of Jean Traig; the role was played by the actress who modeled for The Bulletin photographs, billed as "herself."

The playlet, Sympathy, was written specifically for vaudeville. Twelve pages long, it is a scene of attempted seduction that fails. There are moments of humor, of sensational excitement, when Jean Traig fires a revolver to frighten off her seducer and shoots him in the arm. She has come at his invitation to dinner only because she was hungry, and the man demands "payment:"

JEAN

I did pay for it--I came--I--you said I looked pretty--you said you had to have beautiful things around you--that you were willing to pay for them. \$600 for a piece of stone to put in a ring, to carry in your pocket--but you expect to get me for the price of a meal!

The melodrama was underscored throughout with music and proved to be quite popular with the Pantages' audiences. The Bulletin's Edgar T. Gleeson described the opening in the February 1, 1915 edition:

ACTRESS AND AUTHOR SHARE BIG TRIUMPH: Playlet by Sophie Treadwell Delights Great Crowds at Pantages Theater. Fine capacity houses, which in point of actual numbers and genuine enthusiasm shattered all Sunday records at the Pantages Theater, testify to the success achieved yesterday. . . . The Pantages management is looking forward to one of the biggest weeks in its history.

"An Unwritten Chapter" is founded on an incident in the life of Jean Traig, whose gripping serial has been appearing in daily installments in The Bulletin for the past two months. Miss Sophie Treadwell, The Bulletin's brilliant special writer who wrote the . . . tense little drama . . . has brought to the act the same broad sympathy and understanding that characterized the other chapters in the girl's life. . . ."

Treadwell's royalty for a single week of Sympathy was one hundred ninety dollars, a considerable sum at the time. Undoubtedly, this money provided incentive for Treadwell to continue to develop her skill as a dramatist.

Just before Sympathy opened in San Francisco, William McGeehan had moved to New York to accept a position with The Evening Journal. Treadwell made a number of trips back and forth between New York and San Francisco, a complicated commute in 1915.

Within a few months, Treadwell covered an even greater distance. She became one of the first women foreign war correspondents when she persuaded The Bulletin and Harper's Weekly to send her to France. In a letter of April 13, 1915, Fremont Older wrote:

I am very glad that you have gone to war. I am perfectly certain that you will make a success of your work. I don't believe that there is an editor in America who would dare turn down anything that you write in France, or any other part of the war zone. That is how much confidence

I have in you, and I think that is what all
The Bulletin people think, too.³⁵

Upon arrival, she found that France did not permit women journalists in the battle lines. Her fellow male journalists wrote letters in support of her right to go into the battle lines. She also shrewdly acquired a safe conduct pass which did not specify her profession but which allowed her to travel from one town to the next on personal business. Treadwell wrote a number of articles for The Bulletin and one story for Harper's, "Women in Black," which concerned war widows bringing their dead home on a night train. She also arranged an interview with the famous French actress, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, which produced an article.

Treadwell's experiences during these four months in France led her to form the opinion that some violence in life is necessary and worthwhile--not a popular concept with her editor, but an idea she used later in The Last Border.

While her tour as a war correspondent may have been a qualified success, the experience provided her with the background for several plays, the first of which was Madame Bluff written in late 1915 or early 1916, but not copyrighted in its final form until August 26, 1918. In this three-act comedy, Camille Jones is an ex-newspaper woman turned press agent and scenario writer. She has just returned from France where she attempted to engage a famous French actress

³⁵Treadwell, Scrapbook 6, NWA, Case 7.

in a motion picture contract, but she failed to sign the big star. On shipboard she discovers a likely imposter, Madame Simone de Byng, who has come to America to achieve success and make lots of money. Simone stars in the movie by posing as a countess and winning the admiration of Loomis, the codger-cum-self-made-millionaire, who bankrolls the project.

Movie types, newspaper types and strong, silent types make jokes and romance until Madame Simone marries the aviator, Camille marries the movie star, and all ends happily.

The humor in Madame Bluff is uncomplicated and light-hearted. It is one of Treadwell's best comedies. She seems not to have devoted the unflagging marketing efforts to this play that she did to others of lesser craftsmanship. Probably it would have been a commercial success. There is no indication that Madame Bluff was ever produced or given a public reading. Because of its very timeliness in 1918, it is dated for production now.

Treadwell also wrote a scenario for a musical comedy, unproduced, from Madame Bluff. What makes the scenario remarkable is that the music and dance are integrated, for the most part, into the story, and are used to advance the action. This is a technique supposedly realized for the first time by Rodgers and Hammerstein and Agnes DeMille in Oklahoma (1944).

When Treadwell returned to New York City in late August, 1915, she took a job with the New York American.

At first, she wrote reform articles dealing with abandoned children or treatment of prostitutes at the hands of the police. The kinds of questions she posed to the police demonstrated her feminist attitude:

She and the man started to walk away together and I stepped up and put her under arrest.

"Did you arrest the man?"

"I did not."

"What was the man's name?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ask it?"

"I did not."

"Why didn't you?"

"I did not consider it material."³⁶

She also repeated her ploy of researching the undercover story in disguise and spent the night in the Women's Municipal Lodging House where she found bad conditions, dirt and insults, and exposed them in her newspaper stories.

Within a year she was assigned trial coverage. Her first story was the Mohr murder trial in Providence, Rhode Island. Mrs. Mohr was accused of hiring the murderer of her husband. Written under the heading of Sob Sister Series, Treadwell's stories covered not only the events of the trial but interviews with relatives, descriptions of the home, historical background, and stories on jury members. There were other reporters covering the trial but her editor wrote to her: "Your stories have been uniformly

³⁶ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 4, NWA, Sophie Treadwell, "Defender in Woman's Night Court Swann Plan," New York American, n.d.

excellent. They have attracted considerable attention in the office, and beyond doubt are the best stories printed in New York."³⁷

Sophie Treadwell's reputation as a newspaper woman had grown steadily since 1910. She was able now to support herself comfortably on her earnings, and maintained a separate address from McGeehan's in New York. Journalism offered her a ready source of income and the visibility her ego required. She did not yet think of herself as a dramatist, but as a successful newspaper woman. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Treadwell was training herself as a dramatist.

New York City had lured Treadwell for some time. It was the center of commercial theater in America. During this period (1915-18) in New York, she wrote seven one-act plays: Guess Again, John Doane, His Luck, To Him Who Waits, Trance, La Cachucha and Mrs. Wayne (copyrighted in 1919 under the title of Eye of the Beholder). She wrote three full-length plays: Madame Bluff, Claws and The Answer. As a playwright, she was gaining in skill and confidence; she was beginning to experiment with dramatic forms.

Of the seven one-act plays, two show decisive moves away from conventional idea and structure. To Him Who Waits

³⁷R. C. McCabe, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, January 13, 1916, Treadwell Scrapbook 4, NWA, Case 7.

takes place outside a lonely cabin on top of a ridge in the mountains at nightfall. The two characters are Man and Woman; he is huge, heavy, insistent, powerful; she is small and slim. The entire play is accompanied by the faint music of a violin, played far off, high in the mountains. Treadwell's description sets the scene for the eerie dialogue which follows:

The Man . . . knocks loudly. Woman opens door quickly, closes it behind her, faces Man. He is smiling, but not lightly. Smiling with the look of one moving to a slow victory. She stares straight ahead with the frightened look of one gazing on an old fear.

The man pursues Woman relentlessly. He sleeps outside the cabin door because he wants to look out for her. She wants to be left alone. She says she'll never come to him. He smiles: "everything comes to him who waits." Man offers her jewels, cloth to make a dress, food (the staples--bacon, rice, sugar, flour and salt). Man threatens her with the approach of winter--she can't live alone. He has seen a lone fox and lone wolf leaving the mountain for the valley. She says she is never alone; her dead lover plays the violin for her continuously. The Man points out that he is alive while the other is in the ground, rotting. He threatens her with his physical strength; she locks herself in the cabin.

WOMAN

I'm quite safe--the bolt holds!

MAN

No bolt holds forever.

The door mysteriously swings open. The man says he will not attack Woman by force, he will simply wait, lying across the doorsill. He says again he saw the lone fox and the lone wolf going down into the valley. The Woman sinks into despair. The music becomes louder, more frenzied. The Woman, against her will, invites the Man into the cabin. The violin breaks off, the Man jumps to his feet, and a sudden gust of wind blows out the candle in the cabin, leaving the stage in darkness at the end of the play.

In this play, as well as in Machinal and For Saxophone, Treadwell presented most forcefully the central question for her female characters and probably for herself: Can a woman live freely and securely without the help of a man? Her revulsion for dependence, particularly woman's dependence on man, is apparent in her letters, diaries, notes to herself and in the characters in her plays. The revulsion did not extend to the men, themselves, although the male character in To Him Who Waits is brutish and insensitive, an almost-Neanderthal representation.

In Mrs. Wayne (Eye of the Beholder), she experiments in a different direction. Treadwell wrote on the title page:

The idea of the play is this: That each human being is, in fact, many differing personalities, depending on the eye of the person who sees him. The main character in the play is seen in the eyes of several different people--her husband, her lover, his mother, her mother. She comes in contact with each of them successively. Her husband sees her as his physical possession. Her lover sees her as an ingenuous young girl of eighteen. His mother sees her as a sophisticated woman of thirty. Her mother sees her as a little girl.

The four facets of Mrs. Wayne are played by one actress, dressed in a formless drape of white chiffon. Each costume for the four characters is cut on this same line but in differing colors. Mrs. Wayne's dialogue and style of speech change for each of the four, foreshadowing Treadwell's own For Saxophone and Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude.

The play is unresolved at the end. We see four views of Mrs. Wayne, but they do not form a complete picture, leaving the central character of the play a mystery. Mrs. Wayne is an interesting attempt to dramatize what Treadwell saw as the complexity of the feminine psyche, a complexity and richness which was not adequately nor fully written in female characters during this time.

In her three-act drama, The Answer (1918), Treadwell explores different levels of love experienced by men and women. She is thirty-three years old and her own concepts of love are changing.

In The Answer, Lura loves Jack but is not sure what kind of love it is or how he attracts her. Jack has volunteered as an officer in the army without consulting Lura; she is hurt and bewildered. (Act I, pp. 30-31):

JACK
(laughing joyously)
Come here!

LURA
Oh Jack! When you throw back your head and laugh like that--it just gets me.

JACK
(laughs and kisses her)

LURA

Do you suppose that's all there is to it? Just a trick! Is that why I love you so much in spite of everything--because you know how to laugh?

JACK

(laughing)
Nope--that isn't it! It isn't because I laugh!

LURA

Then why is it?

JACK

(triumphantly)
You know what the great philosopher says, "when you go among women, use the whip."

As the scene develops, one sees that Jack is using the war as an excuse to escape Lura. Lura, thinking that Jack was "the answer" to her unhappiness, had asked her husband, Jim, for a divorce. But she perceives that Jack's feeling for her exists on a different level. (Act I, p. 36):

LURA

Oh, I have loved you so much. . . . Why, I never knew such joy could be in life! Of course you have hurt me--you've always hurt me--but I thought it was because you didn't understand. When you'd trample on me it was just as though some little child I loved was kicking a little--I didn't realize that it was a man! And mean and vicious! I thought it must be my fault for not loving you yet quite enough--and I'd just try to love you a little bit more. But now I understand.

Lura returns to her husband, and is left with his child when her husband is killed in France after joining the army. Nevertheless, Lura feels that Jim lives on in their child.

The plot and theme fail to carry past Act II. Act III is made up of conversation about the war and the single incident of Jim's death. Despite serious flaws in the play, Treadwell continues to explore relationships between

men and women. However, in The Answer, she still arrives at the expected and conventional solution: women belong with their men, having babies to fulfill their lives.

Claws, written in 1917-18, was copyrighted March 3, 1918, under the title The Tigress. Loosely based on her experiences with Helena Modjeska, Claws is Treadwell's first play staged in New York, although not on Broadway, but in a showcase, produced by the author, herself. An off-Broadway house, the Greenwich Village Theatre, had agreed to produce the play but for some unknown reason gave up the production. The single-sheet playbill reads: "Lenox Little Theatre, 52 East 78th Street; Tuesday, December 31, 1918, at Three: Sophie Treadwell offers her play Claws." Starring in the cast as Madame Alla Xares was Sophie Treadwell.

The play takes place in a private home in a college town near New York and in the apartment of Madame Xares. Miss Trumbull (Nana), is hard at work, typing the memoirs of Madame Xares, a famous Polish actress, and in caring for Xares' daughter, Allisa, to whom Nana has been a foster mother since Allisa was born. Madame has high hopes for her only daughter but not the conventional sort for the time (Act, I, p. 24):

MADAME

. . . Do you know what I want for Lisa? I want her to be one of these new kind of girls! Independent! Strong! Smart! Not needing to have anything outside herself! There is no hope for you, Nana. There is no hope for me! But Lisa! If she can be that new kind of woman I see going around! They are making doctors and lawyers and professors and they don't care about anything but themselves and work--not men or love or anything.

They have found a way! Aren't letting themselves be used up. If we can only get Lisa by her youth so she will not be taken by some man, just because he is a man! But wait and choose! Choose, Nana! Not throw away!

But Allisa is a shallow young woman, interested only in being engaged or sewing for her wedding chest. She is in love with a young man, Zachary, who loves and is loved by Madame Xares; they go off to New York together under the excuse of Zachary's joining the acting company in which Xares performs.

Zachary discovers Madame Xares has been the mistress of her manager and leaves her. He returns to Allisa and agrees to marry her. Madame Xares returns home, finds them, and discloses the secret that both mother and daughter love the same man. Allisa leaves the room and, seconds later, there is a gunshot. She has killed herself in the same manner that her father did years before. At the curtain, Xares is left alone and growing old without love.

Each character in Claws is carefully delineated and fully founded. However, not one is quite likable or so clear a protagonist that the sympathies of the audience are caught. The verisimilitude of the characters is the element which hampers audience appreciation. The characters exist as humans exist in life, neither completely good nor evil, each positive attribute balanced by a negative one. Each of the characters in Claws has to be forgiven a personal flaw of some magnitude before one can sympathize, empathize or identify. Madame Xares is a forceful, exciting woman

but a cynical and selfish opportunist. Her daughter, Allisa, is beautiful but shallow and snobbish. Zachary is foolish and self-sacrificing. Nana whines. What is assimilated in daily living often is not tolerated in the theatre. One admires the craftsmanship of the play but does not care what happens to the people. This complaint was to be repeated by critics about Treadwell's later plays.

In summing up this period, one might say that Treadwell achieved and experienced much in the years between 1906 and 1918. She wrote fifteen plays of varying lengths, two of them produced. She edited the memoirs of a famous actress, aligned herself with the feminist movement, traveled to France as a war correspondent and built her reputation as a newspaper woman. She stood at the door of potential success in New York. At the time of her first showcase in New York she was thirty-three years old.

The intervening years revealed to her that she could not abandon the stage for journalism; but also that the position of actress was too vulnerable--not powerful enough for her. The modest successes in playwriting pointed the way. She felt the playwright was less vulnerable to rejection, more in control in the theatrical cooperative effort.

Her feminist sympathies and personal struggle for independence became more pronounced but were evidenced in more subtle and sophisticated ways. For instance, in The Limelight, her revision of The Settlement (discussed on pages 37-39), the reporter, Beth, turns in the real story

on Laura's fraud and is restored to her job. Crery is happy to marry Beth just as she is. At the end of the play, "she reaches her arm out to Crery and draws him to her," which is a complete reversal of dominant figures at the end of The Settlement.

Treadwell's liberal politics became more pronounced. The Russian Revolution of 1917 made a strong impression on her, to the extent that she championed the cause of the revolution and labelled herself a Bolshevik. A close friend put her feelings in perspective for her:

You are no more of the Bolshevik than I am. At the risk of getting you peeved, I will again tell you that basically you are an aristocrat and will never be anything else. That you are dissatisfied with the hypocrisy and puritanism of our statesmen and the political leaders of Western Europe does not constitute you a Bolshevik. . . . A true aristocrat is never an oppressor. More often he is a patriot willing to make the greatest sacrifices to the good of the masses who are somewhat lower in the social scale than he is.³⁸

This assessment of Treadwell as an aristocrat seems to have been perceptive and accurate. There is no doubt that she was a proud and exclusive person. She believed in the privileges of the talented and generally subscribed to the theory that the best people should govern. Treadwell's exclusivity was caused partially by extreme sensitivity to what people said and did and also by a general dislike and disgust for most people. A number of diary entries reveal

³⁸John (last name unknown), Letter to Sophie Treadwell, n.d., NWA, Case 6.

her disappointment and mistrust, touched by contempt for people in general. By nature, she was a solitary person who was deeply (almost totally) involved with her work and herself. This attitude marred her ability to create likeable characters for the stage although she was able to structure potentially exciting theatre.

Inevitably, this personality trait influenced her private life. Although her marriage was never dissolved, she and McGeehan maintained separate residences in New York. Perhaps this was for working purposes. Her mother lived with her for a time. There are indications that Treadwell and McGeehan lived apart from time to time although there is no evidence that this was a permanent situation. It is possible that her obsession with privacy made this dual arrangement necessary for the survival of the marriage. Letters indicate that she had a close relationship with another man at the end of this decade, Maynard Dixon, a well-known painter of the American West. At the least, it can be said that Treadwell advocated and lived an unconventional life, making and living by her own rules.

Whatever her private life, Treadwell kept it successfully separated from her public sphere. Her career seemed to accelerate with the off-Broadway showcase of Claws. The decade of the twenties would bring her greatest successes on the New York stage.

CHAPTER III

Theme and Achievement

The decade of the twenties, the most commercially successful period of Treadwell's career, began with the copyrighting of her new three-act drama, Poe, January 21, 1920. This historical play was the first version of Plumes in the Dust (produced in 1936). It depicted four important events in the life of the American writer, Edgar Allen Poe, and had been carefully researched by Treadwell. She traveled to Richmond, Virginia, the town of Poe's boyhood and talked with a local researcher there who possessed new material about Poe's personal life and she went to Washington Medical College in Baltimore, Maryland, to see the room in which Poe died. In addition, she studied the symptomology of death from delirium tremens to lend authenticity to her writing of the play's final scene.

It is apparent from reading the seven versions of this play, written between 1920 and 1936, that Treadwell tried to maintain a position of near-journalistic objectivity in the writing. She included in the original manuscript, a brief explanation of her purpose:

This is an attempt to write an actual biographical play, to realize in a play authentically one man's life.

Poe was chosen because of the richness of material in his story, and its tracing, as it does, a perfect tragic pattern, and because the character gives extraordinary scope to an emotional actor; and because the period is so playable--near enough to be vital, far enough to have become, of itself, "theatrical."

It is essentially a biography; a play that tries for integrity as well as dramatic excitement--an outer as well as inner integrity. For it tries to recreate this life as moving in the scenes and to the moods of its own time, without comment or slant from the author's time and moods. (It is hoped the audience will contribute this slant, and find its own pleasure in doing so.)

The first version of 1920, called Poe, covers twenty-three years in the writer's life. Each of the three acts contains two scenes set in various rooms in several cities. Act I, Scene 1, Richmond, 1826; Scene 2, Baltimore, 1833. Act II, Scene 1, Fordham, 1847; Scene 2, New York, 1847. Act III, Scene 1, Richmond, 1849; and Scene 2, Baltimore, 1849. While the character of Poe unifies the play, the piece probably would have worked more smoothly as cinema because of its episodic nature than as a realistic stage presentation. The play portrays four pivotal events in Poe's life: the revelation of his mother's true identity (and, consequently, his own); the literary prize which got him into editorial writing; the death of his young wife; and his rejection by a widow whom he had loved for years but who had been warned that Poe would try to marry her for her money. The final scene takes place in the hospital room when Poe dies. One of the difficulties with this panoramic play is its episodic structure. With the exception of Poe, one sees most of the characters only once. They show their effect

on Poe's life and then die or disappear.

Nevertheless, it was with this play that Treadwell demonstrated the ability to alter her sentence structure and dialogue rhythms to capture the sentence structures of the mid-nineteenth century, as well as to suggest Poe's own way of speaking. In general, Treadwell's customary dialogue was direct, realistic and non-imagistic. She seldom employed long speeches, since she felt this was not in keeping with exchanges of dialogue one heard in conversation. Treadwell stated that she had written the role of Poe specifically for actor John Barrymore.³⁹ The structure of Poe's speeches seems to suggest their having been written for an actor accustomed to delivering soliloquies of poetry. Barrymore was noted for his excellent diction and beautiful voice. This altered style of dialogue is exemplified by the following speech which occurs in Act II, scene two (p. 16), when Poe confronts an editor who has published in the newspaper the story of Poe's poverty. Poe is enraged at this invasion of his privacy. The editor asks Poe if it isn't true that he needs help:

POE

That my wife is ill, is true, and my own illness, too.

(laughs)

That has been a well-understood thing among my brethern [sic] of the press for a long time, the best evidence of which are the innumerable paragraphs of personal and literary abuse with which

³⁹ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, The New York Morning World, October 16, 1907, n.p.

I have been lately assailed. This matter, however, doesn't need any help from you. It will remedy itself.

(laughs again)

At the very first blush of a new prosperity, the gentlemen who toadied me in the old, will recollect themselves and toady me again.

(sways, recovers himself)

You will comprehend that I speak of these things only as serving in a measure--to lighten the gloom of my unhappiness by a not unpleasant sentiment of mingled pity, merriment, and contempt.

(he drinks, pours a little more into the glass . . . speaks more clearly, more rapidly)

That as the inevitable consequence of illness I have been in want of money. It would be folly for me to deny it, but that we have ever materially suffered from privation, beyond--

(sways, draws himself up)

--beyond the extent of our capacity for suffering--

(an almost imperceptible shudder goes over him)

--is not true. You will kill this cheap obscenity.

(loudly)

I am getting better! And may add, if it be any comfort to my enemies--I have little fear of getting worse. The truth is--I have a great deal to do--and I have made up my mind not to die till it is done.

Poe in its various versions⁴⁰ provided both public and private excitement for Treadwell for the next fifteen years. But before she completed the second version of Poe, Treadwell, in her persona as journalist, pursued what became the biggest story of her career and eventually scooped the international press.

On the morning of May 7, 1920, the President of Mexico, Don Venustiano Carranza, fled the revolutionists

⁴⁰The seven versions of this play bear the following titles: Poe (first, second and fourth versions), Nepenthe, Edgar Allēn Poe (fifth and sixth versions) and Plumes in the Dust.

then threatening to invade the capital, Mexico City. The party of twenty-six trains was ambushed, and Carranza escaped on horse with a handful of mounted men.⁴¹ A number of days later he was assassinated while sleeping in a hut in the mountains. Several of his generals were arrested, but the circumstances and conflicting stories surrounding his death contributed to a mystery. Sophie Treadwell was sent to Mexico as a special correspondent for the New York Tribune to investigate the circumstances of President Carranza's flight and death. She dispatched to New York lengthy, detailed stories which were run on page one of the Tribune. Because of her background and her love of Spanish culture, the Mexican officials found her sympatico and she was granted the first interview with the new president who succeeded Carranza. Altogether, the experience built her reputation as an expert on Mexico and led to several feature articles on that country. Generally, it was Treadwell's point of view in those articles that America was improperly uninterested in this close southern neighbor, a country with huge oil and mineral reserves. In this prophetic perception she was ahead of her time.

The Tribune supported her opinion by giving preferred space to her articles. Letters to the editor in that paper indicated that Treadwell did much to educate Tribune

⁴¹"Carranza's Weird Flight From His Capital," The Literary Digest (June 19, 1920), pp. 51-55.

readership concerning the importance of Mexico to the United States. For example:

. . . This exposition of the Mexican situation has been the clearest and fairest of any I have seen; I cannot but resent the habitual attitude of indifference, if not actual antagonism, toward Mexico assumed by our people generally.

Miss Treadwell's analysis, truly inspired, should check the too common tendency to criticize all things Mexican usually predicated on a crass ignorance of conditions where not prompted by a distrust of psychology which we neither understand nor try to. . . .⁴²

During her 1920 tour of duty in Mexico, Treadwell encountered a Mexican child, Ignazio Loza. She took an interest in this little boy and succeeded in bringing him to the United States. Although Treadwell never officially adopted the boy, he stayed with her for a time and she supported him financially. Eventually she set up a small trust fund for Loza.

This relationship with Loza was an aspect of Treadwell's ambivalence concerning children, which will be discussed later. During the remaining months of 1920, Treadwell worked on a revision of Claws (1918), titled Old Rose; and her play on women's suffrage, Rights.

Before she completed Rights the next event occurred with her play, Poe. Treadwell submitted the manuscript to the man for whom the starring role was written--John Barrymore. Within three weeks (a brief time as such matters go), his encouraging reply came:

⁴²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 7, NWA, Case 7.

. . . I think the scene in the cottage where his wife dies and the scene of his own death are two of the most perfect scenes I have ever read in my life. . . . This play, I think, has too many elements of beauty and power to let it go. I am much intrigued by its eerie authenticity. It is one of the things that gives the play its peculiar savor. . . . It is so much a star part that I feel I would rather like some of the other characters made more poignant, more especially the women he is in love with. . . . I think it is a beautiful play and I am very glad and proud that you had me in mind when you wrote it. . . .⁴³

Arthur Hopkins, Barrymore's producer and director, took an option on the script for the actor. A meeting between Barrymore and Treadwell was arranged, but in March, Barrymore wrote to postpone their interview since he was involved with the press of business. However, she was still hopeful because Barrymore kept the play. It was not returned to her for three years. In the meantime, Treadwell finished Rights.

The nineteenth amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing women the vote passed into law August, 1920. Her play was copyrighted less than a year later (June 20, 1921). Treadwell hoped that the timing of her play would catch the public interest, already turned to feminist concerns. However, she could interest no producer in a historical drama about Mary Wollstonecraft.

As with her biographical drama, Poe, Treadwell, in her new play, attempted to portray historical fact through her dramatization of the character of the English author and

⁴³Sophie Treadwell, Papers, UALSC Box 6, File 8.

feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97). Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Woman," written in 1792, was the first great feminist document. It met stormy opposition in England and served to make Wollstonecraft notorious. In 1792, she went to Paris to observe the progress of the French Revolution, remaining through the Reign of Terror. In Paris she formed a relationship with an American, Gilbert Imlay, who left her a year after the birth (1794) of a daughter, Fanny. In 1797, she married the author and philosopher, William Godwin. She died later that year in giving birth to a daughter, Mary, who became the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

According to Treadwell's research, Mary Wollstonecraft was handsome. She had a profusion of auburn hair and a clear skin. Her eyes were brown and beautiful, with a slight, almost imperceptible droop in one of them. The strength and sadness of her expression made her face very striking. She possessed to a rare degree the power of attracting people. She was of medium height, and of rounded figure.

Wollstonecraft was a vigorous, intense personality who fascinated Treadwell, and the play, Rights, was a forum for Treadwell's strong views concerning equality of the sexes and women's freedom. She reiterated her theme in many later plays but not as explicitly. In Mary Wollstonecraft, she found an outspoken woman of action who could be an effective mouthpiece for Treadwell's intense feelings.

In the first revised version of Rights, Mary has fled from England to Paris so that she might continue writing her political essays in freedom.⁴⁴ The time is during the French Revolution: In the play, Mary's fight for personal freedom and for mastery of a chaotic emotional situation are played against the struggle of the French revolutionaries and their emotional excesses.

Act I serves to show Mary as a liberated woman, admirable, strong, interesting and likeable; and to introduce the romantic element of play--the love affair between Mary and the American, Captain Imlay. To delineate Wollstonecraft, two women are introduced for contrast: Eliza Bishop, Mary's conventional and ineffectual sister; and Mrs. Fuseli, a traditional coquette. Mary's opinions and life-style are illuminated through conversations with these two women.

Eliza is married to an abusive man. Mary's attitude is that Eliza should be saved from the marriage. Eliza's view is more traditional:

MARY

[We can't go home.] Not while that--that brute is there to threaten you!

ELIZA

I wish you wouldn't call him names, Mary! After all, he's my husband. I'm married to him.

⁴⁴The six versions of this play bear the following titles: Rights (first and second versions), The King Passes, Mary Beaton, Love and Principle, and Rights (the final version).

MARY

Yes! You're married to him. That's just it!

ELIZA

Maybe he has changed.

MARY

He's given no sign of it! Threatening and abusive letters! Refusal to contribute to your support. . . . We can not now return home to England--while that--man is there, grossly waiting to exercise his legal rights over you!⁴⁵

Mary goes on to point out the advantages of education for a woman so that she can support herself. "Independence is a powerful tonic," she asserts.

Mrs. Fuseli, wife of one of Mary's close friends enters. She is described as an Englishwoman, elaborately over-dressed, with all the affectations, languishments and exaggerations of a society lady of her time. She provides another contrasting figure against which to measure Mary Wollstonecraft. The dialogue between Mrs. Fuseli and Eliza forms an impression against which Mary's later dialogue is played (Act I, pp. 6-8):

MRS. FUSELI

. . . We are leaving for Italy tomorrow.

MARY

(struck)
Leaving for Italy!

MRS. FUSELI

Fuseli thinks it safer for me.

⁴⁵Sophie Treadwell, Rights, TS, UALSC, Box 7, Act I, pp. 2-3.

ELIZA

I told you Mary!

MRS. FUSELI

Then, too, an artist, you know, wants only to paint and look at pictures.

MARY

An artist wants life.

MRS. FUSELI

You don't know what any man wants, dear Mary, until you are married to him. . . . this revolution business rasps him! And moi aussi! Why the town is perfectly empty! No ton [society] at all.

ELIZA

I know! In your position you must find it perfectly petrifying! Of course, we--

MRS. FUSELI

I do all mon possible for killing time but I am degoutée by it! Will you believe me! I can not even get a hairdresser.

ELIZA

Why that's monstrous!

MRS. FUSELI

Isn't it? In Paris! And I am forced to have my hair dressed by my own maid! Can you imagine anything more mortifying!

ELIZA

That's revolution for you! . . .

MRS. FUSELI

. . . It has all made me quite sick. Mr. Fuseli thinks I need a change. That's why we're going--really--

MARY

And are you to be Fuseli's sole companion?

MRS. FUSELI

I? Why, I don't think to be Fuseli's companion! I don't dream of such a thing. Fuseli is as much above me--or any woman--as God is above him. I only seek to indulge his senses and keep my beauty to please him.

MARY

Oh, it's horrible to hear women talk!

MRS. FUSELI

(angrily)

You would do well not to despise beauty.

MARY

I do not despise it. I refuse to make it my stock in trade, that's all.

After Mrs. Fuseli exits, Eliza accuses Mary of improper feelings for Fuseli. Through Mary's dialogue, Treadwell voices her recurring attitude concerning woman's mind (Act I, p. 11):

ELIZA

Fuseli's a man. And you a woman.

MARY

What's that got to do with it? I've a mind as well as a body. You don't even believe women have minds.

ELIZA

Yes I do.

MARY

Well, that they should use them!

ELIZA

I believe women have minds. And that they should use them. Of course! But not the way you do, Mary. Not--not to think.

MARY

How pray?

ELIZA

Why, for the amusement of solitude--to moderate the passions--and to learn to be contented with a small expense.

MARY

My life is just an exercise of fortitude--continually on the stretch! I am buried alive, I must find refuge in work and a strong imagination.

In scenes with Mary, Thomas Godwin, Tom Paine, and Gilbert Imlay, Treadwell's dialogue concerns the concept of liberty and how it may be achieved (Act I, pp. 30-31):

GODWIN

Revolution is itself always more pregnant with tyranny! Why there is no period more at war with the existence of liberty! In a movement of revolution when everything is in crisis, the influence even of a word is dreaded, and the consequent slavery is complete. Any attempts to scrutinize men's thoughts and punish their opinions is of all kinds of despotism the most odious--yet this attempt is peculiarly characteristic of all revolutions.

PAINE

You're against all revolutions, then?

GODWIN

Yes--for they propose to give us something for which we are not prepared, and which we can not effectually use.

MARY

The same argument is made against giving rights to women. Unfortunately no one can know and use a right until he--or she--gets it.

IMLAY

You are particularly interested in the rights of women, Mrs. Wollstonecraft?

MARY

I am preparing a book with that title--"A Vindication of the Rights of Women."

IMLAY

It's daring.

MARY

Oh, I suppose the lesser wits will affect to laugh at the very title.

GODWIN

What is to be your main argument?

MARY

Simply this--that as long as woman is not prepared to be the companion of man she will stop all his progress.

IMLAY

(gallantly)

Educate women like men and the more they resemble our sex the less power they will have over us.

MARY

That is the very first point I aim at! I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves! . . . The helpless--the degraded position of women is the presumption of my mind--for that reason, I am opposed to marriage. . . . I will not submit to an institution I wish to see abolished.

In Act II, the love affair develops between Imlay and Mary. The mob of revolutionaries comes to the apartment to threaten the two Englishwomen but is diverted by Rose, an attractive Citizeness who lives downstairs. At the end of Act II, Mary tells Eliza that she believes she is pregnant.

Act III takes place one year later. Mary has a little daughter and Imlay has been spending too much time away at Le Havre, with Citizeness Rose. He makes the traditional excuse (Act III, p. 21):

IMLAY

Oh, I am a man--and perhaps a little weak--where women are concerned.

MARY

Weak people whose passions seem the most ungovernable, restrain them with the greatest ease--when they have a sufficient motive.

IMLAY

Motive!

MARY

Principle!

IMLAY

My principles are good! This was just a caprice of the moment.

Imlay offers to marry her, to support the child; but she does not wish to hold him through obligation. Mary is left alone at the end of the play, desolate, but with her responsibility as a mother to keep her going.

Treadwell periodically worked on this play for twenty years. Her statement on women's rights was important to her but her dramatization of the statement was never successful. Treadwell's difficulties with Rights stem from several causes. When a drama serves as a forum for ideas it may become didactic; i.e., preach its message in a series of striking conversations. Dramatic action may become subordinated to the cause of the play. One of Treadwell's problems with Rights is this structural one: animated discussions on concepts of women's rights and liberty cannot take the place of dramatic action. While the dialogue concerns freedom, liberty, principles of equality, the dramatic action of the play is a love story between an idealistic, talented woman and a dashing, though weak, romantic man from America. They both posture in predictable ways. Treadwell was unable to fuse her romantic story and her discussions of liberty and equality into a single powerful drama.

Also, Treadwell's complex, ironic portrait of a woman who speaks of freedom for women but who wants to belong to a man was unsatisfying and probably unpopular. The character was able neither to submit to the man (which might have satisfied the traditionalists), nor joyfully embrace her principles, which might have satisfied feminists.

Further, it should be noted that feminist plays were not popular in the male-dominated structure of commercial producers. Even though Treadwell rewrote the play in five

versions (Rights, The King Passes, Love and Principle, By Mrs. Beaton and Rights), in an attempt to give it commercial appeal, no version of Rights ever reached the stage.

Treadwell's next newswriting venture catapulted her to the peak in her journalistic profession and brought her a world-wide reputation. It also supplied her with the material for her first Broadway play.

In 1920, Treadwell had managed to get exclusive interviews with President Obregon of Mexico--important interviews in which he had outlined for Treadwell his policy toward the United States. But Treadwell was then pursuing the more famous bandit revolutionary, Pancho Villa. After some delicate negotiation the exclusive Villa interview was arranged. Treadwell told many variations of her experience with Villa. Her diaries and letters indicate that the following account which she gave to Ishbel Ross, author of Ladies of the Press, is a fairly accurate rendering of the colorful story:

Villa had just retired with his men to a huge ranch in Chihauhau and was in an evil humor. Orders had been given to chase off every interviewer who tried to approach the place. Cameras were broken and further violence was threatened. But on her previous trip, Miss Treadwell had rolled up that priceless newspaper asset, goodwill, and so she was able to arrange an interview with the bold bad man of Mexico. He sent out some of his caballeros to bring her to his headquarters in northern Mexico. They made the trip as far as they could by train, then went the rest of the way by Ford and horseback. He received her courteously and devoted most of his time to her for the few days she was there. However, she was never allowed to forget that he was Villa the terrible. They rode over his ranch together

and she got good newspaper copy out of him. Later she patterned the leading character in her play Gringo after him.⁴⁶

Not only did she pattern Tito, the bandit chieftain in Gringo after Pancho Villa; but another rebel bandit chieftain figures in Treadwell's novel, Lusita (1931). Treadwell seemed fascinated by the romantic figure of a revolutionary-- a man who made his own rules, who took what he wanted but in the name of liberating the oppressed. Clearly she also recognized Villa's dramatic possibilities as a stage character. Her description of Villa was vivid and full of admiration:

Villa's eyes are really remarkable. They have all the intensity of deep set black eyes, but they slightly protrude and are brown and small. Protruding as they do, and burning, they give the effect of some fiery power within, concentrated and bursting to come out.

These eyes impress one first, and the sense of great bodily strength, and the voice. . . .

He says even the simple phrases of everyday politeness in a strange, resonant voice of heavy timbre, but placed high in his head. It is difficult to describe Villa's voice. It has an even, singing quality and seems to come from far off, to be detached, something like Ethel Barrymore's--only booming and powerful.⁴⁷

Gringo was written quickly, between August, 1921 and March, 1922. Treadwell had persuaded Guthrie McClintic, new producer and husband of Katherine Cornell, to read both Poe and Gringo. McClintic optioned Gringo on May 22, 1922 and

⁴⁶Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. 585.

⁴⁷Sophie Treadwell, "A Visit to Villa, A 'Bad Man' Not So Bad," New York Tribune, August 28, 1921, p. 2.

the play premiered at the Comedy Theatre, December 22, 1922.

The plot of Gringo is full of dramatic action--gun battles, abductions, seductions, machete duels--all played against the mountain vastness of northern Mexico. Chivers, an American, has been mining a gold claim for twenty years. During this time he has had several Mexican Indian wives and has produced a half-breed daughter, Bessie, to whom he is devoted. Living with him are Leonard and Myra Light who fled the United States to avoid Leonard's military tour of duty. Light fancies himself an enlightened Marxist who preaches the brotherhood of all men and the sharing of all wealth. Tito, the local bandit appears. He has sold (or rented) his wife to old man Chivers and has returned to reclaim her unless Chivers makes another payment. To raise the money and keep the Mexican woman, Concha, Chivers is forced to sell a half interest in his gold mine to young Light. Steve Trent, a mining expert, arrives to inform the group that the mine has produced a new, rich pocket of gold; Light's concern for the brotherhood of man fades as his wealth grows. Tito decides to acquire some of the gold and he abducts the Lights and Bessie, carrying them to the far mountains. When Chivers raises the money to ransom the captives, he finds that Bessie has given herself to Tito and refuses to leave him. Myra goes over the mountains with Steve Trent, leaving her husband to worry about the gold.

In Gringo, Treadwell managed to fuse her concerns for social, economic, and political issues with an exciting

story and credible dialogue suited to lively, colorful characters. Her knowledge of and sympathy for Mexicans and their problems enabled Treadwell to write realistic and apt dialogue for Mexicans speaking English. Unlike Rights, in which the speeches did not suit the characters or the action, the dialogue in Gringo realistically and believably carries the messages of the playwright. As usual, Treadwell's constant concern for the oppression and liberation of women is woven into her other concerns. In Act I, Leonard Light is teaching Paco his socialist views:

LEN

Did you ever stop to think, Paco, why men kill each other?

PACO

Because they hate!

LEN

And why do they hate?

PACO

Because of injury.

LEN

No! No! You've got to think back of that!

PACO

It is only since the Senor came that I have begun to think of thinking--and if I can not yet do it well--

LEN

Paco, men kill each other really but for one reason--for possession of something--for property!

PACO

Was the General Guitierriez so killed?

LEN

Oh, that was a row over a woman--I believe. Same thing! Possession! Property! Now if there were no property--what then? . . . The answer is as plain as day! If there were no property there would be no killing! And think Paco! Why should

one man own something and another man not! All men are brothers--all should be owned in common!

PACO

But women can not be in common! . . .⁴⁸

However, Leonard's idealism and benevolent attitude do not extend to his wife, Myra (Act I, p. 5):

MYRA

Hello! I thought you were down in the mine!

LEN

(stretching)
Why so?

MYRA

It's your job.

LEN

God! That bourgeois mind of yours, Myra! Your job! There you have all the terribleness of women to men through the ages. "It's your job!"

MYRA

(looking down mine shaft)
They've started up--I can see a light. Did you do that assay Don Juan asked you?

LEN

Assay? I've been reading if you want to know it--studying. I'm not content to let my mind go to seed up here even if you are! And this chap knows women. Listen to this.

MYRA

Don't!

LEN

Why?

MYRA

Oh, I know every word of every book we have up here! Books!

LEN

Well, it wouldn't hurt you to listen. There's such a thing as courtesy in human relations--

⁴⁸Sophie Treadwell, Gringo, TS, UALSC, Box 7, Act I, pp. 3-4.

even between husband and wife!

(Myra is busily at work)

Wait till I find that place--it's about the parasite instinct of women--

MYRA

It's in the middle of the first chapter, dear-- I marked it two years ago.

LEN

How do you know what I'm looking for?

MYRA

You always quote at me, Len--places I've already marked.

Treadwell portrayed the patronizing attitude of the white American through Chivers (Act I, p. 9):

LEN

You don't like the way I talk to these people. Well, I don't like the way you talk to them. They're not dogs! They're human beings.

CHIVERS

Yeah, but they are natives, and you've got to talk to 'em that way. We know how to handle 'em, don't we Bessie?

LEN

Natives! Well what are we?

CHIVERS

We're Americans.

BESITA

(copying his manner of saying it)

We're Americans!

LEN

(laughs)

Well, that's natives of a country where all men are created free and equal!

CHIVERS

(not so mildly)

All white men! You can be good to these people! You must be because they are like children! But you can't ever let them imagine they're equal with you, because then they won't respect you. They can't.

The play is full of prejudices: whites against Indians, Americans against Mexicans, men against women. Mexican male attitudes of superiority are revealed in the following exchange between the bandit Tito and his younger brother, Paco (Act I, p. 32):

TITO

(slapping his pockets)

Have you a cigarette?

(discovers the paper written by Chivers.

He laughs uproariously)

Hah! The old fox forgot his writing! You know what that says? It says that for the sum of 1000 pesos paid to me, today, I relinquish all husband rights to Concha in favor of Don Juan Chivers!

PACO

A thousand pesos! She isn't worth it!

TITO

Who knows that better than her husband?

PACO

Is that an American custom?

TITO

Evidently!

PACO

I wonder what price the Senora Myra would be?

TITO

Never bargain for a woman--she won't respect you--take her!

In the final scene of the play, the two women who have been abducted--Besita and Myra--choose to remain with the men they love (Act III, pp. 16-17):

BESITO

Tito! Don't leave me! I want to stay with you!

TITO

Then come!

CHIVERS

No!

TITO

She choose of her own free will--everything--
and now if she want to come with me--she can
come--if she don't--

BESITA

I want to.

CHIVERS

I was going to send you home to school--and, oh,
Bessie, he can't even marry you--you know he's
got a wife and--

TITO

No! No more--you've got my wife.
(fumbles in his pocket for the paper
written by Chivers in Act I)
See! Here it is! All written out in order!
(hands paper to Steve.)
What does it say?

CHIVERS

(ashamed)
Don't read that.
(Steve crumples paper up)

TITO

It says that he gave me 1000 pesos for my wife!
I gave him the same for his daughter.
(starts to open gold bags)
What will be correct?

CHIVERS

Don't.

TITO

(closing bag)
As you say.
(bows to them, then to Besita, indicating
the metate corn grinder)
Carry that and follow me!

In the same scene (p. 20), Myra chooses to leave
with Steve. She says to Len, "You've failed me in every-
thing! And over and over! You're never where you say you
are! I reach out to you and there is nothing there! Just
air! Always." Len asks that Myra stay with him for the
satisfaction of knowing she has done the right thing!

MYRA

Oh, I'm fed up on sentimentality. On words!
Nothing but words--that's all you've ever
given me and I want--I want--

LEN

You don't know what you want!

MYRA

Yes, I do! I want reality!
(to Steve)
Take me.

Either Guthrie McClintic or Treadwell (or both) tinkered with the ending of the play in production. The first alteration had Myra renouncing Steve's love and staying with her husband out of a sense of loyalty. This proved unsatisfactory to audiences and several critics. Treadwell then edited the final scene, ending the play with Besita and Tito's exit. This seemed a more satisfactory ending for critic Percy Hammond:

Miss Treadwell, having discovered a flaw or two in 'Gringo' at its opening performance, has touched it up a little here and there, and now its narrative is smoother and more direct. The present ending shows Bessie, the complex half-breed, as she deserts her American father and hits the trail with the deep-eyed bandit, carrying his saddle bags for him. This seems to be more satisfactory than the other terminus, an awkward, triangular pendant with the young pacifist and the mining engineer in a sudden conflict for the former's handsome wife.⁴⁹

The critical reaction to Gringo was mixed but generally positive. In his opening night review in the December 15, 1922, New York Tribune, Percy Hammond called it "an exciting

⁴⁹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Percy Hammond, "The Theaters: Lectures and the Drama," New York Tribune, December 24, 1922.

narrative:"

This is one of those "first-hand" dramas, an honest, vivid account rather than an accumulation of "hokum"; a graphic, animated story, well told, well acted and pretty well scene-painted. . . . Miss Treadwell is so intrepid and original a playwright that she is able to disregard the dubious amenities of her craft. The gorgeous bandit of her adventures, for instance, is one-eyed and wears an unbecoming sombrero. In the list of her characters there is none who is topped by the prescribed halo of theatrical "sympathy;" There isn't a "sympathetic" character in the play, a condition which may or may not be a handicap to its prosperity. They are all rather human and different. . . .

John Corbin in The New York Times, December 15, 1922, objected to the play because it wasn't satisfactory melodrama or popular entertainment:

There is no effort to make melodrama sympathetic in Sophie Treadwell's new play of American life in Mexico. . . . With all its wealth of character and atmosphere there is little . . . that commands the sort of sympathy essential to melodrama. A perfectly good plot is deployed with the necessary skill, but one remains strangely indifferent to the fate of the dramatis personae, even when absorbed in the development of their characters. A play that through two acts promises to be a sensational success perceptibly flags as popular entertainment in the concluding scenes. It remains, however, an achievement of great distinction and of greater promise on the higher levels of drama. . . .

Alexander Woollcott, writing in The Herald, December 15, 1922, called Gringo a "lively, colorful and continuously interesting play. . . . It is truly and humanly written in all its minor colloquies and it reaches a final act that is more than merely theatrically effective--that is authentic and interesting drama."

Heywood Broun, of the New York World, on December 15,

felt that "here is a piece, best defined as ironic comedy, of great promise and some extraordinarily interesting achievement which does not quite come off. . . . There is rather too much to be told in three acts."

Although a majority of the reviews were favorable, the play was not a financial success. Evidently audiences found the characters sufficiently lacking in charm to make the play unpopular at the box office. Tito, the swaggering bandit chief, is a repulsive man who pimps for his wife. Chivers is a chauvinistic, ignorant bigot with multiple standards of behavior which depend on nationality and skin color. Len's idealistic principles are transitory. Steve is likable but bland. Besita and Myra are well-drawn characters but do not serve as the focus of the play. This is not to say that we do not recognize these characters. In fact, their very lack of appeal may lie in their verisimilitude. Perhaps, as Kenneth Andrews suggests, Treadwell's play, "in spite of its authentic bits of local color, carries a shock of disillusionment."⁵⁰ As another reviewer suggested, perhaps Treadwell's Gringo was too true, like viewing a news story come to life on the stage. It informed the audience but did not compel them to empathize.

Alexander Woollocot in "The Incautious Miss Treadwell," in The Herald, December 24, recognized the unfashionable

⁵⁰Kenneth Andrews, "Broadway, Our Literary Signpost," Bookman, 56, February, 1923, p. 750.

qualities of the play. His word choices also make apparent the prejudiced attitudes of Americans, including New York audiences, toward other races.

In writing this colorful and entertaining play . . . Sophie Treadwell seems not to have taken the prevailing precautions against unpopularity. She has flaunted all sensibilities. To begin with, she has outraged all the Babbits and all those hundred percent Americans who think that it is patriotism to insist that one's country is the best under the sun instead of insisting that it shall be. Why, here this woman has a play which mixes up natives and immigrant Americans beyond the Rio Grande, and she actually seems to prefer the Mexicans. We do not pretend to regard her greasers as embodying our ideals of social conduct, but we must say we like them rather better than her gringos. But, just as the editors of the Nation and other of the more audible radicals are about to embrace her for this gesture--lo! the maladroit woman repulses them by introducing a conscientious objector. . . .

Although Treadwell objected to the decision, McClintic closed Gringo in late December, 1922. While Gringo was not a commercial success, it had received enough critical praise to make its author one whose work was worthy of consideration for future Broadway production.

In January, 1923, Treadwell turned in a slightly different direction and became involved with a Laboratory Workshop taught by Richard Boleslavsky, eminent member of the Moscow Art Theatre. Treadwell was chosen by Boleslavsky to study acting and appear in Laboratory Theatre productions but she joined the workshop for a different purpose.

After the production of Gringo Miss Treadwell decided that merely writing plays was not enough. She wanted to learn how to produce, having convinced herself that she would write plays as well as act in them. So, she spent a summer with the

Moscow Art Theatre players, absorbing from the pupils and disciples of Stanislavsky much invaluable matter concerning staging.⁵¹

Treadwell was to become one of the few playwright-managers in the American Theatre and her participation in this project was the first step of her preparation.

Associated with Boleslavsky in this endeavor was Alexander Koriansky, Russian dramatic critic. He became Treadwell's confidante, life-long friend and advisor. Koriansky persuaded her to prepare lectures on playwriting for the workshop participants. These three lectures, The Playwright as Actor, Writing A Play, and Producing a Play are available in Treadwell's Papers in The University of Arizona Library Special Collections in Tucson: Box 2, File 12. They offer insight into the playwright's conscious knowledge of her own craft.

In The Playwright As Actor she says, "I really gave up being an actor . . . because I love acting so much. I left the stage to write plays because of a hanker, an uncontrollable hanker to go deeper, perhaps soar higher in my work . . . than just acting. . . . In writing plays I wasn't limited to just the parts. . . ."

Reflecting on her own acting, she speaks of the role of Alla Xares in Claws, which she produced in New York in 1918: "I cast myself in one of my own plays. . . . My

⁵¹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, "Who's Who in the Theatre," The New York Times, April 26, 1925.

performance was just passable. . . . The part . . . was stale to me, was dead to me before I began. . . . In acting it I simply picked up the stale ends of what I had left in writing it. And so I do not think the experiment of playwright and actor, as actor, is . . . a successful one."

Treadwell had developed her own rules for playwriting which she outlined in Writing a Play. These rules, coupled with a list Treadwell kept of the characteristics of a well-made play indicate that she usually attempted to follow the formal structure of melodrama or the well-made play in her playwriting. She listed as elements of the well-made play: unity of theme, freedom from all extraneous matter, veracity of motive, contrast of characters, clearness of exposition, probability of incident, logical coherence, sufficient movement, and culminating intensity of interest. However, two of her most interesting and skillful experiments--Machinal and Saxophone--don't fall into either category of melodrama or well-made play. In her thoughts on playwriting, her bias toward the well-made play structure is apparent (she admired George Bernard Shaw's use of the well-made structure):

In a play you must know exactly where you want to go and you must work along this line rigidly. . . . A play must be completely constructed in the mind of the author before a word is written. . . . The real playwright begins . . . from a situation . . . one moment when opposed forces come together in a particularly thrilling or amusing moment, depending on whether the mood is drama or comedy.

Treadwell felt that the playwright was really engaged in "an emotional battle with an audience, a battle to reach

out--to get and hold an interest . . .":

The playwright must feel and think at the same time and this is really not so easy. . . . He must engage in his creation two forces that are more than likely inclined to destroy each other. . . . In drama . . . the best scenes are those written at one sitting. . . . When the playwright is truly in the grip of his own creative emotion and has those forces gathered up in himself, to a real center, a real intensity, a scene written in this way has a singleness of mood and a drive that is very difficult to achieve. . . . Comedy can better be done piecemeal, made up almost line by line, created at a much slower tempo.

In Producing a Play, Treadwell ranks the director just below the author in the creative hierarchy. "Next to the author, the director is, or should be, the great creative force in the theatre. What he sees in our play is really very definitely going to make it or break it." But she felt that the author should be the one to make final decisions and, thus, the playwright must be a craftsman of the theatre and not just a writer. Clearly, at this point in 1923, Treadwell was convinced that she wanted to become an entrepreneur in order to have more complete control over the final realization of the playwright's artistic vision. She thought that no one could know the soul and inner integrity of a play as well as its author and so "the author must know his play to the end and so must know the boards of the stage." The writer must conquer the many difficult crafts of the theatre so his play won't be destroyed.

In little more than a year, as a result of an experience with producer George C. Tyler, Treadwell "will not

accept the belief of most directors that they are the pivots upon which the theatres spin. . . . They ridicule the playwright and they take unwarranted liberties with his script. You see how the playwright is treated. He is the lowest creature of them all, according to the Broadway manager. And he isn't. He's the biggest. His is the dream. His the work."⁵²

During the summer she worked with Boleslavsky's Laboratory Theatre, Treadwell wrote Loney Lee, a comedy. Its final title was O Nightingale and it would be Treadwell's best comedy and one of her most successful efforts. George Tyler, in association with A. L. Erlanger (of Theatrical Syndicate infamy), had planned to produce a play for Helen Hayes, titled We Moderns. However, at production time, the manuscript was unfinished and Tyler made it known he was looking for another play for Hayes immediately. According to The New York Times, September 23, 1923, "Monday, Miss Treadwell read Mr. Tyler her play. Tuesday, Mr. Tyler telegraphed frantically all over town for Miss Treadwell to come in and sign a contract. Wednesday, Miss Treadwell signed her contract."

The play opened as Loney Lee on November 5, 1923, at the Apollo Theatre in Atlantic City. The performance was

⁵²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Percy N. Stone, "Many-Sided Sophie Treadwell Places Playwright Side First," New York Herald Tribune, April 21, 1925.

called "a huge success." The Gazette-Review headlined: "Helen Hayes in Good Play Here--Interesting Comedy at Apollo Delights Audience--Helen a 'Knockout' to the Crowd."⁵³ The play then moved to Parson's Theatre in Hartford, Connecticut. While the reviews thought the comedy "fragile" at times, the Hartford Daily Times, November 13, 1923, said: "If you enjoy light comedy, delightfully played by an excellent cast, you will enjoy Loney Lee." Despite what appeared to be a favorable response to the play and to Helen Hayes, Tyler and Erlanger decided not to open the play in New York, much to Treadwell's disgust.

In the intervening sixteen months before the April, 1925 opening of O Nightingale (new title of Loney Lee), in New York, she re-wrote Claws (1918), into its final version titled The Love Lady; re-wrote Loney Lee to its final version titled O Nightingale; and experienced her final adventure with John Barrymore in connection with Poe.

By October, 1924, Barrymore had kept a copy of Treadwell's Poe for three years. Since she had written the role of Edgar Allen Poe with Barrymore in mind, she hoped he would play it. But Barrymore announced that his wife, Michael Strange, had written a play about Poe and he would prefer to do that version, produced by Arthur Hopkins. According to Alexander Woollcott:

⁵³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Horace Blitz, Atlantic City Gazette-Review, November 6, 1923.

. . . opportunity was made for Miss Treadwell to read the Michael Strange script and see for herself if it infringed in any way on her rights. After this perusal she voiced the disconcerting opinion that the two plays were as alike as two peas and that she could not suffer this newcomer to be produced without vehement protest on her part. In reply, Mr. Barrymore said that, whereas there were in his opinion, no more resemblances than there would inevitably be between two plays written on the uncopyrighted subject of Edgar Allen Poe, neither he nor Arthur Hopkins felt free to subject the innocent Michael Strange to the annoyance and embarrassment of any such protest. If Miss Treadwell felt that way about it . . . he would prefer not to undertake the role of Poe at this time.⁵⁴

Within a week Treadwell sued Barrymore for stealing her play and for return of the script which she valued at \$2,500. One of the newspaper accounts quotes Treadwell as saying that she and her husband, W. O. McGeehan, wrote the play with Barrymore in mind.⁵⁵ Michael Strange (Mrs. Barrymore's pen name) then countersued Treadwell for libel and preventing her play, Dark Crown, from being produced, after Treadwell's charges of plagiarism. Although the lawsuits were dismissed after Barrymore returned the Poe script to Treadwell, the adverse publicity caused Guthrie McClintic to return the script of Poe which he had optioned for one thousand dollars. She submitted it to other playwrights for their opinion and other producers for their considerations,

⁵⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Alexander Woollcott, "Plays and Players in These Parts," The New York Sun, October 6, 1924.

⁵⁵Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, "Accuses Barrymore of Stealing 'Poe' Play," The New York Evening Bulletin, October 16, 1924.

but the play would wait until 1936 for its first production.

The year 1925 was artistically successful for Treadwell. At age forty, she realized her driving ambition to become a playwright-manager. Treadwell was not totally inexperienced in producing a play. She had presented Claws in 1918 in an experimental production. Claws went through two revisions--Old Rose and The Love Lady--the latter being Treadwell's second venture into producing.⁵⁶ She presented it for a limited three-day run, January 12-17, 1925, at the Heckscher Theatre on Fifth Avenue at 104th Street. Once again, she played the role of the actress, Mme. Alla Xares, who competes with her daughter for the same man.

This experiment emboldened Treadwell to undertake a Broadway production of her comedy, O Nightingale, which Tyler and Erlanger had refused to bring into New York. The idea behind O Nightingale is an old one: naive, young actress from Kansas makes good in the high school play and comes to New York to become a star. She is made even more winsome by her penchant for reciting Shakespeare, learned at her father's knee. All the characters are lovable and amusing. It's a story that warms the sentimental heart and makes the audience feel wise and indulgent.

⁵⁶The discussion of Claws in Chapter II, pp. 53-55, will serve as the analysis of The Love Lady. The versions are substantially the same.

Mme. Vera Istomina shares an artists' studio with sculptor Richard Warrington. Once a prima ballerina for the Czar, she now ekes out a living by teaching dance to aspiring young performers. Two of her students are Dot Norton, experienced chorus girl, and Appolonia Lee, earnest actress from Kansas who wants to become a star to show all the folks back home. Loney is all innocence and good intentions, reflecting the dream of America: hard work will win inevitable reward, and good conquers evil.

In Act I, p. 22, Dot is giving Loney advice on how to break into show business. Loney wants to be seen by the producer, Lawrence Gormont. Dot tells Loney that she must acquire the protection of a man because there are millions of girls in New York who want to go on the stage.

LONEY

(Quite lit up)

Well, they've got a right to go on the stage if they want to, haven't they? They're American citizens. The constitution says so! All men are created for the purpose of happiness! And that means women, too! We got the vote now. Free and equal! This Gormont is not a king! The government won't allow it. Anyway, he's going to listen to me. I got a right to my chance, and I'm going to get it!

DOT

(Experienced in handling these cases)

Sure you are. You just get in with someone who knows him. Maybe he don't know him, but he knows some other fellow who does. Maybe somebody who owes him money or wants something out of him, anyway!

LONEY

And what of talent? What of character? It's character that wins! And talent! And faith? Faith is what does it! Why, it moves mountains! Sometimes something sweeps over me and I feel I could do anything. Conquer the world! I feel it now! Just watch me dance now--that old lady said I couldn't--

well, just you watch me.

(She begins to dance fast and well . . .)
 You see what faith does? I used to think I
 couldn't dance and I couldn't. Now I think I
 can! And look at me! And I'm going to get my
 chance too. I'm not afraid of anybody! Just
 let 'em come on! Let 'em all come on!

The Marquis de Severac has come to the studio to look at Warrington's sculpture. He observes Loney dancing and eventually takes an interest in her. Coincidentally, he is the former lover of Mme. Istomina who abandoned her when she began thinking of marriage. He is a pleasant, harmless old roué who assumes Loney will understand why he is buying her frocks and taking her to dinner. Loney runs out of money; Warrington has been looking for a woman to clean the studio and mend his clothes: viola! The Marquis persuades Warrington to let her stay while Warrington takes a yacht cruise with the Marquis' stepdaughter.

The Marquis arranges a dinner at which Loney is to recite Shakespeare for Lawrence Gormont. She is preparing for the dinner party when Warrington returns unexpectedly. He is curious (Act II, p. 37):

WARRINGTON

Miss Lee! . . . What's your mission in life?

LONEY

Oh to be great! To be a great actress and play Juliet! That's my mission. That's what I've been preparing for all my life. I've learned all the great roles, but mostly I've been preparing for Juliet. That's what I'm going to do tonight. Juliet!

WARRINGTON

But when you came here you said you wanted to do housework.

LONEY

Well I did, to earn my keep.
 (smiling a little deprecatingly)
 I was broke, but I hadn't given up my art!

WARRINGTON

Oh, you hadn't given up your art?

LONEY

Oh no! A person should never give up! Just look at my case. That day I came here. I'd pretty near given up. I suppose you think that's weak, but I had, . . . then, that very day, I got me this place, and I got me the Marquis!

When the moment comes for Loney to audition for the crass producer, she is unable to speak. After Gormont and Flora leave (Act III: 28), Loney begins to cry:

LONEY

It's just that I expected it would be so - so distinguished! I'd planned to be so - distinguished myself . . .

MARQUIS

. . . He will help you.

LONEY

No he won't! He didn't like me! He didn't see anything in me at all! I failed - that's all. I've had my chance. My one big chance! And I've failed.

But within a few lines, her indomitable spirit reasserts itself, and the Marquis is forced to deal honestly with her:

LONEY

Tomorrow! Tomorrow, maybe I can get a job at something else for a while, until I can take more lessons and learn more! Learn everything.

(rise)

And get bigger and more fascinating! And then--when I'm like that--and really know how to do as good as anyone--or better, maybe! Then I won't have to go to Mr. Gormont! He'll have to come to me! And I'll say.

(making a large gesture)

Ah. Mr. Gormont! What can I do for you today? That's what I'll do! I'll work! And take more lessons--and--

MARQUIS

Listen, cherie!

(After a moment's indecision)

Listen to me! You are never going to make a success in this road you have taken for yourself! Lessons or no lessons - you are never going to make a success! Never!

LONEY

(Standing quite still, presses her hand to her heart)

Please don't say that! It--it kills my heart!

MARQUIS

But is is you who will kill your heart if you would try to go on! You cannot! It is not for you-- you haven't what you call skin enough. To make a success in this road you must have the skin of a rhinoceros! Have you? No! No!

LONEY

I'll grow one then.

MARQUIS

And you would spoil yourself! You would be like all these others! . . . Is there no one to love you-- back at your home--to take you in his arms and--

LONEY

There's my father! He used to take me in his arms all the time, when I was little and say one Philomel, to stop the hurt.

MARQUIS

To stop the hurt!

LONEY

Philomel with melody--sing in our sweet lullaby-- lulla--lulla--lullaby.⁵⁷ Oh, I wish my father was here now! What's to become of me? What am I going to do?

The question of what she's going to do is answered by Warrington. Loney gets her wish--a surrogate father in Warrington's person; and the audience gets a satisfying

⁵⁷This is the lullaby sung to Titania by her fairy train in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream.

solution to the comedy. Loney is alone in the studio. She has changed into her "ample, childish, old-fashioned night-gown." She is reciting to herself between little sobs (Act III, p. 33):

LONEY

Oh Gentle Romeo, if thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully: Or, if thou think'st I am too quickly won, I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay. So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world. In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond; And therefore thou mayst think my beviour light; But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true Than those that have more cunning to be strange. I should have been more strange, I must confess. But that thou over-heard'st, ere I was here, My true love's passion; therefore, pardon me; And not impute this yielding to light love, Which the dark night hath so discovered.

(She gets into bed--puts out the light.

Warrington comes out from behind the screen, tries to get out silently . . . she hears him)

WARRINGTON

(going to her)

It's all right! It's me! It's Warrington. Please! all right! It's nobody.

LONEY

(gasping in fright)

Oh - - - - oh!

WARRINGTON

I didn't mean to frighten you! I just came back to look out for you! I was walking around down there and when I saw the others go, and you were here along with-- [the Marquis] well, I thought I better come! And then I couldn't get out! And then you were so-- so lonely--I forgot and--oh please! Please! You'll make yourself sick!

(She is trembling-- unable to speak)

You're trembling! You'll get pneumonia! Please!

(Suddenly picks her up--starts to couch with her)

Don't tremble like that! Please! Please!

(Suddenly)

Listen! You're all right, Loney! Listen!

(He sits with her in his arms and begins to say the lines of Philomel)
 Philomel with Melody--never harm, nor spell, nor charm--come with our lovely lady nigh--and so good night--

(He doesn't remember the lines, but does the best he can)

(The effect is right. She quiets--lifts one hand to his shoulder. He leans down and kisses her.)

CURTAIN

Treadwell skillfully combines many reliable appeals in O Nightingale, invoking Romeo-and-Juliet-magic with a happy ending by actually quoting the original Shakespearean verse. The young artists, Lee and Warrington, are perfectly matched by their earnestness and mediocrity. The old former lovers, Vera Istomina and the Marquis, provide a sophisticated counter-part to the young couple, contrasting cynicism with the innocence of first love. Dot, chorus-girl-with-a-heart-of-gold, learns a thing or two from Loney's naive goodness. Love wins in the end, guaranteeing happy critic and audience in 1925.

The critic for the Daily News captured the spirit of the play in his review:

She was just a naive little sapling from the tall sticks of Kansas, who thought she could "make good" on the New York stage by quoting Shakespeare to the hard-boiled managers.

Such were the beginnings of O Nightingale which opened last night at the 49th Street theatre.

"But you gotta get a man first if you wanna succeed," counsels her more experienced pal. "It's men that give you the boost, because it's men who rule the roost."

And innocently taking this sage bit of Broadway philosophy to heart, the female "Merton of the Movies" from the cornbelt "acquires" a man.

A Noble Rake

He's only half a man, though--a kindly and wicked by turns decadent old French nobleman, the Marquis de Senerac, a rake who can still sow a few wild oats when he wants to.

"And you are an artist?" inquires the marquis. "I'm an actress," she replies naively, "but they call it their art."

It all takes place in the bare studio of an impoverished English sculptor, whom the old marquis visits for a commission and an invitation to a yachting party.

The marquis contrives to stay behind and further the stage aspirations of little Appolonia Lee by buying her dresses and things and admiring the back of her neck.

Sprightly Lines

Such in its essence is the trifling and highly diverting little plot, with its nightgowned heroine untarnished to the final curtain, that Sophie Treadwell brought to a keenly appreciative audience last night. . . .

O Nightingale is truly a spring comedy, as its author says it is, but that's no reason why it shouldn't last through the summer.⁵⁸

The New York Times said "Sophie Treadwell has come close to writing an excellent comedy in O Nightingale. As it is, she has turned out a well-written play that is almost consistently entertaining, and which provides several unusual and interesting characters." The reviewer comments that Treadwell's own performance in the play as Vera Istomina is quite good.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Burns Mantle, "'The Sapphire Ring' Good Drama; 'O Nightingale' is Sprightly," The Daily News, April 16, 1925, p. 24.

⁵⁹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, "Author Plays a Part in 'O Nightingale': New Comedy . . . Is Entertaining and Well Written," The New York Times, April 16, 1925.

In the April 16 Column, "The New Plays," in the New York World, the reviewer contrasts Loney with Bessie, the heroine from Gringo:

Several years ago, Sophie Treadwell wrote a play about a wild little girl who pursued a one-eyed Mexican Bad Man through three acts of a sincere and stirring melodrama. She called it Gringo and it was not a conspicuous success, probably because a public which loves to sentimentalize over young girlhood, hates to watch it chase one-eyed Bad Men. As if by way of reparation, Miss Treadwell has made her present heroine unsophisticated beyond all belief so that it needs all the humor and dexterity of this extremely skillful writer to banish the suspicion that the girl from Springfield is really not quite bright. She gave the character . . . a certain poetic quality which permeates the entire play and the infantile intensity of Martha Bryan Allen gives it a touch of solemn absurdity which in itself is ingratiating. It is probable that the heroine of O Nightingale will capture the imagination of her audience where her rowdy young predecessor failed. But in the midst of her prettiest speeches and most earnest evidences of charm, your mind turns back wistfully to the dogged, dirty-faced little baggage who trotted contentedly after her Mexican and was thoroughly deplorable and utterly alive.

In an undated clipping from the New York American, Treadwell commented on the origin of two characters from the play:

Even a theatrical manager interested in my play O Nightingale asked me how I conceived the character of Madame Vera Istomina, former premiere danseuse to the Czar, a part which I myself act in the play. The answer is simple. That character is myself as I will be at sixty, just as the part of Loney Lee . . . is myself as I was when I was not quite sixteen.

The old premiere danseuse, with her days of glory behind her, now a penniless figure with a fierce pride, represents a point of view which is very much my own . . .

Despite a set of favorable critical reviews, O Nightingale ran only four weeks, closing Saturday, May 11, after

having been moved from the Forty-ninth Street theatre to the Astor. It was scheduled to move again to the Ambassador Theatre, Monday, May 13, but according to Variety, business of under \$5,000 a week hardly warranted another shift. One admires Treadwell's determination to exercise more control over the final artistic product by authoring, producing, and performing in O Nightingale, but perhaps the dissipation of her energies, by being responsible for so many different components of the endeavor, shortened the potential run of the play.

Treadwell worked on three plays during the latter half of 1925: Many Mansions, a modern-dress version of Poe; You Can't Have Everything, a perplexing play which she called a light comedy of modern New York life; and Inheritance, the first version of Lone Valley.

Treadwell copyrighted You Can't Have Everything, August 17, 1925. Possibly she recognized the profound difficulties with this manuscript, for she never put it through her process of revision. In this play, Treadwell's intention seems to have been to write a slick, sophisticated, drawing-room comedy discussing contemporary marital problems in what she hoped was a deft and entertaining manner, in the style of Rachel Crothers - He and She, 1911, or Nice People, 1921. You Can't Have Everything presents the story of three couples: the Reades and the Blythes who are married; and Tom Forrest and Neith Dorne, who interact variously with the other two couples. Zelda Reade and Louise Blythe decide to go to Honduras

for quickie divorces: Zelda, because she is bored and feels neglected by her advertising-executive husband; Louise, because her columnist-husband is an alcoholic and a burden. Zelda gets her divorce but Louise does not. However, Everett Blythe, thinking he is free, stops drinking, loses weight, begins writing again. When Zelda and Louise return from Honduras, Nick Reade and Everett Blythe, who have moved in together, try to dodge their former spouses. It becomes obvious that Zelda only wanted a divorce so that she and her former husband could have sex illicitly, for the excitement of living in sin. It is apparent also that Louise is involved in such a dependency-relationship with Everett that she is strangling him. Neith, the beautiful unmarried commercial artist, loves Nick. Nick wants Zelda, Tom and Everett want Neith. After scenes showing these characters in various combinations, Zelda hears she is really not divorced because a revolution in Honduras has cancelled all paperwork. She and Nick settle in but pretend they are only lovers. Tom goes to Neith's country home with her for an affair and Everett, discovering he has been abandoned by Neith, runs back to Louise for security. They each settle for their particular arrangement because, after all, "You can't have everything."

The perplexing element about You Can't Have Everything is that it decidedly is not a light comedy. If one chooses to interpret this play as comedy, it is a dark one, a sardonic, bitter look at the quality of love and the state of marriage.

The dialogue exchanges are cruel or insensitive. The situations are bizarre or neurotic. Those who are supposed to love each other exhibit hostility instead. The opening scene between Nick the Complacent and Zelda the Petulant illustrates their relationship. Nick is working at his desk. Zelda is reading and chain smoking. Suddenly she hurls her book across the room (Act I, p. 3):

NICK
Why, Zelda, what is it?

ZELDA
Nothing.

NICK
What do you want to hit me for?

ZELDA
Nothing.

NICK
There must be something.

ZELDA
No--no--no, nothing--just bored.

Zelda tells Nick that she has invited a few people in after the theatre. He is not pleased (Act. I, pp. 5-6):

NICK
(Not interested, starts to close his typewriter)
I might as well give up.

ZELDA
Oh, Nick, don't be sulky.

NICK
I'm not sulky but . . . I would like to be able to finish my work now and then.

ZELDA
But it's almost twelve! You've been working steadily since dinner and all day at the office.

NICK

But I cannot really work in the office as I do here--think up things, plan, get ideas, dope out stuff.

ZELDA

Why not?

NICK

There is quiet here--sometimes--

(Reaching up to her)

and you, Zelda, always. I can always work better with you around.

ZELDA

Around!

Nick calls Neith, a beautiful artist who lives nearby. Zelda asks that she not be invited to the party and discovers she's been asked for another reason. Nick's attitude toward Zelda is superior and insensitive (Act I, p. 7-10):

ZELDA

Don't ask her, Nick. . . .

NICK

(In the phone)

Hello, Neith? Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, that's right. Have you a few minutes to spare? . . . All right.

(Hangs up, turns to Zelda)

She's coming right over.

ZELDA

Nick, I asked you. . . .

NICK

I didn't ask her for the party. I asked her for some work.

ZELDA

What work?

NICK

I told you that new advertising contract we had. Sunshine Mush? That's the campaign I've been doping out tonight--trying to. I'm going to get Neith to do six posters, "The Six Ages of Man." We'll put them out--

ZELDA

Oh, Nick!

NICK

What is it now?

ZELDA

I asked you to give me a chance at the next work like that--

NICK

Zelda, don't be ridiculous.

ZELDA

(Angrily)

Ridiculous! Why, I was a better artist at school than she ever dared to be! . . .

NICK

Perhaps. But she kept on and you gave it up.

ZELDA

(Angrily)

And why did I give it up? Why?

NICK

(Complacently, giving her a pat)

To marry me.

ZELDA

To marry you: Yes, that was part of it, but not all. I gave it up because I realized that, good as I was, good as I was, you hear, and that was better than most, better than Neith, anyway--I couldn't be ever really great, the real thing, and so I decided one day that rather than be a second-rate artist I would have a first-rate life, and marrying you was part of that. I thought I would live beautifully if I couldn't really paint that way. But now--

NICK

(A little uneasily)

Now?

ZELDA

I told you the other day that I wanted to work again. I asked you to give me a chance, just a chance, and now you--

NICK

(Impatiently)

But you couldn't do the stuff Neith does.

ZELDA

Why not? I'm a much better artist.

NICK

Maybe, but you haven't got what she has.

ZELDA

What? Her stuff is all cheap, all copy, all alike, all--

NICK

Maybe, but you know it takes a terrific something to change your entire personality, and it's that something she gets into her pictures.

ZELDA

You mean fake?

NICK

No. I mean will--vitality and will.

ZELDA

(Struck after a moment)

Oh, so you think I have no will? . . . Well, you're wrong. It took more will for me to quit than for Neith to go to Paris and dye her hair. It takes more will to renounce, you know, than to go ahead. I had enough will to quit one life's work rather than let it just fizzle, and I may have will enough to quit another for the same reason.

This is the point at which Zelda decides to divorce Nick. The preceding dialogue is not the parrying banter of light domestic comedy. It is difficult to see how actors on stage could deliver lines like these so that they sound like light comedy. Treadwell had several trusted friends and advisors who read the first drafts of her plays and offered advice. Evidently their reaction was sufficiently negative to turn her attention from this script to another: Inheritance.

Inheritance explores the theme of women's liberation through the character of a prostitute who seeks to change her life. Treadwell had the highest of hopes for this play

because she worked it through ten versions in an attempt to score a commercial success. Inheritance was copyrighted January 25, 1926, but went through several revisions before its first production, Bound, at the Lakewood Theatre in Skowhegan, Maine. The producer, Crosby Gaige, had taken an option on the play, and Bound was being put through its out-of-town tryout routine with Howard Lindsay as director.

The Skowhegan Morning Sentinel of June 21, 1927, printed a good summary of the plot as it was in that version:

It's the old story of the woman who tries to come back. Wearing by her life that has damaged her about as badly as a woman can be damaged, but still young and not altogether hopeless, the unexpected legacy of a little place in the country comes as a Godsend to her and she goes there to recuperate physically, mentally and morally, desiring only to be left alone. She intends to mind her own business, which shall be strictly honest, and she hopes other people will do the same, but of course they don't.

The worst obstacle she encounters is the hide-bound piety and hypocrisy of an isolated, bigoted rural community. . . . Her great hope and final salvation comes to her at the hands of a young man [Joe] whose life has been more miserable than hers, but clean. He is eager to sacrifice everything for her, his ambition, his position in the community, such as it is--everything. She resists until she realizes through the enmity of the neighbors that, morally crippled as she is, she may still be the mate he needs.⁶⁰

The review went on to signal some of the problems (or virtues) of the drama:

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Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, "'Bound Shows Human Nature," Skowhegan Morning Sentinel, June 21, 1927.

The play is not of the "Old Homestead" type and has few of the elements that are supposed to be sure winners. It's rather a cynical attack on some of the most cherished of the old Puritan ideals and a rebellion against the self-sufficiency of some well established social conventions. It doesn't 'play to the gallery' and so flatters no vanity of the holier-than-thou's. It will please radicals more than conservatives, although not at all blatant nor crusading. It simply tells a sober story and lets the moral fall where it will. Those who like something more than whipped cream in their theatrical diet will like it, but many will be rasped too badly to be much pleased.⁶¹

Bound then went through several more versions, metamorphosing into Wild Honey, and opened October 17, 1927, at Ford's Theatre in Baltimore, Maryland. Crosby Gaige was still producing but now Treadwell was directing with Robert Edmond Jones as designer. The curious and inappropriate addition was music which accompanied the production. An orchestra, under the direction of John Magiz, played the following selections:

1. Opening--"Romantic"--Overture
 - "Salut D'amour" (Louis Greeting).... Keter-Behn
 - "Le Secret"--Intermezzo..... E. Elgar
 - "Love Sends a Little Gift of
Roses (Song)..... J. Openshaw
 - "A Kiss in the Dark"--Waltz..... V. Herbert
2. Exit--"Just Once Again"--March..... Donaldson
and Ash

In this version, May is a girl from a cabaret trying to start a new life; and Joe becomes Henry, an idealistic farmhand with college ambitions who marries her in spite of everything. Neither Treadwell nor Robert Edmond Jones fared well in Variety, October 26, 1927:

⁶¹Ibid.

Crosby Gaige must have sunk all of a dollar and a half into this production. It's a bad investment despite Miss Treadwell's singularly uninteresting work played in one set with just a few changes of props to mark the passing of the acts.

There is little else during the dull and drab fable of the young peasant of the cactus country and a more-sinned-against-than-sinning cutie from the honky tonks of the big cities. It gets us nowhere until along about 10:40, when the girl from the bright lights strips down to a princess slip and tells us right out loud that she spent the night with the young cactus jumper. It's too late, however, and it's not enough. The heroine of the "Garden of Eden" went her one better, and look what happened.

Miss Treadwell's heroine inherits the dismal set from a deceased aunt and comes out to God's country to begin a new life. What she begins is a halting and unsatisfactory amour with a boy from a neighboring ranch. Augustin Duncan, in the villainous makeup of a slave driver, busts [sic] in every so often to cast lustful glances at the ex-cabaret girl. It seems he had carried on with her late auntie but he doesn't get far with May. After starting to elope with a hosiery salesman and being recalled by the hero saying his now-lay-me down stage center, she is in his arms for the final curtain. . . .

This version seems to have made a disastrous impression on all the critics, and Wild Honey was withdrawn.

However, Treadwell was eager to begin her next project, the play that would be the masterpiece of her career:

Machinal. In April and May, 1927, Treadwell sat in on the murder trial of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray, although she wasn't officially covering the trial as a news assignment. Because Treadwell was a newspaper woman, she was curious about the events in the trial of two lovers who murdered the woman's husband, a story that consumed hundreds of columns of newsprint. Briefly, Ruth Snyder, after attempting unsuccessfully to murder her husband on seven prior occasions,

persuaded her lover, Judd Gray, to be her accomplice in the eighth attempt. In March, 1927, they bludgeoned the sleeping Albert Snyder, an art editor for a boating magazine, with a window sashweight. It was not a cleverly-planned murder, and they were put on trial by mid-April. Both were convicted May 9, and they were executed by electrocution in January, 1928. This act of murder was to have been "a step toward the larger freedom, a fuller enjoyment of life. . . ."⁶² The paradox of the brutal act juxtaposed with the rationale that this was a step toward freedom piqued Treadwell's curiosity: what crushing set of circumstances could compel the woman to murder her husband to attain freedom?

After the Gray-Snyder trial, Treadwell was involved with the out-of-town tryouts for Wild Honey. She probably worked with the concept and outline for Machinal in the summer of 1927, and commenced dictating the dialogue after the unsuccessful tryout of Wild Honey in October.⁶³ She finished the bulk of the play after the Gray-Snyder executions in January, 1928. Machinal was copyrighted April 21, 1928.

⁶²Edmund Wilson, "Judd Gray and Mrs. Snyder," The American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 163.

⁶³Probably as a result of her newspaper experience, Treadwell developed the habit of dictating the dialogue of her plays from a detailed outline of incidents. Characteristically, she would spend several weeks perfecting the outline of a play before she began dictating dialogue to a stenographer.

Evidently, Treadwell was able to interest director-producer Arthur Hopkins almost immediately in her play. They worked on it together in the summer of 1928, and, after one month's rehearsal, Machinal premiered at the Plymouth Theatre September 7, 1928, to critical acclaim.

Treadwell had evidenced hints in the past of her ability to give unconventional dramatic treatment to a play. Her one-acts, Eye of the Beholder and To Him Who Waits (discussed in Chapter II, pp. 48-51), were departures from the well-made play structure and realistic dialogue she usually adopted in her writing. But it is in Machinal that Treadwell is finally able to blend her concerns for women's rights, and socio-economic inequities; her journalistic knowledge of an interesting, topical story well told; and her artistic experience in combining the right dramatic style with those elements of theme and plot. The right dramatic style was expressionism, a mode which flourished in Germany in 1910-20 and was introduced in America by the Theatre Guild's 1922 production of Georg Kaiser's From Morn To Midnight (1916); Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (1922) and The Great God Brown (1926); Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine (1923) and John Howard Lawson's Processional (1925), among others. Treadwell's use of this presentational style not only is the perfect choice for her story of murder and adultery, but it transforms those tabloid clichés into sensational drama which suggests a universality of concerns. "Machinal combines

cogency and palpability of theme with sympathetic insight into the mainsprings of the woman's motives."⁶⁴

In his introduction to the published version of Machinal, John Gassner summed up what many of the critics thought of the play and placed it in historical perspective:

One of the most unusual plays of the twenties, Machinal, appeared on the stage in the very last year of that decade [Machinal was produced in 1928], almost as if it had been deliberately produced to sum up trends in the theatre of that period. In Machinal were to be found formal experimentalism, recognition of the machine age and concern with individual struggles viewed against a general background of modern life in America, and a vague protest against the blight of materialism. Formally, it belonged to the main theatrical adventure of the twenties, the telegraphic imaginative style . . . known as expressionism. . . . Sophie Treadwell's use of this subjective style of distortion and depersonalization was, however, quite unique. In her play, expressionism, although applied to a sensational murder, was subdued and was given a muted musical function, being used as a sort of obligato to the heroine's failure. Her first numb state of mind, her awakening to love, her desperation, and her defeat found a theatrical translation in the automatic movement, sound, and speech of the play. . . .

In this play, Miss Treadwell was able to convey a rare compassion for her character as an individual and yet make her story representative of many lives; and this in spite of the unusual murder of the climax. In the process, besides, Machinal managed to project the mechanical essence of a world in which private frustrations and heartbreaks can seem only half real in spite of their acuteness. If the author had poured the same story into the mold of an ordinary three-act realistic play, it would have been

⁶⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Kelcey Allen, "Zita Johann Gets Ovation in Machinal," Women's Wear Daily, September 10, 1928.

quite unremarkable. . . .⁶⁵

Something Treadwell saw in Ruth Snyder's sordid act of violence and subsequent trial transcended the act itself and triggered her deep sympathy for the position of women in the world. Once again it aroused her resentment of what she perceived to be woman's essential helplessness in the power structure of society. Submission is the key to Helen Jones' agony in Machinal. She has been forced to submit to her mother, to society's expectation that she must marry, to her husband's ardor, to the birth of an unwanted child, to society's condemnation for having taken a lover, and, finally, to the prison barber who shaves the crown of her head before she is electrocuted:⁶⁶

YOUNG WOMAN

No! No! Don't touch me! I will not be submitted--
this indignity! No! I will not be submitted!--
Leave me alone! Oh my God am I never to be let
alone! Always to have to submit--to submit! No more--
not now--I'm going to die--I won't submit! Not now!

BARBER

(Finishing cutting a patch from her hair)
You'll submit my lady. Right to the end. You'll
submit! There, and a neat job too.

JAILOR

Very neat.

MATRON

Very neat.

⁶⁵Sophie Treadwell, "Machinal," Twenty-Five Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre; Early Series, ed. John Gassner (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1949), p. 494.

⁶⁶Yvonne B. Shafer, "The Liberated Woman in American Plays of the Past," Players, Vol. 49, no. 3-4 (Spring 1974), p. 97.

YOUNG WOMAN

(Her calm shattered)

Father, Father! Why was I born?

PRIEST

I came forth from the Father and have come into
the world--I leave the world and go into the
Father.

YOUNG WOMAN

(Weeping)

Submit! Submit! Is nothing mine? The hair on my
head! The very hair on my head. . . . Am I never
to be let alone! Never to have peace! When I'm
dead, won't I have peace?⁶⁷

Once again, one of Treadwell's women finds that she needs something more than the world is prepared to grant her; she yearns to find herself freedom/joy/peace, but is thwarted in her search by a society which expects passivity, sweet compliance, submission.

In his column, "Offstage and On," New York Herald Tribune, September 20, 1928, critic Arthur Ruhl acknowledged Treadwell's attempt to make a special plea, not for murderesses, but for all women:

There is a curious quality in Sophie Treadwell's fine play, "Machinal," a kind of desperate intensity at once wistful, defiant, and fiercely in earnest--which, for want of a better word, we might call "feminine". . . . There is no doubt of her blazing sympathy and indignation.

The whole thing tingles and vibrates like a fine wine, plucked as it nears the breaking point. And there is something more than sympathy and indignation for the individual victim, something of a broader

⁶⁷Treadwell, Machinal, p. 527. The dialogue of Machinal used in this study is from the published version in the Gassner collection cited above. In this version Treadwell reinstated sections of dialogue which had been cut from the acting version.

revolt against the inescapable facts of what is still largely a man's world.

There are bits, here and there, which it seemed to us only a woman could have written; lines which have an uncanny touch of feminine authenticity. . . ."

In three pages of notes explaining the original version of Machinal (before Hopkins), Treadwell mentions her fascination with the effects of radio, and its implications for the vast American audience. She was acutely aware of this first electronic mass medium and she felt her Machinal audience would have been "trained to radio, and so accustomed to the drama of the lovely unaided voice." Consequently, she wanted snatches of music, perhaps in imitation of the sound of a radio dial being spun in search of a station. She felt the monologues, "all the voice of the woman coming from out a dark stage" (a disembodied voice as out of a radio), should be "connecting channels of action." She speculated on whether or not these monologues might not approach closer to "the scatteredness, unexpectedness of the relaxed meditating mind," than the usual "demand that the thought move through them in an approximately straight line" (as in realistic drama). In these notes outlining her intentions, Treadwell never mentions the genre of expressionism as a starting-point, although she uses the word "expression" once. Obviously, she had a sense of the elements which make up the expressionistic genre; but it seems that she was approaching what she called the style of Machinal through a sort of inductive process: combining a set of particulars (radio cacaphony, repetition, city sounds,

stream of consciousness, the concept of a spiritual journey, explosion of emotion), and arriving at a dramatic style of production. For the characters of the play (other than the Young Woman), she directed that they

are to be played as "personifications" of what they represent (genuinely, type actors giving type performances). Their make up (dress and facial) should be in the "expression" of the kind of people they represent, and once found should remain fixed (so as to become clear and established in the imagination of the audience). Gestures should not be quite automatic but simple and repetitious (as the make up--constantly declarative of what the characters are).⁶⁷

There has been some speculation concerning just how much of the final production of Machinal was Treadwell's idea and how much was provided by Arthur Hopkins and Robert Edmond Jones. These notes make clear that her style of writing and original intention not only dictated the scheme for Hopkins' production but the set design and striking lighting effects as well. She wanted a unit set with suggestions of a door and windows; and only essential pieces of furniture and props--things "full of character." The revolutionary departure in setting and lighting attributed to Robert Edmond Jones was actually Treadwell's original intention, although he is to be credited for his artistic interpretation and final execution of those technical elements. Because of the unity created by her single artistic vision, she was more responsible for the

⁶⁷Sophie Treadwell, Machinal (Introduction to First Version), TS, UALSC, Box 10, n.p.

total masterpiece of Machinal than most playwrights are in other commercial productions. Her experience in all the component elements of theatre served her well in the creation of Machinal.

Certainly the contribution of both Hopkins and Jones was considerable. Of all the directors and designers with whom she worked, Treadwell preferred these two and developed life-long close friendships with them. In an article, "The Hopkins Manner," Treadwell indicated his style as a director and alluded to the way in which he helped her as a playwright:

. . . He chooses a play that he himself wants; and having chosen it, he enters into it, explores it, questions it, looks at it, listens to it. If it is not the way he thinks it should be, he tells the playwright so--and waits until it is. . . .

In other words, Mr. Hopkins does not put a script into rehearsal until he himself knows this script and feels it is right . . . He does not expect values that are not there to suddenly appear. He knows that production is no alchemy, that it cannot turn palpable weakness into strength, or make real dullness glitter. . . . He uses his knowledge . . . when it will do the most good--on the written script before it is put into rehearsal. . . .

The ancient battle of conflicting forces in the theatre--the battle as to who is pre-eminent, actor, playwright, scene designer, or director, is here settled without even a contest. And the answer is "the director." The answer is "Arthur Hopkins."⁶⁸

Certainly Hopkins helped Treadwell tighten and focus the monologues of the Young Woman. A comparison of portions

⁶⁸Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA. Sophie Treadwell, "The Hopkins Manner," The Stage World, November 25, 1928.

of these speeches, before and after Hopkins, probably shows his influence. In the original version (Episode I, p. 7):

. . . Now I'm going to marry Mr. J. He's asked me so I suppose I am. I wish he hadn't--then I wouldn't have to. Now I suppose I'll have to--I'd be crazy if I didn't. He says he wants to--so--but I don't want to. Why does he want me, I wonder, when I don't want him? He says it's my hands. He says he loves my hands. He says he loves my hands--I don't like his. Mine are tapering. His are fat. They're awful fat. I don't like them to touch me. He likes to touch me--that's love--he loves me. . . .

In the published version (Episode One, p. 501):

Marry me--wants to marry me--George H. Jones--George H. Jones and Company--Mrs. George H. Jones--Mrs. George H. Jones. Dear Madame--marry--do you take this man to be your wedded husband--I do--to love honor and to love--kisses--no--I can't--George H. Jones--How would you like to marry me--What do you say--why Mr. Jones I--let me look at your little hands--you have such pretty little hands--let me hold your pretty little hands--George H. Jones--Fat hands--flabby hands--don't touch me--please--fat hands are never weary-- . . .

As expressed in her notes accompanying the first typescript version, it was Treadwell's goal somehow to combine uncompromised dramatic artistry with commercial viability and perhaps touch women especially by this play:

The hope is (by accentuation, by distortion, etc.), to create a stage production that will have 'style', and at the same time, by the story's own innate drama, by the tremendous interest and curiosity already aroused in it by the actual and similar story of Ruth Snyder, by the directness of its telling, by the variety and quickchangingness of its scenes, and the excitement of its sounds--(and perhaps by the quickening of still secret places in the consciousnesses of the audience, especially of women)--to create a genuine box office attraction.

Machinal assaults the senses of the audience with an array of stimuli. The play is inextricably interwoven with

music and sound. After the advent of sound in films Treadwell would refer to these sounds and the music accompanying her later play, For Saxophone, as soundtracks. In Episode One of the published version of Machinal, page 497, Treadwell specifies that before the curtain rises, the audience hears the sounds of office machines going and they accompany the Young Woman's thoughts after the scene is blacked out. The pace of this scene is rapid, whipped along by the clacking of typewriter keys and the chanting of telegraphic dialogue. The speed suggests the pace of modern life.

ADDING CLERK

(In the monotonous voice of his monotonous thoughts; at his adding machine)
2490, 28, 76, 123, 36842, 1 1/4, 37, 804, 23 1/2, 982

FILING CLERK

(In the same way--at his filing desk)
Accounts - A. Bonds - B. Contracts - C. Data -
D. Earnings - E.

STENOGRAPHER

(In the same way)
Dear Sir--in re--your letter--recent date--will state--

TELEPHONE GIRL

Hello--Hello--George H. Jones Company good morning--hello--hello--George H. Jones Company good morning--hello.

FILING CLERK

Market - M. Notes - N. Output - O. Profits - P. . . .

The boss, George H. Jones, has offered marriage to the Young Woman and she ends the scene with a monologue in which the audience hears her concerns: should she marry Mr. Jones, even though his touch repulses her; the fear of losing her job and being unable to pay the bills; the crush of the

subways and the pace of life--both of which are too much for her.

Machine sounds segue into radio sounds, and the Young Woman is seen eating dinner with her mother with whom she has no more connection than she has with the office characters. They are obsessed with work routine, her mother with food and its dregs--garbage (Episode Two, p. 501):

YOUNG WOMAN
Ma--I want to talk to you.

MOTHER
Aren't you eating a potato?

YOUNG WOMAN
No.

MOTHER
Why not?

YOUNG WOMAN
I don't want one.

MOTHER
That's no reason. Here! Take one.

YOUNG WOMAN
I don't want it.

MOTHER
Potatoes go with stew--here!

YOUNG WOMAN
Ma, I don't want it!

MOTHER
Want it! Take it!

YOUNG WOMAN
But I--oh, all right.
(Take it--then)
Ma, I want to ask you something.

MOTHER
Eat your potato.

YOUNG WOMAN

Ma, there's something I want to ask you--something important.

MOTHER

Is it mealy?

YOUNG WOMAN

S'all right. Ma--tell me.

MOTHER

Three pounds for a quarter.

YOUNG WOMAN

Ma--tell me--

(Buzzer)

MOTHER

(Her dull voice brightening)
There's the garbage.

JANITOR'S VOICE

(Offstage)
Garbage.

MOTHER

(Pleased--busy)
All right.
(Gets garbage can--puts it out. Young woman walks up and down.)
What's the matter now?

YOUNG WOMAN

Nothing.

MOTHER

That jumping up from the table every night the garbage is collected! You act like you're crazy.

YOUNG WOMAN

Ma, do all women--

MOTHER

I suppose you think you're too nice for anything so common! Well, let me tell you, my lady, that it's a very important part of life.

YOUNG WOMAN

I know, but if you--Ma--

MOTHER

If it weren't for garbage cans where would we be?

The sounds of the radio playing a sentimental song about mother fade into a jazz orchestra which plays behind Episode Three--Honeymoon. Appalled by the thought of consumating the marriage she didn't want, the Young Woman cries for her mother, and then, "Somebody, somebody--." The jazz band segues into the sound of steel riveting, a striking choice for the sound to accompany the hospital scene--Episode Four. She now has a child she didn't want but no one explained to her how not to have one. She thinks aloud again in a speech in which "the single emotional word [or short phrase] replaces the involved conceptual sentence"⁶⁹ and in which punctuation--the dash--is one of the crucial tools of visualization. The words and dashes together indicate the use of the pause as a means of expression and their combination "form a kind of linguistic chiaroscuro."⁷⁰ This significant means of expression shows the kinship between expressionist dialogue and music, which can create a theatre of multiple emotional levels inaccessible to conceptual speech. (Episode Four, p. 508):

Let me alone--let me alone--let me alone--I've
submitted enough . . .--tired--too tired--dead--
no matter--nothing matters--dead--stairs--long
stairs--all dead going up--going up to be in heaven--
golden stairs--all children coming down--coming
down to be born--dead going up--children coming
down--going up--coming down--going up--coming down--
stop . . .

⁶⁹Walter H. Sobel, ed., An Anthology of German Expressionist Drama (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1963), xviii.

⁷⁰Ibid., xix.

(Seated at opposite ends of the divan. They are both reading papers--to themselves.)

HUSBAND

Record production.

YOUNG WOMAN

Girl turns on gas.

HUSBAND

Sale hits a million.

YOUNG WOMAN

Woman leaves all for love--

HUSBAND

Market trend steady--

YOUNG WOMAN

Young wife disappears--

The Young Woman is reminded of her lover toward the end of the scene. The words "stones--small stones--precious stones--millstones" echo in the darkness, and she kills her husband, the violence unseen by the audience as in a Greek tragedy.

In Episode Eight the automatic actions and relentless routine of society return. She is in the hands of the law. The ritual of the trial is accentuated by sequential repetition and telegraphic exchanges, accompanied by the clicking of telegraph instruments (p. 528):

LAWYER FOR DEFENSE

I object! I object to the introduction of this evidence at this time as irrelevant, immaterial, illegal, biased, prejudicial, and--

JUDGE

Objection overruled.

LAWYER FOR DEFENSE

Exception.

JUDGE

Exception noted. Proceed.

LAWYER FOR PROSECUTION

I wish to read the evidence to the jury at this time.

JUDGE

Proceed.

LAWYER FOR DEFENSE

I object.

JUDGE

Objection overruled.

LAWYER FOR DEFENSE

Exception.

JUDGE

Noted.

"The words and movements of these people except the Young Woman are routine--mechanical--each is going through the . . . motions of his own game." (Episode Eight:519) Treadwell even satirizes the press and makes the reporters part of the clacking machine slowly drawing in the Young Woman (p. 525):

1st REPORTER

(Writing)

Under the heavy artillery fire of the State's attorney's brilliant cross-questioning, the accused woman's defense was badly riddled. Pale and trembling she--

2nd REPORTER

(Writing)

Undaunted by the Prosecution's machine-gun attack, the defendant was able to maintain her position of innocence in the face of rapid-fire questioning that threatened, but never seriously menaced her defense. Flushed but calm she--

When an affidavit from her lover is read testifying that they had "intimate relations," the Young Woman confesses three times: "I did it! I did it! I did it!" Three reporters end the ritual of the trial with a trio of lines:

"Murderess confesses. Paramour brings confession. I did it! Woman cries!"⁷² The stage directions specify that "there is a great burst of speed from the telegraphic instruments. They keep up a constant accompaniment to the Woman's moans."⁷³

In Episode Nine the final elements in the aural accompaniment supply irony as they play out the tragedy: a priest chanting prayers, a negro singing spirituals, the whir of an airplane flying, keys rattling. The Young Woman calls for answers, seeks comfort; and the priest impersonally intones selections from his prayerbook (p. 527):

YOUNG WOMAN

Father, Father! Why was I born?

PRIEST

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world--I leave the world and go into the Father.

YOUNG WOMAN

. . . Is nothing mine? . . . The very hair on my head--

PRIEST

Praise God.

YOUNG WOMAN

. . . When I'm dead won't I have peace?

PRIEST

Ye shall indeed drink of my cup.

YOUNG WOMAN

Won't I have peace tomorrow?

PRIEST

I shall raise him up at the last day.

⁷² Ibid., p. 526.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 526.

YOUNG WOMAN

Tomorrow! Father! Where shall I be tomorrow?

PRIEST

Behold the hour cometh. Yea, is now come. Ye shall be scattered every man to his own.

On the now-black stage, the voices of the reporters come out of the darkness with the question and answer that encompass the theme of the play (Episode Nine, p. 529):

1st REPORTER

Suppose the machine shouldn't work!

2nd REPORTER

It'll work!--It always works.

The machine, the routine, the society--the process: it always works. With her final cry, "Somebody," the cry which has been her motif of yearning throughout the play, the Young Woman's voice is cut off and the priest's voice drones on in the darkness.

Not indicated in this published version is the description of Episode Ten--In The Dark--found in the acting version of Machinal at the Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City. Lines are spoken in darkness until a light comes at the end. The acting version specifies: "Overhead lights come up on cyclorama first faint blue--then red--then pink--then amber--they are thrown up full--pause--then curtain." The critics' attempts to describe this clear contribution of Robert Edmond Jones indicate its effectiveness was unquestionable. "The morbid, drooping climax is heightened by a complicated curtain of colored lights supposed

to represent . . . the migration of a woman's soul . . ." ⁷⁴

"At the end of the play, just after a terrifying moment of complete darkness--the electrocution is heard, not seen--the frame [of the stage] has been taken away, the rose lights on the burlap [sic] cyclorama remain for a long minute and the curtain quickly falls." ⁷⁵ "Somebody, somebody!" she screams at the end. Only a pulsating flood of terrifying crimson light, like a still flame, makes reply." ⁷⁶ Joseph Wood Krutch praised "the gradual emergence of a blood red glow out of the darkness in which the play ends . . ." as "one of the most unobtrusively effective bits of stage techniques seen here in a long time." ⁷⁷ Percy Hutchinson interpreted it as "an empty stage with the light of morning creeping up on the hangings. . . ." ⁷⁸ Stark Young was profoundly effected by Jones' "genius of light" which left "only the

⁷⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Pierre de Rohan, "'Machinal' Ugly But Great Play," New York American, September 8, 1928.

⁷⁵Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, S. Jay Kaufman, "Hopkins Does 'Machinal' Magnificently," New York Telegraph, September 8, 1928.

⁷⁶Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, J. Brooks Atkinson, "Against the City Clatter," The New York Times, September 16, 1928.

⁷⁷Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Joseph Wood Krutch, "Behaviorism and Drama," The Nation, September 26, 1928.

⁷⁸Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Percy Hutchinson, "As the Theatre Practices the Art of Homicides," The New York Times, n.d.

vacant stage, no objects, no people, no events, only the light growing brighter, flame colors at the bottom rising into blue, the moment of death for the tormented being in the electric chair."⁷⁹

Treadwell finally had achieved a commercial and critical success. Although Machinal ran for only ninety-one performances on Broadway, it was subsequently performed all over the world bringing its author substantial royalties. The initial critical notices were full of acclaim and secured her reputation as a master craftswoman of drama. Percy Hammond acknowledged the successful departure from conventional drama:

Unlike most efforts to liberate the stage from its old-fashioned harness, "Machinal" cuts the straps with considerable facility and releases an interesting study and well-told tale. . . . The speech of the play is simple utterance of human beings; the action is directed by Mr. Hopkins with a canny view to illusion, and the lights and settings . . . are just bizarre enough to further the purposes of one of the best of the unusual dramas.⁸⁰

Brooks Atkinson called Machinal "the tragedy of one who lacks strength":

From the sordid mess of a brutal murder the author, actors and producer . . . have with great skill managed to retrieve a frail and sombre beauty of character. . . . But Sophie Treadwell has in no sense capitalized on a sensational murder trial in her

⁷⁹ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Stark Young, "Joy on the Mountains," New Republic, October 31, 1928, p. 299.

⁸⁰ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, September 8, 1928.

strangely-moving, shadowy drama. Rather she has written a tragedy of submission; she has held an individual character against the hard surface of a mechanical age. . . . Subdued, monotonous, episodic, occasionally eccentric in style, 'Machinal' is fraught with a beauty unfamiliar to the stage.⁸¹

In his review cited above, Pierre de Rohan felt Treadwell had achieved at least a critical success:

Sophie Treadwell has done for the theater what Theodore Dreiser did for literature. She has created a complete picture of life's bitterness and essential meanness, painted with the small, oft-repeated strokes of the realist, yet achieving in perspective the sweep and swing of expressionism. In short, she has written, in "Machinal," a great play, but (or perhaps therefore) one which is not likely to find a large audience.

Gilbert Gabriel praised Treadwell's mastery of genre and evoked the name of Eugene O'Neill:

You forget to be annoyed by the allegorical naming of the characters as Mr. A. and Miss Q., a Husband, a Man, Richard Roe. The breath of a warm, plain, pitifully real existence gradually fills these types and travesties, and, once filled, they remain buoyant and unpuncturable and alive. That, I think, is Miss Treadwell's finest feat. Few have achieved it with this by now benighted form of playmaking. . . . She has written it with an extreme simplicity which generates a power all its own. The episode in the lover's room is told as tenderly as really. It has needed something more than common craftsmanship to turn a Graphic titbit [sic] into an O'Neill splendor.⁸²

⁸¹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," The New York Times, September 8, 1928.

⁸²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Last Night's First Night," The New York Sun, September 8, 1928.

John Anderson called the play a "magnificent tragedy" and was obviously deeply affected by it:

Here are superlatives for the superlative--a tragedy of sullen splendor. . . . It is superb and unbearable and harrowing in a way that leaves you bereft of any immediate comparison, and leaves you, too, for that matter, a limp and tear-stained wreck.

There is a fine fluency in the writing of the scenes. Miss Treadwell has stripped them down to bare bones of drama, and flung them across the play in a swift stacatto [sic] movement which gives it huge power and terrific momentum. . . . 83

Every artist involved in the production received praise from the critics: Arthur Hopkins, Robert Edmond Jones, Frank Harling, who composed the incidental music; Zita Johann, the Young Woman; George Stillwell, the Husband; and Clark Gable, the Man--her lover, in his first major stage role prior to Hollywood stardom.

In the final analysis, Treadwell wrote a timely, exciting play which satisfied the critics, the audience, and herself. To satisfy herself, she wrote an experimental, unusual and powerful drama which documented how the world treated a woman who sought the same kind of freedom of choice accorded men, a woman unable to adapt to that sexist world. She dramatized a social problem happening to an individual, but she was able to make that individual represent a larger group. She blended her own style of didacticism with the emotional punch of melodrama so that the audience experienced

⁸³ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, John Anderson, "Snyder Case Suggested in a Magnificent Tragedy," New York Evening Journal, September 8, 1928.

thrills, tears and horror: a catharsis.

Machinal made Treadwell's reputation as an important American playwright, and provided income the rest of her life, in spite of the fact that it closed on Broadway after ninety-one performances. She didn't achieve a long run, but Treadwell was already thinking about her next play.

Treadwell called her three-act Ladies Leave "a modern comedy of morals." Copyrighted in June, 1929, it was optioned by producer-director Charles Hopkins in August and opened October 1, to polite but subdued critical response. After the style and impact of Machinal, the critics were not prepared for Treadwell's "comedy of morals" which was actually another of her jaundiced looks at American men and American marriage. Although Machinal and Ladies Leave stand at opposite poles, they share basic ideas and background. Both young married women are bored, restless, unfulfilled in their marriages. Zizi Powers, the young wife in Ladies Leave, is married to a successful magazine editor. Ruth Snyder's husband was art editor of a motorboating magazine. Zizi decides to live and love freely after meeting and hearing a lecture by a Viennese psychologist, Dr. Arpad Jeffer, who is touring the United States to publicize his book, Love and Lovers. Dr. Jeffer feels the natural expression of love has been stifled in American life. A man should have "stability,

sentimentality, love of family, gaiety and passion, luxury and sensuality. . . ."84

POWERS

But what kind of provider is he? Ah, that's where the American has it over all the rest of the world.

JEFFER

I was talking of essentials.

POWERS

Essentials! What's more essential than--

Zizi takes a lover, Philip Havens, her husband's slick, superficial assistant editor. But the subject of infidelity is handled with a lighter touch in Ladies Leave. Instead of killing her husband, as the wife did in Machinal, Zizi treats him with affection, even grows to love him more. She confesses her affair to Burnham Powers, her husband, whose characteristic reaction is to think only of himself and feel he's been made a fool. Zizi decides neither her husband nor her lover are adequate and leaves for Austria to follow Dr. Jeffer who promises a more aware, sensitive approach to the male-female relationship.

Burnham's attitude toward his wife is one that Treadwell had articulated before. Here, Burnham invites someone to stay in their home without consulting his wife (Act I, p. 36):

ZIZI

How you had the nerve to make me ask a strange woman to come here and stay . . . in my home!

⁸⁴Sophie Treadwell, Ladies Leave, TS, UALSC, Box 12, Act I, p. 8.

POWERS

You've stayed in her home.

ZIZI

You made me! I wanted to stay in a hotel. You made me--and now you have the nerve-- . . .

POWERS

Her husband asked me as a special favor, and you know he's--

ZIZI

He had the nerve! The complacency of you both! The stupidity of all of you! Ask the wife! Invite the wife! Meet the wife! The wives I've met! The wives I've sat on the club porch with! The wives I've sat through dinner with! And now one for a house guest . . .

POWERS

. . . This is just a little flying visit to see the winter styles. You two can go shopping together and--

ZIZI

Shopping! Why are you all possessed with the insane idea that all women like to hang around in stores? They don't. I don't. Just to go inside a shop gives me a headache.

When Zizi announces she is going to Vienna, Philip consoles himself with having gotten the title for a novel out of the experience. Burnham consoles himself by considering his creature comforts (Act III, p. 32):

POWERS

(In very good spirits)
Well, Phil, a man must eat. Will you join me?

PHILIP

I'm not so hungry somehow.

POWERS

Come in anyway. I hate eating alone. That's going to be one of the worst features for me--eating alone.

In Ladies Leave, Treadwell tries again to articulate, in a dramatic vehicle, her point of view concerning

relationships between men and women. It seems reasonable that she would attempt to treat the subject in a comedy after having successfully dramatized it in a tragedy. Perhaps her criticism of the American man was a bit too emphatic for the audiences. Certainly it was not lighthearted.

Stephen Rathbun, critic for The New York Sun, questioned the believability of Zizi's feminism:

Mrs. Zizi Powers is a feminist to the extent of insisting upon living her own life. She refuses to be submerged by her husband, the official editor of a popular magazine for women, and she refuses to be fettered by her lover, who is the real editor of the magazine. But it is hardly feministic of the frankly honest Zizi to be interested only in men. She lives in a man-centered world, thus her newly acquired freedom is but an illusion. And that is why this drawing room comedy is an unimportant play and is just the fleeting diversion of an idle evening.

Perhaps it is Zizi's unexplained freedom from economic worries, quite apart from her husband's large income, that keeps her a frivolous love-seeking wastrel. Threatened with a divorce by her pride-wounded husband, she faces the future calmly, without a care in the world. Thus is life made easy for pretty business of the stage. Yes, the small town girl that L. Burnham Powers married must have been an heiress.⁸⁵

Alison Smith saw the connection between Machinal and Ladies Leave and the emerging feminist in both:

To her compassionate and sombre portrait of the woman in 'Machinal' Sophie Treadwell added last night a flippant cartoon of another wife whose dilemma she chose to regard as broadly ludicrous. It was as if the by-products of that former desperate and stabbing tragedy had moved her to the after-thought that such a wife, like everything else, may have a ridiculous aspect. The result

⁸⁵ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Stephen Rathbun, "'Ladies Leave' Opens," The New York Sun, October 2, 1929.

is a sort of comic strip of a marital triangle with the pictures bearing a faint tinge of the 1890's, or about the time when the world was buzzing with excitement over the daring of the Woman Who Did.

For the courage of the sprightly heroine of "Ladies Leave" takes the form of asserting declarations of independence first heralded from the mouths of the bloomer girl. . . .

All of which unfolds with the blurred dates that mark the yellowed and brittle pages of the first emancipated woman's magazines. But if the theme itself is too time worn to be thrilling, Miss Treadwell has developed it with good-natured shrewdness and with occasional flashes of spontaneous wit.⁸⁶

Treadwell had now explored the possibilities of the feminine free spirit, or some form of the independent woman, in at least seven plays and found little producer-interest or audience sympathy for either the women or their stories. Machinal illuminated a woman's struggle but the woman lost. Perhaps, as a consequence, Treadwell turned in a new direction in both method and subject matter for her next play--the story of a prizefighter.

After Ladies Leave closed in October, 1929, Treadwell became ill again with her familiar old malady, a collapse of nerves accompanied by breathing difficulties. She was experiencing a great deal of pain of undefined origin, and entered the Sanatorium Gutenbrunn in Vienna where she stayed for approximately one month.

Upon her return she completed her second collaboration

⁸⁶ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Alison Smith, "Other New Play," The World, October 2, 1929.

with her husband, William McGeehan. She had rewritten Poe a number of times, so that eventually one could no longer discern McGeehan's contribution; however, his style and vernacular are apparent in Million Dollar Gate, copyrighted May 21, 1930.

A championship fight has been contracted for Dion O'Donnell by his manager and cronies, all of whom are corrupt. It has been arranged by Torturici (the "Torch"), Pearlstein (the "Fox"), and William (Whispering) Waller that O'Donnell will lose the fight by their hiring a crooked referee when O'Donnell refuses to take the dive. O'Donnell is being misled by Nora Kelly, a whore with a heart of steel. But a clever newspaperwoman, Linda Hills, traps this collection of crooks, reveals the truth to O'Donnell and he gets rid of them--but not Linda Hills. They end the play together.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the subject-matter and theme were suggested by McGeehan's work as sports editor for the Herald Tribune. The characters speak a language more like McGeehan than Treadwell. The gang is discussing betting on the fight:⁸⁷

MULLINS

You don't think he's got a chance?

PEARLSTEIN

(Impatiently)

A chance! A chance! They all got a chance!
What's a chance?

⁸⁷ Sophie Treadwell, Million Dollar Gate, TS, UALSC, Box 12, Act I, p. 5.

MULLINS

(Laughs)

It ain't a sure thing--sure. Any betting?

PEARLSTEIN

No--just feelers, odds of three to one. But no big sugar up. The boys are waiting till they know something. Maybe till the last day.

MULLINS

You taking any of it?

PEARLSTEIN

I am if--

(Taking out paper and tapping it significantly)

And the crowd will be right with me if I give the word. . . . You want some, Senator?

MULLINS

(Sententiously)

I never gamble.

PEARLSTEIN

I never gamble either. I wouldn't bet today was Friday till I saw the calendar.

MULLINS

And you always have a calendar.

PEARLSTEIN

(Laughs)

This won't be a gamble! It will be an investment.

MULLINS

Don't you birds go too far. . . .

PEARLSTEIN

If there's a good referee--there won't be no squawk, will there?

Treadwell's contribution is certainly the smooth, skillful plotting and idea to screen film interludes in the two intermissions showing the championship boxing match on which the play pivots--the million dollar gate. In her preface to the play she describes this innovative concept of an interact, perhaps a forerunner to multimedia productions:

The suggestion is made to offer the play with two motion picture interludes. But as these come in the interacts, the play can perfectly well be played without them. The author's object in suggesting these two interludes is first,--to create a continuous entertainment (motion picture audiences have continuous entertainment, and like it); and second,--to combine the entertainment of the stage and screen in one show. (In this show the play is the thing; the screen merely carries through the action between the acts, and is so arranged that any of the audience that wishes can go out in the interacts without losing any of the stage play.) Interact (between I and II) Motion pictures of the two fighters in training in their respective camps. It is suggested that this picture show only action within a roped ring--DION and KILBANE working out, their sparring partners, advisers, and such friends as come up to greet them, etc. (In this way, the theatre audience maintains its own character as an audience--here, seated before the ring at a training camp; and in the next interact--seated before the ring of the fight. Also, production costs are kept within a practical figure). Interact (between II and III) Motion picture of the fight--four rounds in the ring from the moment the announcer climbs in until the raising of the champion's hand.⁸⁸

In this play with its many colorful, well-drawn characters and with its action-packed story, Treadwell had a potential script for the film industry. However, in the 1930 s the script would make the rounds of MGM, Paramount, RKO, 20th-Century, Columbia, Warner Brothers and Universal, among others, and be refused.

The difficulty with Million Dollar Gate lies in Dion O'Donnell, the protagonist. Although he is a believable character, clearly drawn with an admirable objectivity, he is

⁸⁸Ibid.

not a likeable character. Perhaps Treadwell, out of her element with this tale of the boxing world, failed to understand what her audience's attitude toward boxers would be. American audiences tend to view boxing as something of a blood sport and boxers as latter-day gladiators. They become wildly partisan for one fighter or the other. No one seems to be neutral at a boxing match. It would be necessary for Treadwell's audience to be able to identify with Dion O'Donnell's struggle, or his hopes and fears, or admire his integrity: indeed, these are necessary components for any connection between audience and protagonist. But O'Donnell signs the crooked agreement, even after he senses his manager's criminal intent. He expresses no ambition to be other than a boxer, although he admits he doesn't want to be in the dirty fight game the rest of his life. He takes up golf as a mark of the socially polished man. He reads Jack London. Treadwell's character is true-to-life: he compromises when necessary; he tries to do the best he can. But this is not the stuff of dramatic heroes. Treadwell, who badly wanted another commercial success, still was unwilling or unable to construct a colorful, romantic protagonist to go with the vivid secondary characters. Million Dollar Gate was never produced.

In the latter half of 1931, Treadwell completed

another three-act comedy, The Island, dramatizing an unusual and somewhat unpalatable story.⁸⁹ Felton Rine, age forty, has bought an island to make a home for himself and his new wife. But his intended, Laura Poole, fails to show up at the wedding. Stricken, he retreats to the island and succumbs to the physical temptations of seventeen-year-old Loretta Anderson, the daughter of a local couple who take care of the cottages. Her forty-year-old mother, Mrs. Anderson, longs for wider horizons and develops an interest in Olaf, a twenty-two-year-old, nearly illiterate Swedish masseur. Also on the island is Reed Eliot, a former advertising executive who has given up his career to sail the seas and write his novel. Laura Poole appears, having decided to marry Rine because she's a woman raised to a certain social class but without the money to support herself in style. She falls in love with Reed Eliot, but still plans to marry Rine, when Loretta announces she is pregnant and must marry him herself. Rine spurns her, and she throws herself off the cliff into the sea where she is saved by Eliot. Rine, dazzled by an attempted suicide over himself, discovers he wants Loretta's honest love; Eliot decides to gamble with Laura; and Laura's mother takes the adventure-hungry Mrs. Anderson off to Japan. Olaf, Laura and Eliot sail away on Eliot's schooner.

Several elements seem to make this so-called comedy unfunny and unpleasant. Added to the disparity of ages among

⁸⁹Sophie Treadwell, The Island, TS, UALSC, Box 14.

the lovers, and a touch of religious fanaticism (Olaf thinks women are a temptation of the devil), is the fact that the audience doesn't like the characters, and the characters don't like each other. Treadwell's descriptions reveal the uninteresting, unsympathetic natures of her characters:

"Loretta is a rather pretty girl of seventeen, cheaply dressed in home-made summer clothes that show an attempt at style.

She has great dark eyes and a pale skin. All her movements are lifeless. She seems a quiet listless girl, uninterested in anything going on about her. . . ." "Rine is a man about forty or forty-five, beginning to be a little fat and a little bald. He has a domineering manner that comes partly from being always very rich, very secure; but mostly from being--underneath--insecure. In spite of the glamor of great wealth, there is something defeated about him. . . ."

"Eliot is about twenty-eight, intelligent, healthy, absolutely self-contained. He has a bantering way of speaking. . . ."

"Olaf . . . is of commoner stuff. He is a boy about twenty-two, blond, with a big strong body, and a dull ingenuous face. He is a Swede . . . selfconscious, ill at ease." "Anderson is about fifty-five. An insignificant honest-looking man. . . ."

Laura is described as an exquisite, graceful girl who takes her own devastating charm for granted; but she is simply a collector of men whose curiosity is aroused when Eliot ignores her. This is not a group of characters with which an audience wants to identify.

The Island had a brief tryout in 1932 in Treadwell's town of residence, Newtown, Connecticut with a professional pre-Broadway cast. Treadwell intended to produce this play and Lone Valley herself, as she declares in a July 29, 1932, letter to one of her agents, Adrienne Morrison:

I am finally taking the plunge, finally definitely starting in on the production of my plays. I am giving The Island a tryout here . . . and, after that, I hope to have a cast and put Lone Valley into rehearsal for New York. And I shall follow with others, in time, as scripts and conditions work out.

This step hasn't come quickly and easily to me, as you know. I have held off until the last minute really, held down by all sorts of misgivings and inner wearinesses. I am taking it now because . . . it seems the only thing left for me to do--August here, another theatrical season starting, and not one of my plays in any one's plans--even vaguely. Whether it will make a way out or merely bog me down further remains for us to see. . . .⁹⁰

Treadwell tried out The Island at Edmond Town Hall, August 11-12. No director is mentioned in the program, and it seems reasonable to assume that it was directed by the author. She had a strong cast, including Philip Ober as Eliot and Natalie Schafer as Laura. Prominent New York producers attended the showcase: Crosby Gaige, Harry Moses, producer of Grand Hotel; Raymond Sovey, designer. Critical reaction, though limited, was devastating:

Little can be said on the side of justification for either the play, the production or the talent.

⁹⁰ Sophie Treadwell, Letter to Adrienne Morrison, July 29, 1932. UALSC, Box 14.

Optimists might have discovered three bright lines, but to this dull mind nothing happened to relieve the deepening seance.

One . . . was embarrassed by waves of stilted sound [dialogue] and uncontagious fury.

It is the story of seven people on an island, featuring three women who literally beg their respective boy friends "Please take me." One is actually taken and the comfort inherent in this gesture is that, for the moment, two persons are removed from the stage. . . .⁹¹

Treadwell never tried to produce this play on Broadway. Although its unusual subject matter indicates the author's ability to foresee future interests and her ready use of avant-garde dramatic situations, she was unsuccessful in combining all elements into a strong play.

Treadwell's 1931 diary is not complete. She comments that both she and McGeehan are very ill--she with nerves and he with a heart condition--and she can't work. However, during this year, she toured Europe and the Near East; attended the London production of Machinal (retitled The Life Machine); finished her novel of Mexican life, Lusita; and copyrighted October 29 a new three-act drama, Andrew Wells' Lady (perhaps the play begun in August). That a year filled with such activity and literary achievement should be designated as a time in which she couldn't work is consistent with Treadwell's compulsive nature where work was concerned. She felt empty, lost, useless, tense when she wasn't working on a piece of

⁹¹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Ethel Beckwith, "'The Island' New Treadwell Play Receives Tryout," August 12, 1932.

writing and to her the most meaningful, exciting writing was playwriting. A notation in one of her diaries is her observation on the meaning of this activity: "Work is the greatest thing on earth, greater than love, greater than death. . . . Work is the product of time and energy--and time is the brother of death. Death is the reward for having lived."

In March, April, and May 1931, Treadwell restlessly toured parts of the continent in a chauffeured automobile visiting France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Roumania, Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. By July she was in London for the opening of Machinal which was privately produced and directed by Henry Oscar and opened at the small Arts Theater Club, July 15, 1931. When Machinal moved to the Garrick Theatre, it was retitled The Life Machine. The Lord Chamberlain would not issue a license for public presentation until certain dialogue and incidents were deleted. Presumably, these deletions were made, because the license was issued but then withdrawn. Curiously, the critics were morally revolted by much of the play, particularly the Honeymoon scene: "frank enough to border on the unpleasant;"⁹² or "We are not even given credit for being able to imagine how the heroine will loathe her honeymoon, but are shown as

⁹²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, "Execution In a Play - Grim Sounds Heard 'Off,'" The London Daily Mail, July 16, 1931.

much of the nuptials as public decency allows--possibly rather more."⁹³ Another reviewer had an equally intense reaction:

It is a horrible thing; a fantasia played upon raw nerves; a jumble of expressionism and so-called realism that cancels what seems to be its purpose and leaves a sense of gratuitous ghastliness behind.

All this would be true of The Life Machine. . . . It has been understandably banned by the Censor. . . .

Some of the scenes are revolting. The wedding night with the vulgar husband is brutal in its intimacies. The hospital scene, with hammering going on next door, a spectacle of torture. . . .⁹⁴

The unidentified reviewer for the Daily Sketch (July 16, 1931) felt that realism was carried too far. "The first-night scene in the honeymoon bedroom between the exultant husband and the unwilling wife may be true to life and may be excellent drama, but it is so intimate as to be embarrassing, and the same may be said of the bedroom scene with her lover."

Probably several negative elements combined to work against critical and audience reaction to The Life Machine. First, Treadwell for whatever reason, used her less-compressed version of the play and not the version Hopkins produced in New York. The monologues in Treadwell's version are more poetic but much longer. Second, the production did not have

⁹³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, Edith Shackleton, "Speak-Easy Scene On The Stage--Grim Expressionistic Play from America," Evening Standard, July 16, 1931.

⁹⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA, S.R.L., "Revolting Scenes in the Life Machine," The Morning Post, July 16, 1931.

the talents of Arthur Hopkins and Robert Edmond Jones although descriptions of the London production indicate that Treadwell was able to convey the spirit of the Hopkins production to Henry Oscar. For instance, the final lighting effect seems to have been the same in both productions. Third, a certain moral attitude which condemned bedroom scenes and unpleasant subject matter seemed to operate against the play. Fourth, a kind of British chauvinism or Americanophobic attitude was evidenced by the critics with phrases like "the story if a typically American one," or ". . . those glimpses of American life which would convince us that Columbus should have been strangled at birth."⁹⁵ Despite this negative London reaction to Machinal, it went on to production in Paris and Moscow. It was revived in London in 1939, has experienced numerous revivals in this country; and has been translated into French, Russian, German, Arabic, Hungarian and the Scandinavian languages.

After Treadwell's return from London, she began a new play in August, probably Andrew Wells' Lady. Designated simply "a play in three acts," Andrew Wells' Lady treats the affairs of the rich and prestigious in New York. The title is ironic since Wells is married to a would-be lady and also supports a "lady" as his mistress. The scene as described by

⁹⁵Shackleton, Evening Standard, n.p.

the author is "a library in a rich man's house; a formal styled room showing the unrelaxed hand of the interior decorator."⁹⁶

The plot is developed using some elements and characters now familiar in Treadwell's work: the honorable self-made man who has spent time in Mexico, the cold society woman, a scurrilous Spanish male, murder, the smothering or venting of honest passions.

The distinguished Andrew Wells, married to a society leader and do-gooder in prison reform, turns to another woman for the warmth and peace he doesn't receive from his wife. His spoiled daughter is conducting a flirtation with a Puerto Rican dancer, Rico Rodriguez, even at her engagement party to well-known Cornelius Pierrepont. Wells confronts Rodriguez, insults him and drives him off. In Act II Wells visits the apartment of Delia Malloy, alias Diana Mallon, his lover. Wells goes for a walk long enough to allow visits by Diana's alcoholic mother and her convict-husband, John McCloon, just released from jail through the efforts of Mrs. Wells' parole-assistance group. McCloon importunes Diana to go to bed with him at that instant but she postpones the event by sending him away for a short time. Wells steps out of the kitchen, having returned early from his walk and

⁹⁶Sophie Treadwell, Andrew Wells' Lady, TS, UALSC, Box 14.

having heard the whole scene between McCloon and Diana. She declares she must return to McCloon as a matter of honor. Rodriguez bursts in, having followed Wells and threatens to shoot him in revenge for the insult to Rodriguez's Spanish pride. Diana throws herself between them and is killed by the bullet meant for Wells. In Act III, McCloon has been arrested for the murder. Mrs. Wells is worried about public reaction to her parole-assistance group and Wells is brooding over his knowledge of the truth. Wells confesses to his wife and daughter. They urge him to keep quiet for the sake of their position but he signs a statement for the police accusing Rodriguez, saving McCloon, and presumably sacrificing the Wells' family position in society.

As usual, Treadwell's dialogue is good: spare, direct, idiomatic, the characters speak the truth to each other and express their emotions honestly. The following dialogue between Theo, Wells' daughter and Richard Kent, Wells' young male secretary who loves her, neatly exposes their ambivalent feelings and gracefully works in exposition as well (Act I, p. 20):

THEO

You didn't come downstairs to my party tonight. . . .

KENT

I'm not hired here to go to parties.

THEO

Don't be childish. You make me tired, Dick.

KENT

I realize that.

THEO
You can't play the game! You have to get serious!

KENT
Well--that's the goal for you, isn't it? Score another!

THEO
Don't be nasty, Dick. Can't we be friends?

KENT
No.

THEO
Why not?

KENT
Because I don't like you.

THEO
I thought you were in love with me!

KENT
I am! But I don't like you.

THEO
(Pause)
Why don't you like me, Dick?

KENT
Because you're no good.

THEO
How dare you say a thing like that?

KENT
Oh, I'm not talking about--chastity and that stuff.

THEO
What are you talking about?
(He doesn't answer.)
Why am I no good?

KENT
(Suddenly)
Because you haven't any heart! And you haven't any guts! And you don't care for anything or anybody on earth--except yourself!

THEO
. . . haven't I been nice to you?

KENT

You mean you've driven with me alone hours at night--when it suited you? And turned your car down all the dark roads that suited you? And let me kiss you just as long as it suited you. Is that what you call being nice to me?

(She doesn't answer.)

You've been nicer than that. You've sneaked downstairs here to meet me--after everybody . . . had gone to bed--sneaked down in your little pajamas--but if I'd sneaked upstairs to you--you'd have aroused the house!

And when questioned again about his feelings for her, Kent declares again:

. . . I despise you. You're so self-satisfied and insolent! You think you're important! Because you have a lot of money! And your father's a really big man. And your mother's a prominent woman. But what are you? . . . Nothing! . . . And I know it! But because you smell sweet and your little breast sticks out and the little hairs on the back of your neck are--

THEO

That'll do, Dick.

KENT

You see, that's not nice--is it? That's getting toward something real, isn't it? Real--so you stop me! But you like it.

Treadwell liked this play and worked it through several versions. Unfortunately, she wrote a melodrama, peopled with stereotypic characters who execute improbably-frenzied entrances and exits in order to propel the action-filled plot. Treadwell had a phrase for her unsuccessful, unproduced works: "another one for the drawer." Andrew Wells' Lady was another one for the drawer.

The next year, 1932, was one of play rewrites and try-out productions for Treadwell. Depressed by her husband's

heart condition and the state of her career, she experienced one illness after another. Nearly four years had passed since her triumph with Machinal, and she had not been able to achieve another success. During this stale period, as she referred to it, she returned to producing her own plays.

After another revision in the manuscript and a title change from Wild Honey to Lone Valley (discussed on pp. 106-108 above), Treadwell previewed the play for three performances June 29-July 1, 1932 in Nyack, New York. Luther Greene, director of the Rockland Producing Company, and Treadwell directed the play which featured Elisha Cook, Jr. as Joe in one of his first leading roles.

Critical notices and audience reaction certainly helped convince Treadwell to produce Lone Valley on Broadway, just as hostile reception for The Island, produced one month later in Newtown, doomed that play to the drawer.

Albert Perkins, in the Rockland County Evening Journal, June 30, 1932, gave an account of the evening:

. . . Miss Treadwell had every reason to be pleased with the outcome of the evening. Loud and insistent cries of "Author!" resounded through the house at the conclusion of the drama which had its "world premiere" in Nyack. . . .

The play was a "strong" up-country drama, full of passion and profanity--frankly melodrama, but effective melodrama. Well put together, competently written, it still contained many familiar touches. The good, good boy fell in love with the bad girl and stuck to her even when her past transgressions were revealed, and the final curtain descended on a wedding scene. . . .

An unidentified reporter from The Nyack Daily News,

June 30, 1932, also liked Lone Valley and provided this interesting sidelight on the author:

When the curtain dropped on the last act, there was prolonged applause for those appearing in the play, then the clapping of hands became more demanding and there were shouts of "Author, author!" Miss Treadwell . . . at first did not realize that those who had seen the play wanted her to appear on the stage. She seemed to think the applause was for members of the cast.

The cries of "Author, author!" became more insistent.

Then Miss Treadwell saw whom the audience wanted. Only a few saw her throw her white lace scarf around her shoulders and slip out the door of the box to the street . . . that slender, gray-haired woman, with vivid face . . . who besides being a playwright is one of the best-known newspaper women in the United States.

Between September, 1932 and March, 1933 Treadwell wrote the final and best version of Lone Valley.⁹⁷ The play, produced and directed by herself, opened at the Plymouth Theatre, under Arthur Hopkins management, March 10, 1933.

This version of Lone Valley is a skillful, powerful dramatization of a small story. A reformed prostitute seeks a new life, and encounters the obstacles presented by small minds in a small community. Each incident, each character is particularized, and the dramatic concerns are specific enough that Treadwell missed the universality necessary to a great play.

Mary has been a prostitute in a large city. She inherits a small ranch of a few acres from an aunt, and decides

⁹⁷Sophie Treadwell, Lone Valley, TS, UALSC, Box 9.

to start a new life. Initially, she goes to the ranch to recuperate from the birth of a baby boy who died. When she is threatened by Grainger, the local deputy sheriff and owner of all the surrounding land, she determines to stay and make a living on the land. She finds the ranch is tied in various ways to other members of the community--all unhappy and frustrated. Joe is a bound-boy from the orphanage whom Grainger took as a ward so that he would have cheap labor on his large ranch. Ella, Grainger's sister, has been driven to mental illness by her brother who disapproved of her emotional attachment to a young Italian hired hand and institutionalized her to break up the relationship. This aborted love relationship parallels the love which develops between Joe and Mary, except that Mary is now the unsuitable match. Joe is told the truth about Mary's background by Grainger. Mary refuses to marry Joe, now that the truth is known, and leaves the ranch. But Joe follows her as the play ends.

The character of Mary represents another of Treadwell's proud, independent women who are battered by the male-dominated world. She has been on her own since she was a child of twelve when her parents died. Rather than be taken to an orphanage, she claimed to be sixteen and "went out on her own," presumably eventually into prostitution. She and Joe are drawn to each other because they both have been orphaned and feel like outcasts. However, they both exhibit a quiet wisdom and a sense of understanding for the cripples of the

world. Their dialogue is comprised of short, factual exchanges concerning real matters.

Ella, Grainger's daft sister, has a vague, disconnected way of speaking that is reminiscent of the dialogue structure in Treadwell's Machinal. Ella is one of Treadwell's most interesting characters, but her role in the play operates only as counterpoint for Mary. She has been destroyed; but Mary will be a survivor. Following is Ella's first scene in the play (Act I; p. 36-37):

(Miss Ella Grainger is a delicate-looking, thin woman with bright, romantic eyes. She is forty-seven. She carries a wire cage containing a parrot. . . .)

MISS ELLA

(She starts on seeing Joe)
Oh, Joe.

JOE

Miss Ella.

MISS ELLA

You won't mention anything to my brother, George, will you Joe? About this occurrence of my coming here?

JOE

Of course not.
(He takes parrot, sets it down)

MISS ELLA

There's nothing dishonorable about that, is there Joe? I wouldn't want to do anything dishonorable.

JOE

Of course there isn't.

MISS ELLA

(Considering the point)
No--no. But silence is golden. Your being here, too, Joe--silence. You can depend on me. You never hear me talking in my brother's house, do you Joe?

JOE

No, Miss Ella, sometimes for weeks--you never say a word.

MISS ELLA

Silence is golden. Silence. Then suddenly I must talk. I can't keep it any longer. It wells up in me. I must tell what I feel or drown. It's about the enfolding arms.

MARY

What's she talking about?

JOE

Nothing! She just says that sometimes--it don't mean nothing.

MISS ELLA

(Giving Mary the parrot)

I brought it back. I thought it the only honorable thing to do. . . . Take it. It's yours. Always remember that. It's an excellent rule. Don't forget that, Joe. Take what is yours.

JOE

Have you had the parrot all the time, Miss Ella--

MISS ELLA

Yes. I took it the very day she died. I was afraid my brother George would have it killed.

(To Mary)

My brother drinks sometimes--he drinks and then he--we're afraid.

It's because--he has no love--he drinks--to drown it out--But I cannot drown it out--it drowns me--it wells up in my heart until I'm drowned--drowned but not dead--not dead--but just as lonely.

(Looking at the parrot)

I kept it hidden in my room until today.

Mary doesn't speak in images but speaks of life as she sees it--as it is. She wants to stand on her own, she wants to be left alone--in peace. Mary is one of the many characters in Treadwell's plays who asks only to be left alone to find her own way.

Perhaps the familiarity of plot and theme irritated the critics. Perhaps the company's acting was not a strong

component of the production. Perhaps Treadwell's directing was, as she had once termed it, "not really very good." Whatever the reason, the critics weren't impressed with Lone Valley. "It is touching, has its moments of truth, and is written and acted with complete sincerity. It is simply not big enough, or brazen enough, to make its mark. . . . The major fault . . . is its lack of force throughout."⁹⁸ "All is a little pale, suffering from the dramatist's penchant for under-writing. She tries to be so real that her story loses all its force."⁹⁹

. . . "Lone Valley" as a whole is not brilliant enough either in the writing or playing to make up for the dreary familiarity of its plot. Much finer plays have been written on this theme and finer actors have played them. A conscientious and workmanlike production, it lacks the spark that sets time-worn materials on fire all over again.¹⁰⁰

Gilbert Gabriel, who recalled the stirring performance of Machinal, was surprised by what he felt was dullness from Treadwell:

The play manages, I scarce know why, to keep to a dead level of unexcitement. Perhaps it talks too well--or perhaps just too much. Everybody speaks in it with a grave, oracular over-meaning. The whole Cosmos rumbles around the ranch room. An

⁹⁸Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA, Richard Lockridge, "Lone Valley, a Play of Youth's Awakening," n.d.

⁹⁹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Arthur Pollock, "The Theaters," n.d.

¹⁰⁰Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Wilella Waldorf, "Lone Valley Arrives," n.d.

occasional effort to grow onions and tomatoes on the window sill resounds as solemnly as the six days' labors of all Genesis.¹⁰¹

Lone Valley closed March 11, 1933, after one performance. Treadwell seems to have abandoned this play and made no future efforts to market it for movies or television.

She was less devastated by this failure than she might have been at another time; for Treadwell was traveling to Russia. Machinal was scheduled to open May 22 in Moscow at the Kamerny Theatre, directed by Alexander Tairov.

Machinal's production in Russia was a big event for Treadwell. She had been sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution and had written, by some interpretations, an anti-capitalist, or at least anti-materialist, play in Machinal. She had studied with Boleslavsky of the Moscow Art Theater and remained an admirer of the Stanislavski system, as practiced by Boleslavsky. Clippings from Russian newspapers and her Moscow diary indicate that she made a very favorable impression on Russia. Russia certainly made an impression on her, but not a favorable one.

The production of Machinal was a great success at the Kamerny and Vakhtangov Theaters. In "News From Moscow," by Jay Leyda, in Theatre Arts, this correspondent comments:

¹⁰¹ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Gilbert Gabriel, "Lone Valley: Sophie Treadwell Produces Her Own Play in the Plymouth," n.d.

. . . Machinal with its striking scenic effects . . . is a definite contribution to the Moscow Theatre. Concentrating all warmth and color in the single role of the heroine . . . Tairov's production has an atmosphere of implacable rigidity. This is in decided contrast to the more recent production of the same play by the newly-opened studio-theatre of Simonov. Changing its name to Ellen Jones, Simonov made the play a highly personal and natural piece of work and he achieved less than Tairov.

Treadwell kept her Moscow diary for reasons other than chronicling the opening of Machinal; so, we have only newspaper commentary of the event itself. Raphael Rubinstein, literary advisor for the Kamerny, provided the Herald Tribune's Russian correspondent with an analysis of Treadwell's translated play. Tairov's comments were as pointedly political as artistic. Setting aside political commentary, he saw the play in terms of a duality:

There really are two acting characters . . . Helen and the Town. This Town is personified by a whole gallery of persons who, though they vary in importance, in sex, in size dimensions, color of the hair, temperament, etc., are all not human beings but puppets. They eat, drink, sleep, give birth to other similar beings, dress, undress, make statements, hurry, lie, discuss, get rich or poor, always within the limits of an established standard. This standard has so deeply grown into their flesh and blood that they do not notice it but think they live freely and according to their will.¹⁰²

Richard Watts, Jr., New York drama critic, traveled to Moscow and provided a comparative account of the Russian and American productions:

¹⁰² Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA. Raphael Rubinstein, "A Word From the Soviet Theater On Its Production of 'Machinal,'" Herald Tribune, n.d.

. . . Despite all of the radical changes in manner and viewpoint, the Kamerny 'Machinal' remains so surprisingly true to the drama that Miss Treadwell wrote. . . . It is interesting to note that a regimented machine age was one of the villains of the play upon which the chief blame for the heroine's plight was placed.

Pictorially the production is particularly brilliant. The curtain arises against a background of skyscrapers in silver and a black sky. Then across this background there is thrown an ever-shifting succession of light forms and pictorial symbols of metropolitan life. With enormous effectiveness this visual method captures the mood and the spirit of the play. Between each change of scene this symbolic play of light is provided.

Another effective piece of staging is provided in the scene where the girl and her lover go to their hotel room rendezvous. In the room there is a full-length mirror with its back toward the audience. It is, however, merely the framework of a mirror, so that you can look through at anyone who is facing it. When the two lovers stand at the glass you can see their reactions and note that while she is chiefly concerned with the embrace, he is looking at his reflection in the mirror. It is a shrewd manner of providing characterization and dramatic implications. Somehow you know more about the inner relationship of the lovers after such a glimpse.

There is also an incidental musical score, written especially for this production by Polovinkin, . . . presented during the shifting from episode to episode. . . . The settings are resourceful, not too extremely stylized and invariably interesting. . . . I might add, however, that when I left New York the speakeasies still didn't carry signs labeled "bar" upon their windows, wide open to the street. . . .

. . . I would say that while the Kamerny production is more effective visually, it probably lacks something of the sympathy that Mr. Hopkins put into his version. It is, nevertheless, a fine and faithful job of adaptation and, granting the differences in temperament of the two lands, it can be said that Miss Treadwell's play is, in Moscow, if not quite the warm-blooded work it was originally,

still a fine, moving and beautiful play, one of the distinguished works of the modern theater.¹⁰³

Treadwell, a determined woman, keenly aware of her rights, had decided that she should be paid royalties for Russian productions of Machinal. While in Russia she made several visits to speak before the playwrights' group of the Union of Soviet Authors and to argue her case. She was persuasive, for the Paris edition of the New York Herald ran the following story:

The drama section of the Union of Soviet Authors has set a precedent by arranging for Miss Sophie Treadwell, the American playwright, to receive royalties for all presentations in the U.S.S.R. of her play, 'Machinal'. . . . Although a number of American plays have been produced in the U.S.S.R., Miss Treadwell is the first American to have her royalty rights recognized. . . .¹⁰⁴

The money, in rubles, was deposited in the State Workers' Savings Box, number 914. Of course, Treadwell would have had to travel occasionally to the Soviet Union to enjoy her Soviet earnings. As far as we know, she never visited Russia again. It was a victory of principle, rather than real monetary gain.

We can only speculate on the reasons why Treadwell, an avid and restless world-traveler, never returned to the country she had admired for fifteen years. There are clues in the

¹⁰³Richard Watts, Jr., "Moscow Sees 'Machinal' and Approves of It," New York Herald Tribune, June 18, 1933, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 10, NWA. "Sophie Treadwell Given Play Royalties in Moscow: Soviet Sets Precedent Through Recognizing 'Machinal'," The New York Herald, Paris, August 24, 1933.

fragments in her diary. She was first surprised and then depressed by the shabbiness of everything--streets, shop articles, the people, their living accommodations. She was struck by the difference in financial circumstances between the officials and artists who were entertaining her and the "gray peasants" who waited in lines in the streets. She seems to have been given the run of the city with an accompanying interpreter. She visited divorce bureaus and law courts and was shocked by both. She jotted down in fragments the story of a seventy-year-old man and a nineteen-year-old girl who came to the divorce court, he to get a divorce so he could marry the young peasant girl. The girl indicated she was getting married so she could leave the factory. When the girl rose to leave, Treadwell noted she had a lame foot. Treadwell discovered the illiteracy rate was ninety-two percent. The censors spoke to her about her play and asked what she was going to print in her own newspaper upon her return to America. She visited an abortion clinic where young women were treated at the rate of twenty-five an hour and found that each abortion took approximately four and one-half minutes. She visited what she termed a "prostitution institute" and commented that the interpreter wouldn't let Treadwell out of her sight. She wasn't able to really talk to any of the young girls but she was aware of the men waiting outside. The next day she visited a prostitute refuge house where the young prostitutes were examined every three days and the hostess was

required to be thirty-five years old. Treadwell was aware that her interpreter reported on her to the government. She became increasingly sensitive about the peasants and wondered how they could be treated as they were. All these fragments taken together indicate that Treadwell became disillusioned with the Communist government and the Soviet way of life.

If one recalls Treadwell's consistent commitment to the dignity and rights of the individual, and particularly the emerging dignity and rights of women, one may safely speculate that she was especially disillusioned by the lack of improvement in women's position in Soviet society. She was offended by the exploitation of women in the prostitution establishments, in a society which trumpeted the end of exploitation of the people--but not including women. Nothing would have been more guaranteed to enrage Treadwell and change her political views. She obviously discarded her former sympathies because her swing to a conservative or right-wing political position dates from her return from Russia. She became hostile to left-wing theatre people in America, which in the 1930's meant hostility to a great many people in the theatre. Perhaps this attitude of Treadwell's was one factor in her failure to secure a producer for any of her plays until 1940. A late entry in the Moscow diary says, "I will write a movie of this." She never wrote the movie, but she did write an excellent play.

Treadwell returned from Russia in late June, 1933. She went to work immediately on a play exposing life under

the Soviet regime. Initially called The Last Are First the final version bore an ironic title, Promised Land.¹⁰⁵

Promised Land is the work of a mature craftswoman, one who knew exactly what she wanted to say and, as with Machinal, chose the most suitable style in which to say it: naturalism. Treadwell's best work was written around themes important to her, dramas which poured out of the intensity of her personal feeling. Both Machinal and Promised Land were written in a short time, immediately after an incident which inspired their creation, and were not extensively revised. Undoubtedly, they are her best two plays but, as far as we know, Promised Land was never produced.

This three-act play takes place in the kitchen of a house in Moscow, the former house of a well-to-do family. This is the kitchen area for seven couples who occupy the eight rooms. These characters make up a cross-section of the Russian people: peasants, white Russians, a G.P.U. officer, artists, former revolutionaries, a teacher. The play focuses on the fates of Nadia, former member of the aristocracy, and her husband, Volkov, a top official in the Russian secret police, the G.P.U. Volkov is responsible for exacting obedience from the peasants, even to liquidating certain villages. He works for the glorious future, one hundred years hence. For the present, the end justifies the means. Volkov has Nadia evicted from her room so that she will be forced to

¹⁰⁵ Sophie Treadwell, Promised Land, TS, UALSC, Box 14.

live with him. Nadia insists that they marry. He belittles her bourgeois morals but marries her because divorce is easily obtained by signing a paper. Nadia tries to help those around her through Volkov's influence; but Volkov himself has no pity. Nadia realizes he is a Bolshevik whose gods are the Proletariat as a group, not as suffering individuals. Nadia reveals her former aristocratic status: she stole her maid's papers and assumed the identity of one of the proletariat. Volkov asserts he must divorce her because of his career and record. Nadia leaves him; he recognizes how much he loves and respects her. But now he is useless to the party, a weak man who no longer can destroy people today for the sake of the future because she has awakened his humanity. The play ends as they begin to consider an alternate way to make a better world.

The story of Nadia and Volkov is played against all the little stories of the characters around them. Each story is part of the larger picture but in microcosm. These characters forming the milieu are drawn vividly with only a few lines of dialogue or descriptive stage business. Their concerns are common ones but the new system broods over all. Onstage are Mme. Miliutina, a former aristocrat; Masha, an energetic peasant; Tania, her fourteen year-old daughter reading a book; Nikolai, an old peasant dressed in dreadful rags and Vassili, a factory worker, playing an accordian and spitting on the floor (Act I, p. 2):

TANIA

I can't read--I can't--Comrade Vassili--all day long you've played!

VASSILI

(Playing on)

Sure--ain't this rest day?

TANIA

(To boy outside, rolling hoop)

Vitya! Vitya! Please!

VITYA

(Appearing at door with his hoop)

What?

TANIA

I want to read.

(Vitya starts to roll his hoop in the house)

Where did you get that thing?

VITYA

(Rolling)

Off an old wagon lying in the street.

TANIA

You better look out! Isn't that sabotage?

VITYA

(Disgusted)

Sabotage! Sabotage is when--

TANIA

I know what sabotage is.

VITYA

Lenin said--

Vitya's stepfather, Sukotin, steps in asking for Vitya's mother, a ballerina with the local company. He is distressed that she isn't home but returns to his work: writing an official government play to liquidate the old bourgeois ideology of love and jealousy, a play with a dynamo, a motorcycle and a diesel engine (Act I, pp. 3-4):

MASHA

(Disgusted)
How can he write when he is thinking about a woman all the time!

TANIA

I guess dancers are very seductive.

MASHA

(Disgusted)
Seductive! Dancers dance--that's all. It's their work. . . . Just like Mme. Miliutina works in an office and I work in a Museum--Pelagria works in a factory. Seductive! Women work these days--women--

In this first scene of the play, Treadwell delineates the concerns of the Russian people, their struggle to comprehend the new system so they can adapt and survive. Treadwell's careful exploration of the mundane establishes instantly the authenticity of character and ambience.

The struggle to re-educate the people is captured in a brief exchange among three peasants. Old Parasha has slipped out to attend church. She and her husband, Nikolai, are upbraided by Masha (Act I, pp. 7-9):

MASHA

. . . Every day it is the same thing. She sneaks out and goes in a church.

(Passionately)

What can you do with such stupidity? She is so stupid she doesn't even know it isn't Sunday. The government changes the calendar, takes away the word Sunday, makes us count the days by numbers so there is no Sunday, and yet. . . . God! Sometimes I get discouraged. I work in the anti-religious Museum all day. I preach anti-religion all day, and yet, look at both of them--

(Suddenly)

They've got to tear all the churches down!

SUKOTIN

(Laughs)
Haven't they?

MASHA

Every one! Every one! As long as one is left--
 (To Parasha)
 Haven't I shown you all the tricks the priests
 played? Didn't I show you the mummies they told
 you were saints? Didn't I explain to you about
 Christ, just a man, not God?

NIKOLAI

(Nods excitedly)
 Not God! Not God!

MASHA

(Hopefully, to the old man)
 You know that. You know that, don't you? Christ
 wasn't God.

NIKOLAI

(Excitedly)
 Yes, yes! Christ wasn't God, Lenin was God!

MASHA

Oh.

NIKOLAI

(Going on, in a trance)
 Lenin is the most holy man who ever came on
 earth. His words are holy and his body is holy.
 His body is so holy it will not decay. You can
 see it lying on the alter. You cannot see
 Christ's body.

MASHA

You, Parasha. You know better than that.

PARASHA

Yes. Christ's body rose to heaven.

MASHA

(Desperately)
 Oh! Sometimes I get discouraged.

Attitudes of the old and new are examined in exchanges
 between Mme. Miliutina and Masha as they discuss the former
 empress. (I:8)

MASHA

. . . Look at that filthy priest, Rasputin, with
 the Empress.

MME. MILIUTINA

Don't . . . speak of her like that, please
just--

MASHA

Why not? She wasn't anything. Just a woman,
just a--

MME. MILIUTINA

I know.

MASHA

(Belligerently)

Then why shouldn't I speak of her any way I want?

MME. MILIUTINA

No reason, I guess.

(Hesitates)

It's just that she was a sort of--a sort of symbol.

MASHA

Of what?

MME. MILIUTINA

(A little helplessly)

Of dignity. Human-womanly-dignity.

MASHA

Dignity. With that dirty priest! You come to
the Museum. I'll show you pictures, I'll--

MME. MILIUTINA

I know! I know!

MASHA

Wasn't he dirty?

MME. MILIUTINA

Yes.

MASHA

And ignorant?

MME. MILIUTINA

Yes--and brutal--and crafty.

MASHA

Well?

MME. MILIUTINA

The doomed often struggle to embrace what is
going to destroy them.

The ruthlessness of the official party line, and its hypocrisy, is exposed when Maklakov begs Volkov to help his ailing wife by getting her a permit to leave Russia (Act I, pp. 47-48):

VOLKOV

We have doctors.

MAKLAKOV

But no medicine. She needs a serious operation.

VOLKOV

We have surgeons.

MAKLAKOV

No anaesthetics, no proper instruments, our hospitals run down, old worn-out equipment--

VOLKOV

Our workers have to go there. Why should your wife be favored?

(Angrily)

Because she's an intellectual? Russia has no classes any more. All are equal.

MAKLAKOV

If you will not make an effort to help my wife out of the country, will you not try to get her into the hospital in the Kremlin, where there are good doctors and equipment?

VOLKOV

The Kremlin hospital is for those who live in the Kremlin. The government officials.

MAKLAKOV

(Bitterly)

There are others who have the privilege. The high commissioners of the party, the high officials of the Secret Police, the high officers of the army.

VOLKOV

(Coolly)

Does your wife belong to any of these? What claim has she to care in the Kremlin hospital?

MAKLAKOV

Only that she is a Russian woman, dying and in great pain.

VOLKOV

There are eighty million Russian women and they are all dying, sooner or later. They cannot all be admitted to one hospital.

MAKLAKOV

And you say there are no classes! You say there are no privileges! You say--

VOLKOV

If you could, your wife would be one of the last.

MAKLAKOV

And why?

VOLKOV

Because she belongs to a class that is an enemy to the Soviet State. She is an intellectual, and if we have privileges, they are for the proletariat.

MAKLAKOV

Then why do you keep her here? What use is she to you? Another mouth to feed in time of need, another--

VOLKOV

(Angrily)

Because it is a time of need. We cannot permit Russians of the class of your wife to go among foreigners.

MAKLAKOV

The class of my wife! My wife worked to bring about the revolution. As hard as you others-- harder. Arrest--imprisonment--in the revolution of 1905 she--

VOLKOV

It is not for the welfare of the State that foreigners receive at this time an unsympathetic picture of our conditions, a class prejudiced picture. In a few years perhaps--

One of Treadwell's agents, Harold Freedman, also felt Promised Land was excellent. ". . . I think it is a splendid play--far and away the best play you ever wrote, and one play I am sure that will make a tremendous impression if produced. If you can keep on writing like this, then I don't think you

have to worry about anything. . . ."106 But he also recognized difficulty: ". . . The only reaction I have had on it so far has been merely from people who are afraid of the general subject matter. . . . The Theatre Guild unfortunately turned it down . . . Jed Harris returned it."107

Barrett Clark advised her ". . . of course the script is out for all the so-called liberal or radical producers, which means the Group, Theatre Union and a few others. . . . It is because of the background you have chosen that the play is going to be very difficult to place."108

The play was eventually turned down by Thomas Mitchell, Paul Muni, Spencer Tracy, Melvin Douglas, Arthur Hopkins, Crosby Gaige, Harvey Forbes, the Theatre Guild, Warner Bros., Delos Chappell, among others. The general feeling was that the character of Volkov was not sympathetic enough and the love interest needed to be expanded--the play needed to touch the sentiments. Treadwell refused to make the play more sentimental; she refused to transform Volkov into a conventional hero from the complex, interesting anti-hero she had originally created. Perhaps one of the reasons Promised Land never received production was that Treadwell was some twenty-

¹⁰⁶Harold Freedman, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, February 15, 1934, UALSC, Box 14.

¹⁰⁷Harold Freedman, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, April 3, 1934, UALSC, Box 14.

¹⁰⁸Barrett Clark, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, April 3, 1935, UALSC, Box 14.

five years ahead of her time with the concept of the anti-hero. As previously mentioned, this play which might have been so popular in the late forties or early fifties when red-baiting was the fashion, must have been distinctly unpopular with the generally pro-Russian theatre community of the thirties.

Treadwell's first revision on Promised Land was interrupted by the death of her husband, William O'Connell McGeehan, on November 29, 1933. McGeehan had gone in October to Sea Island, Georgia, hoping to rest and regain some of his health. But he succumbed to myocarditis and nephritis from which he had been suffering for a number of years. After his funeral, Treadwell went to her ranch, Old Trees, in Stockton, California, to work and recover.

She completed the revision of Promised Land and her most experimental and innovative play, For Saxophone, or Intimations for Saxophone, copyrighted June 6, 1934. Two elements of this avant-garde stage piece are striking: first, she attempted an innovative combination of sound, music, dance, and dialogue, trying to capitalize on an audience's taste as trained by radio, stage musicals and sound films; and second, only in this play does Treadwell distort the concept of time as it is generally understood. Treadwell has three categories of characters: those seen and heard; those heard but not seen (voices); and those seen but not heard (visual presences). She makes use of Greek chorus-like groups

who provide exposition and comment in verse, through repetition and rhyme. The eye is meant to see the action as if through a kaleidoscope--colorful, flashing impressions of the action, in a definite pattern but fragmented, not chronological, perhaps not even sequential.

The best of her versions is titled Intimations for Saxophone.¹⁰⁹ While it's a long play (four acts divided into fourteen scenes), the action flows as if locale and time were unimportant. The plot is simple and not the important element in this avant-garde drama. The story concerns Lily Laird's search for love and freedom. She marries Gilly Lethe but soon realizes this relationship is suffocating her. She has an intense and guilt-ridden affair with a passionate dancer. She seeks a complex father-lover-confessor-savior relationship with an author. She eventually commits a unique suicide by moving during a knife-throwing act so that she is struck by the knife thrown by Dancer.

The entire play is designed to be performed to the accompaniment of music, particularly the saxophone, which seems to embody all that Lily finds vulgar, cheap or boring. At points in the play the saxophone makes its own dramatic comment on the action, and thus becomes an active participant rather than providing single or conventional accompaniment.

¹⁰⁹Sophie Treadwell, Intimations for Saxophone, TS, Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, New York City.

Treadwell includes a brief explanatory preface in this early version which indicates her artistic vision of the play's production:

The script is written to be played with an almost unbroken musical accompaniment. It is really words for music . . . The music is for the most part typical of music of today, where a saxophone [sic] is much heard, but there are also parts of a Brahms symphony, some Viennese Waltzes, Hungarian gypsy innovations, etc.

Also, much use is made of voices (of people not seen)--bits of conversation here and there--incomplete--suggestive. I thought this gave . . . the whole thing the living effect of something overheard. . . .

The play's . . . scenes . . . go one into the other through lights, voices, and music, so that the effect is something seen, moving by, and something overheard--from all of which, a bit here and a bit there, inconsequential and seemingly, unrelated, the audience discovers--writes the play.

All the scenes are planned to be done in different light spots--pools of light on a dark stage--no scenery . . . very little furniture--very few props. . . .

Time is treated in an unconventional manner. In Scene 1, the action portrays a couple singing and dancing while the dialogue being spoken by voices out of the dark concerns an event in the future. But as we watch, the future becomes the present and the voices speak of matters in the past, present and future. Then dialogue from the characters we see is woven into these various conversations so that we are presented with the present and future simultaneously.

Treadwell plays with verbal sounds, rhyme, and connotative names in Intimations for Saxophone. Lily marries a man named Lethe, and for her the marriage is true oblivion. Lines containing the word "congratulations" are repeated over

and over in the dark bridging from the wedding into the next scene, a focussing of audience awareness through mantra-like repetition. The names of three characters whom Lily considers trivial all rhyme: Gilly, Milly and Billy, strongly suggestive of rhyme with "silly."

Treadwell touches upon many of her concerns for women and men in the society: mother-son relationships; the place of women in marriage or on their own in society; surface living, easy morality, extra-marital relationships and personal freedom, most particularly personal freedom for women. But she does not make Intimations for Saxophone an agitprop for women's lib. The innovative form is as important as content in this nonrealistic play about real society.

Even though Treadwell knew she hadn't written a commercial piece with this intricate play of light, sound, dialogue, music and dance, she thought it would make an extraordinary stage experience or a film. The play made all her usual rounds and evoked interest among several producers. Donald Oenslager, the designer, optioned the play for a brief period. It also was studied by a reader for Samuel Goldwyn, Inc., at the behest of her old friend and fellow-artist, Arthur Hopkins, who sent the script to a number of other producing organizations. None was as enthusiastic as Robert Edmond Jones:

. . . You have a great idea here, the germ of a new theatre idiom. It interests me enormously. . . . I have no reservations at all about the method of presentation. On the contrary, here is a bold step into a new dimension, full of power. . . .

It is your experiments with new theatrical forms that interest me. There are passages in Saxophone that are so original and brilliant I simply have no words for them. . . . I do want very much to talk to you and to tell you some of my ideas for a new kind of stage technique. . . .¹¹⁰

Over the next three years, Jones tried to raise the money for production but was unsuccessful.

Close study of the versions of For Saxophone indicate that Treadwell started experimenting with a style resembling the style she used with Machinal. But the style mutated from expressionism into what appears to be a forerunner of multimedia productions incorporating American jazz rhythms, elements of a light show, music, dance, and drama. With minor changes in dialogue, and modern theatre equipment like lasers and quadrophonic sound, For Saxophone would be an exciting stage production now but would be even more expensive to produce than it was in 1937. Nevertheless, For Saxophone remains as an innovative, impressive artistic achievement.

Two years elapsed between the copyright date of For Saxophone and Treadwell's copyright July 6, 1936 of her new play, Three.¹¹¹ This three-act realistic drama is a combination of melodrama and the well-made play structure. The major characters, an artist, a writer and a doctor, are all likeable

¹¹⁰ Robert Edmond Jones, Letters to Sophie Treadwell, October 24, 1937.

¹¹¹ Sophie Treadwell, Three, UALSC, Box 14.

and clearly drawn. But Treadwell's plot, certainly acceptable today, probably was too unconventional in 1936.

Katherine Clair, a strong, confident, attractive woman is a successful commercial artist. She attracts the attention of Dr. Ian Reith who is an eminent physician and psychologist. She agrees that he may come spend the night with her, but Matt Brooks, the writer, shows up at her apartment after having failed to keep a business appointment with her. Everyone assumed he was drunk, since he had gained some notoriety for that problem. Instead, Kit finds him to be a serious artist, a genius perhaps, who decides to take a commercial assignment with her because he needs the money. She is powerfully attracted to him, and they spend the night together, after she sends Reith a message telling him not to return. In Act II, Matt reveals that his father was driven from his mother by her cold, religious fanaticism. His father died in the bedroom of a prostitute. It is this story that Matt wants to put into a novel, but he's having difficulty writing it. Matt further reveals that his mother went insane after his father died. Matt proposes marriage to Kit and speaks of his longing to have a child. Kit attempts to conceal her reluctance to marry him and have a child which would inherit his instability. Matt's fragile balance collapses: he leaves the apartment for a walk and disappears. Kit decides she will marry him and have a child--but not his child. She proposes to spend one night with Reith, having

resolved that she will try to become pregnant by Reith. In Act III, Matt finishes his novel, and it is snapped up by a publisher. Reith discovers the truth about Kit's baby boy, and threatens to reveal that he's the father. However, he sees how much Kit and Matt love each other and exits, leaving the secret safe on which Matt's new strength is founded. In the second version Reith stays to offer moral support.

This play had potential as an unusual, well-written drama, despite the startling plot. However, Treadwell accomplished only one revision and put the play aside. Three was at least twenty-five years ahead of the audience that would have been able to accept it.

Three features a strong, articulate woman and an enlightened man, sympathetic to women. A striking conversation concerning women's special problems takes place between Kit and Ian Reith in Act II, Scene 1, p. 5. The dialogue seems unusual in terms of the time it was written, a time when a deep economic depression, displacement of great numbers of people and the threat of war pushed women's concerns far into the background.

KIT

. . . Women don't seem to perform many works of genius.

REITH

The capacity for doing a thing and doing it are not the same. Genius needs its infinite pains, and--

KIT

(Laughs)

Well, women have those all right.

REITH

Yes, they have and that's maybe one of your answers.

KIT

Why do they do so damned much belly-aching, Ian. Is that natural?

REITH

(Laughs)

No--it's because they're abnormal and degenerate.

KIT

Degenerate?

REITH

Scientifically speaking, a woman is a being that has never yet functioned in her own environment.

KIT

What do you mean?

REITH

The world she must function in is not her own--it's a man's.

KIT

You sound like Susan B. Anthony.

REITH

Well, just consider war for one thing. The whole world lives in a state of war, preparation for war, war, recovery from war. War is a pure male expression. And then just sexually, no woman ever lived sexually a life that is really her own, completely, perfectly her own. This makes her quite--abnormal.

KIT

You're getting awfully deep. . . .

REITH

Then there is fear. No emotion is more destructive than fear and women live under it almost continually.

KIT

Men are terribly afraid, too.

REITH

Yes, fear plays a horrible part in the lives of all of us--naturally--all the fears that society piles on us--but besides these, women have their own special fears that a man knows nothing about.

KIT

What?

REITH

Well, the great fundamental, primitive fear that all women have subconsciously--the fear of being raped. . . . And the fear of having children--that is a continual devastating fear in most modern women. . . . That she functions at all is her miracle. . . .

Treadwell's feminist viewpoint appears in nearly every one of her plays, although not often this explicitly. Possibly these exchanges of philosophizing made the play too intellectual or too static for commercial production.

The primary reason Treadwell laid aside Three was that Arthur Hopkins decided to produce Plumes in the Dust, the final version of her Poe, discussed in Chapter III, pp. 58-61. We don't know why Treadwell changed the play's name to Plumes in the Dust.¹¹² Possibly she wanted to avoid a carry-over of bad publicity for those who remembered the lawsuits surrounding Poe; or perhaps she was suggesting the image of Poe's genius, degraded through misfortune and dissipation.

Hopkins took Plumes in the Dust out of town to the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey, the National Theater in Washington, D.C., and Ford's Theatre in Baltimore for its tryout. Critics in those cities praised the star, Henry Hull, but not the play. Plumes opened October 26, 1936, at the McCarter Theatre for one performance only. Willard Thorp, professor of English, reviewed the play and touched on

¹¹²Sophie Treadwell, Plumes in the Dust, TS, UALSC, Box 6.

the major problem:

In her ardor to tell the truth, to introduce all the possible motives, no single theme emerges. What then, is the play? A picture of how America devastated genius in 1840; of Poe's devotion to an ideal; of his reliance on Mira, on Virginia and on Muddie? . . . Where do these scenes lead?¹¹³

The critic for The Washington Post commented on the unrelieved tragic tone of Plumes in the Dust.

. . . a play of stark frustration that betrays a grim determination to stress every hapless aspect of a genius' bitter struggle. . . .

The period of the play is an unbroken interval of disappointment, disillusionment and grief. The three acts are without any vestige of enlivenment and cling tenaciously to the grim developments in a life from which the cold hand of tragedy was never lifted. . . . There is an insistent note of defeatism . . . that is continuously and thoroughly depressing.¹¹⁴

Betty Hynes, in the Washington Herald, called the play "an utterly uninspired drama . . ." and criticized Treadwell for "the series of episodes she pieced together which move with leaden feet across the stage, losing themselves in the slough of hopeless sentimentality."¹¹⁵

Variety, in its "Plays Out of Town" column, admitted that the character of Poe was skillfully drawn "but establishing one character, no matter how impressively, does not make

¹¹³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Willard Thorp; "Hull's Acting. Sure and Often Inspired . . .," n.d.

¹¹⁴Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Nelson B. Bell, "Henry Hull is Given Ovation in New Drama," The Washington Post, n.d.

¹¹⁵Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Betty Hynes, "'Plumes in the Dust' Opened. . .," Washington Herald, n.d.

a complete drama . . . The play, for all its occasional climaxes, is slow, episodic and gloomy."¹¹⁶

Plumes in the Dust opened November 6, 1936, at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre in New York City. The notices were mixed, but tended to be negative, and the play closed November 14. The critics agreed generally that the life of a poet, no matter how great the poet, did not make good stage drama; although granting that Treadwell was a capable playwright, even she was not equal to the task. Many of them were bored, John Anderson in particular:

The underlying trouble is that Miss Treadwell's writing is not in the right key. It creates no mood for what should be the recreation of not only a man but a period, and it often sounds purely pompous. If a shirt-sleeve picture of a genius is going to result merely in making a great artist uninteresting, then it would be better not to have the picture but, to let the man's work speak for him, as he intended.¹¹⁷

Another critic included Hopkins in his criticism of the work:

Considered purely as a play--which, under the circumstances would be a rather silly way to consider it--"Plumes in the Dust" suffers from too much deliberation, both in the writing and in the playing. It suffers, also, from rather awkward expository passages, through which the portions of Poe's life not shown are recited. Arthur Hopkins has directed it with all the stately dignity of a pageant and has

¹¹⁶Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Craig, "Plays Out of Town," Variety, n.d.

¹¹⁷Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. John Anderson, "Plumes in the Dust at 46th St. Theatre," November 7, 1936.

not, as producer, insisted that the author prune her scenes and lines to the dramatic bone. The result is frequent heaviness.¹¹⁸

In support of Plumes, The Wall Street Journal called it "an altogether distinguished work of rare sympathy," excepting the inharmonious death bed scene.¹¹⁹ Richard Watts, always a supporter of Treadwell's work, described it as "an earnest and compassionate study of the tragedy of Edgar Allan Poe." He felt she had been able to capture him as an artist "with a burning, inexhaustible passion for artistic creation. . . . Miss Treadwell has written a study that is invariably dignified and frequently impressive."¹²⁰

Burns Mantle, writing in the November 15 Sunday News, "Plumes in The Theatre," suggested that had the role of Poe been acted by John Barrymore, at the height of his career and his powers some twelve years before, as was intended by Arthur Hopkins, the play probably would have been a success because Barrymore could have played to the hilt that misunderstood genius.

In Treadwell's explanatory preface to the play (quoted entirely on pp. 58-59), she unknowingly pinpoints the two

¹¹⁸Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Richard Lockridge, "The Stage in Review: Borrowed Plumage," n.d.

¹¹⁹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Stirling Bowen, "Poe Play Has Anti-Climax," The Wall Street Journal, November 7, 1936.

¹²⁰Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. Richard Watt, Jr., "The Theaters," n.d.

probable reasons why she could not make Plumes in the Dust an exciting drama. One could say she aimed too high or that she attempted the impossible: she wanted, 1) to write an "actual autobiographical play" and, 2) to realize in a play authentically one man's life. First, historical accuracy in an autobiographical play does not necessarily make good drama, as many of the critics observed. Second, a play which attempts to realize a man's life will necessarily omit many events and probably will suffer from an episodic structure featuring intense dramatic events or moving from one striking tableau to another, a criticism levelled at Plumes in the Dust.

Treadwell spent the next year, 1937, going around the world by steamer. Among other countries she visited India, Japan, China, Ceylon and Egypt. After her return she studied the effects of the depression on California farmers and fruit growers. This stimulus and study fed into her novel, Hope for a Harvest, written in 1938 and 1939.

One must recall that Treadwell was distinctly a Californian all her life. She often referred to herself as coming from pioneering California stock--part miner, part Mexican, part American. She maintained her Old Trees ranch in Stockton as working acreage until its sale in 1954. She took an interest in the ranches around Old Trees and observed the influx of immigrants who were able to make a success of their farms where the California Caucasians had failed. At this point in the economic depression of the thirties, many

people were proposing ways in which the country could recover its former dynamism. Treadwell's idea had to do with reinvigorating our national character with liberal doses of hard work, discipline, and faith in America's opportunities. She poured this into Hope for a Harvest.

The Theatre Guild had been looking for a vehicle for the eminent acting team of Fredric March and Florence Eldridge. Treadwell adapted the completed novel into the three-act play copyrighted July 9, 1938.

The first version of the play is quite different from the final acting version. Clearly Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn of the Theatre Guild had much to do with tailoring the play for the Marches. In the first version, a middle-aged Sue Thatcher returns from Europe, where war has already started, to make a home on a small California ranch she has inherited from her grandmother. She meets a cousin, Elliott Martin, who personifies the failure of the farmer in California. She pities him but feels more affinity for Joe de Lucchi, the hard-working immigrant who is making a living from the soil. Her old friend, Edward Engstrom, embittered by the wife who deserted him, resists helping Sue because of his hatred for de Lucchi. Sue works hard to rebuild the old ranch residence and land. She begins to succeed, which gives hope to Engstrom. A parallel thread in the plot involves young Pat Martin, Elliott's daughter. She is pregnant by a young man who runs off to marry someone else. She confesses to Sue and asks money for an abortion. Sue sees

the perfect solution and gratification of her heart's desire-- to have a child. She agrees to care for Pat, raise the child herself, and Engstrom will help by caring for the farm.

As Hope for a Harvest was revised for March and Eldridge, both Elliott Martin and Carlotta Thatcher (formerly Sue), were made more sympathetic and more warmly American-- both were given speeches of patriotism scattered throughout the play. Engstrom disappears as his character is absorbed by Martin. Toni Martin (formerly Pat) becomes pregnant by the local boy but is married by de Lucchi's son who will raise the child as his own. By the final curtain, Elliott has rediscovered what he really wants: to settle down with Carlotta and regain his dignity as a man of the land.

The Samuel French acting version contains a brief preface which provides background and a suggestion of plot:

Hope for a Harvest is laid in a fruitful section of California where Elliott Martin, once an ardent and prosperous peach-grower, has lost most of his land to the more energetic immigrants, and now ekes out a living running a filling-station. The country swarms with Okies, and only the Italians and the Japanese are inclined to exert themselves on the land. Meanwhile the California farmers stand around indulging themselves in self-pity and racial intolerance, hoping for the millenium and a chance to get something for nothing. Into this "country slum" comes Carlotta Thatcher, Elliott Martin's cousin, returned from fallen France after twenty years in Europe. She is appalled at what has happened to the once-fertile lands of her childhood. She takes up life in the old Thatcher ranchhouse . . . and determines to make a living on the land. . . . She rouses Cousin Elliott from his lethargy and even brings about an understanding between him and his arch-enemy, an Italian who has been successful by dint of hard work. . . . Elliott's daughter is

matched with an idealistic Italian boy and the future is made hopeful through the vitality of the people themselves. . . . 121

It appears that someone encouraged Treadwell to insert speeches of a patriotic nature in the play. It seems reasonable to assume that Langner and Helburn moved the play in this direction. In 1939-40, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart scored a critical success with The American Way, a patriotic paean to the democratic ideal. Since the stars of that production were March and Eldridge, it is probable that the Guild was looking for a similar success. However, the inclusion of these speeches, moving as they may have been, sacrificed something of pace and dramatic action. Carlotta invokes the memory of pioneering days with this speech (Act I, p. 26):

. . . And you know, Elliott, I drove the same road that Grandma Thatcher drove her ox team over ninety years ago--as near as I could figure it. I stayed at Emigrant Gap last night and I came down out of the mountains with the sun this morning. You remember, Elliott, how Grandma Thatcher used to tell us how the great valley looked that day they drove down into it? Miles and miles of just the land and the sky and the great oak trees. The Promised Land! Not a human being or a house anywhere.

She is bewildered by the change in this lovely San Joaquin valley. Elliott's answer exposes the chauvinistic prejudices which Treadwell was addressing (Act I, pp. 28-29):

ELLIOTT

. . . All the old ranches are nothing but dumps now.

¹²¹Sophie Treadwell, Hope For a Harvest (New York: Samuel French, 1942), pp. 3-4. All dialogue will be cited from this acting edition.

LOTTA

Yes--I saw the Pearson place as I came down the road from the hills, and the Merrill's--and the Gordon's--all the fine old ranches I used to know! The trees cut down, the barns falling in--the--what's happened?

ELLIOTT

Oh, nobody lives in 'em anymore but Dagoes and Japs. They've driven us out, Lot.

LOTTA

How?

ELLIOTT

Oh, undercut us--overlived us--overbred us--an inferior race will always breed out a superior one--

LOTTA

I thought when I left Europe I was getting away from all that!

ELLIOTT

You walked right into it again. Wait till you see your mail box--there's a whole row of 'em there--where just our one Thatcher box used to be--Cadematori, Yamaguchi, Sanguinetti, Matsumoto--Cardozo--Ita--all living on what was just our one ranch--and all despising each other--and--

LOTTA

But I thought in America!--

ELLIOTT

Oh, they all have automobiles and lipsticks and washing-machines--but underneath they are just what they were!--new scil but old roots.

Treadwell was a forerunner of the sixties in her awareness of our rape of the land and her respect for the American Indian way; but speeches like the following spoken by the reformed Elliott seemed to the critics to be badly written inspirational messages (Act III, p. 109):

. . . Just thinkin' and diggin'--diggin' and thinkin'--about the land. . . There's something awful wrong, Lot--about what people like us have let happen to our

land. Two hundred million acres of it just plain used up since we took it over from the Indians. You see, the Indians respected the land--they knew there are gods in it. We ain't got any gods any more. Just a lot of machines--like that--hear that thing out there? God, look at it tearin' into the earth--pullin' for sixty horses--sixty horses that ain't there no more--to eat and to fertilize. Just one smart machine. It's smart all right. But maybe what we're lettin' it do to us is stupid. We been too damn busy makin' things to think what they're doing to us--They've made us damn lazy for one thing. There isn't a kid around here who'll put a shovel in the ground for you. He'll sit on the seat of that damned thing--but he won't put a shovel in the ground--a shovel brings him down. Think of that--a democracy--and work brings you down--Everybody wants to be something they ain't--bigger--not better! Bigger! As Ma says--"Something for nothing--something for nothing!"

Out of town, Hope For a Harvest did very well. After the April 4, 1941 opening in New Haven at the Shubert Theatre, the critics raved:

Beauty and wisdom, and penetrating criticism of one phase of the American scene make the intensely moving drama, "Hope For a Harvest," an outstanding play. . . .

It would be difficult to say whether the striking beauty of the play and the smoothness of its flow is more a result of accomplished acting or the skillful structure achieved by the author. Last night each consideration seemed so interwoven with the other that a perfect whole resulted. One could not separate them. It was enough to accept gratefully Miss Treadwell's work and the portrayal of her characters by true artists.¹²²

F. R. Johnson, in the April 5 New Haven Journal Courier, said that some judicious pruning would correct the play's lack of tempo which he considered its weakness.

¹²²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 9, NWA. "Brilliant Cast Presents Moving Play at Shubert," April 5, 1941.

The play was scheduled into the Guild's subscription cities and the next stop was Boston. Elliot Norton, Boston's toughest critic, extolled:

"Hope For A Harvest" . . . is a beautiful play, wise and sane and stirring, one of the major theatrical events of this season. Sophie Treadwell, who wrote it, will find herself the target of some bitterness, because in it she speaks out boldly and utters unpleasant truths.

She will be called a reactionary and an enemy of progress in some quarters. There will be screaming and fuming and wailing among those opposed. But a great many people will find much hope in "Hope For A Harvest" and much that is profoundly stimulating.

A quiet play for the most part, not without some hearty comedy, this is a solid drama of our time and although the setting is in California ranch country, it is by no means a local story. It seems to say--and perhaps it is even too explicit--that these are times for inventory, for personal stocktaking and for the setting of a new course which may well prove to be very much like the old course.

It seems to say--and does say--that racial hatreds and the bitterness of men against men in any country can bring disaster; that the blind bitterness of men who seek excuses for failure in denunciation of those around them can lead the same way; that there is mischief in the casual assumption that life owes any man a fat living, as distinguished from a decent living, or that life owes anything to anyone who refuses to accept responsibility. . . .

Miss Treadwell is writing for others, for those who have been drifting along with the tide of the machine age, fumbling and complaining a great deal and thinking not very much.¹²³

Hope For A Harvest rolled up more successes on the road. An item appeared in Variety noting that four Boston critics hailed the show as the theatre event of the season;

¹²³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Elliot Norton, "Stirring Play at Colonial," The Boston Globe, April 1, 1941,

that it had \$75,000 in advance sales and had grossed \$20,000 for its first week. The Washington Star gave advice to writers:

Frustrated playwrights especially should go to the National. . . . There they will discover the wisdom of fitting one's play to the mood of one's time. Miss Treadwell has done that most agreeably in her drama of what has happened to America and what America might . . . do to correct it. It is simple, sincere, honest, and human in the light of this dark day.¹²⁴

Nelson Ball, The Washington Post, called it "one of the most substantial hits of the season. . . . It possesses those warm qualities of human understanding, sympathy and mutual helpfulness that make it a particularly inspiring document at just this juncture in dislocated national and international affairs." The Times-Herald found it "beautiful and inspiring . . . one that achieves rare eloquence and a happy harvest . . . "¹²⁵

In Pittsburgh, critic Karl Krug said Treadwell had written, "with incisive clarity (after her first act), of the sociological and economical upheaval of the past ten years."¹²⁶ The verdict was the same in Baltimore, "fine, provocative play;"

¹²⁴ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Jay Carmody, "The Marches Bring a Play of Merit to the National," The Washington Star, April 21, 1941.

¹²⁵ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Bernie Harrison, "'Hope For A Harvest' Proves Inspiring Play," Washington Times-Herald, April 21, 1941.

¹²⁶ Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Karl Krug, "Superb Cast Backs Star in Guild Play," Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph, April 28, 1941.

and Philadelphia, "a grand play . . . filled with understanding." Although one Philadelphia critic called it a "living editorial."¹²⁷

Hope For A Harvest opened in New York, November 26, 1941. The reaction of the in-town critics was different from their out-of-town colleagues. Brooks Atkinson called it a "loose and languid play."¹²⁸ Richard Watts said he didn't believe it and he didn't think Miss Treadwell believed it either.¹²⁹ Wilella Waldorf called it "hardly a profound work, following a conventional and generally obvious plot pattern. . . ."¹³⁰ John Anderson, the New York Journal American termed it a "tedious symposium, littered with words and almost empty of drama."¹³¹

¹²⁷Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. J. H. Keen, "Hope For A Harvest," Philadelphia Daily News, November 11, 1941.

¹²⁸Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," The New York Times, November 27, 1941.

¹²⁹Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theater," New York Herald Tribune, November 27, 1941.

¹³⁰Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Wilella Waldorf, "'Hope For A Harvest' New Comedy at the Guild Theatre," November 27, 1941.

¹³¹Clipping Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. John Anderson, "'Hope For A Harvest' Presented by Guild," New York Journal American, November 27, 1941.

Brooks Atkinson, in his Sunday column, had time and space to provide a more thoughtful opinion on Treadwell's "back to the soil" play:

. . . Although Miss Treadwell describes the rural situation accurately, her conclusion over-simplifies an enormously complicated subject. The old way of life Mrs. Thatcher dreams about can never be restored as nothing in the past can be restored; and, since she has very little money left, uncertain labor resources to draw upon and not much physical strength or practical experience, I should think she would be the last person to cut through the economic and social problems of farming and restore a disused fruit ranch to production. . . . Farming deals in living realities--in many cases with highly perishable products. It is no profession for the amateur; and a romantic impulse to get back to the soil is feeble equipment to bring to neglected farm. Although Miss Treadwell is perfectly right in perceiving a decadence of the old American spirit on most small farms, Mrs. Thatcher's capacities for reviving it seem to me to be remarkably small.¹³²

Perhaps, as Stark Young suggested ". . . one of the chief weaknesses of the play is its attempt to solve a very large and real problem in terms of a very slight and theatrical fable."¹³³ But Treadwell eagerly was pursuing a commercial, Broadway, big-time success with this play. She had Langner, Helburn, director Lester Vail, and the Marches to satisfy. In rewriting Hope For A Harvest to form a suitable vehicle for Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, the love story was expanded, a change which trivialized the original intent of the play. Given the attitudes of the time, the

¹³²Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Brooks Atkinson, "Back To The Soil," The New York Times, December 7, 1941.

¹³³Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA, Stark Young, The New Republic, December 13, 1941.

question of Toni's illegitimate baby was solved in the much more conventional manner than Treadwell's original idea.

Treadwell conveyed to the Guild producing staff her own idea of the play and emphasized the importance of the child to Carlotta. We know from the final acting version that she lost that argument:

My difficulty is creating a significant character out of Elliott! At first I saw him as the mere down-and-outer, never with much character, taking refuge in talk and Dago-hating for his failure to handle his life. In leaving in this original Elliott as the foundation of the new character and attempting then to merge him with the character of Engstrom by the use of some sentimental bridges from one character to the other, I feel I failed to make him either interesting or believable. I hadn't thought the character through in its own terms enough.

. . . He is really the keystone of the play. I see him as one of the millions of middle-class American men of the present day, who, beaten down by the economic defeats, have lost their grip both in a material and spiritual way. These are the very men, who in Europe welcomed and are now welcoming a "new order."

Concerning the main line of the play, I would like to have Lotta find her real fulfillment through Toni's child. This was my first conception of the play. This is what I started out to write--a childless woman--deeply loving--deeply maternal--too simple, too sound, too powerful in her instincts to be able to satisfy herself for long with bodiless substitutes. These hidden, deep frustrations have undermined the whole edifice of her life, so that the death of her husband, on whom she has centered all her great capacity for loving, leaves her spiritually homeless--bankrupt. I would like to make any fulfillment through Elliott secondary--not completed in the present, but a promise for the future.

Throughout the play I would like to accent more the contrast between the richness and freedom of America in contrast to the poverty and spiritual enslavement of Europe and also the beginning awareness of the

terrifying likenesses that lie not only in conditions, but in what is going on in the people themselves.¹³⁴

A study of all the reviews from both the subscription tour and the New York premiere suggests that the in-town critics, with their "high and fairly inflexible standards of criticism,"¹³⁵ and their Manhattan provincialism which suspects a lack of civilization west of the Hudson River, probably contributed to the failure of this play. In weighing the differences between the two sets of reviews, Richard Watts, Jr. asked: ". . . are Manhattan reviewers so provincial that they cannot appreciate a play which deals with agriculture as a civilizing force in the United States?"¹³⁶ His answer was no, but the answer was too defensive. There are indications that the audiences loved the play, and the critics hated it. Burns Mantle admitted that the local experts could discourage playgoing when they did not kill it outright; and despite the reviews, Mantle included Hope For A Harvest in his Ten Best list for 1941-42 along with such plays as John Steinbeck's The Moon Is Down, Angel Street, by Patrick Hamilton; Blithe

¹³⁴Notes During Re-write, Hope For A Harvest, TS, UALSC, Box 15.

¹³⁵Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Burns Mantle, "Choice Was Limited and Selection Tough, But There Were Some Good Shows," New York Sunday News, June 14, 1942.

¹³⁶Clipping, Treadwell Scrapbook 11, NWA. Richard Watts, Jr., "The Theatre: When Critics Differ," New York Herald Tribune, n.d.

Spirit by Noel Coward and Maxwell Anderson's Candle In The Wind. Treadwell had another consolation: Hope For A Harvest was given a radio broadcast in December on the Treasury Hour's Millions for Defense; and twelve years later, a telecast on the United States Steel Hour.

Twenty-five years had elapsed since Treadwell's move to New York City--the heart of commercial theatre--and her final Broadway production, Hope For A Harvest in 1941. During that time she had completed some twenty-two full-length plays, not counting revisions, seven of which had received Broadway productions. In addition, she had written hundreds of columns of newsprint and two novels. In January 1942, when Harvest closed on Broadway and the United States had entered World War II, Treadwell was fifty-six years old. She had spent the prime of her life as a prolific playwright, journalist, and novelist, filling newspapers and the stage with her own special kind of crusading for women, for Mexicans, for all the off-beat personalities about whom she wrote who struggled to survive, hearing the beat of that different drum. She wrote comedies, melodramas, and one tragedy. She wrote plays of social protest and drawingroom comedies. By producing and directing her own plays, she became one of two or three women writer-producer-directors in America, the other two being Rachel Crothers and Susan Glaspell, who directed occasionally.

After Hope For A Harvest closed, Treadwell went back to her workroom over the carriage house on her small estate

in Newtown and began writing another play. She didn't know that she had seen her last Broadway production; but had she known, it might not have made any difference. She probably would have written the new play anyway. As she jotted in one of her diaries, she felt alive only when she was writing. As her goal, Treadwell had envisioned success in the commercial theatre; and for whatever reason her achievements have been ignored, we must recognize her more than modest success in the theatre over a twenty-year period.

CHAPTER IV

Recapitulation and Rejection

The next twenty years in Sophie Treadwell's life were productive, although not as successful as she would have liked. She wrote seven new plays; accomplished major revisions of at least six other; was hired by Howard Hawks to write the screenplay for Dishonored Lady; had three plays televised and one novel published. She served nearly a year during World War II as a special correspondent in Mexico for the Herald-Tribune, interviewing government officials and writing feature stories. She directed a play once more. She became a mother. During the rest of her life she alternated between giving up theatre and writing another play, becoming intensely excited about the new drama, wondering if it signaled the renaissance of her career. She had bouts of self-doubt, melancholy and illness; but she didn't cease writing until a year before her death in 1970.

In the next four months after Hope For A Harvest closed in January, 1942, Treadwell wrote Highway, a play she later described in her 1948 diary "in the category of Peg-O-My-Heart and other heart warmers." In a page of comments inserted in the manuscript she explained:

This is a play about a girl who runs a chili stand on a highway in Texas, and of some of the people who come in and out there. Nothing very much happens, but all of the people--one way or another--find their way ahead.

It is not intended to be a play of plot, but a play of character--of human character--in character parts for character actors. They come on--do their stuff--go off--almost as in vaudeville. And they are chosen to give variety and contrast and change of pace. And each has his own little story.

Only the girl's story runs all through. It is a sort of Cinderella story. That is, she gets the Prince all right. But he is a prince without a palace. Still there's a glass slipper, a glass slipper that seems to fit about everybody. Maybe this is the "theme."¹³⁷

There are seven versions of Highway but they all follow the same general line: Zepha runs a roadside restaurant through which move various characters: Pierre and Mimi, a French actor and English Lady; an oil-rich American Indian; drillers, a truckdriver, an old bookkeeper; a rich oilman and a young Texas wild-catter whom Zepha loves. Zepha makes great coffee and a memorable bowl of chili, she's the chef with a heart of gold who sacrifices her youth for her alcoholic father, and her money for her wild-catter lover. Eventually she is rewarded by love and marriage.

These background characters are interesting but not always probable: the French actor, Pierre, drops into the chili parlor on his way to Hollywood, full of hope. He drops into the same chili parlor on the way back to New York full of defeat. More acceptable are the patrons who live in the neighborhood and frequent the little restaurant, although

¹³⁷ Sophie Treadwell, Highway, TS, UALSC, Box 17.

many of them are characters of Jonsonian humour; Zepha's Pop is an alcoholic because he's lonely; the oil-rich Indian repeatedly wrecks cars and pays cash for new ones--he can't drive; the trucker is always attempting to seduce Zepha. Only Zepha is on stage long enough to develop more than one facet of character; and her strongest characteristic is offering good advice or help to her customers. To the trucker (Act I, p. 10):

TRUCKDRIVER

. . . Gimme a nodoz. That'll keep me awake.

ZEPHA

You oughtn't to take that stuff.

TRUCKDRIVER

Why not?

ZEPHA

It's bad for you--worse than whiskey.

TRUCKDRIVER

Lotta stuff wors'n whiskey.

ZEPHA

It's bad for your heart.

To the rich oilman, Billings (Act I, p. 32):

ZEPHA

You're drunk.

BILLINGS

I ain't never been drunk in my life.

ZEPHA

You drink a quart of whiskey a day. . . .

BILLINGS

I can always tend to business!

ZEPHA

You sound like a window-washer on one of them high windows in that hotel of yours. The strap slips and

he starts down singing, "Don't worry--I'm all right--I'm tendin' to business."

BILLINGS

I'm in good shape.

ZEPHA

So far--but you just got about two more stories to go. . . . Here, pull yourself up.
(Gives him folder)

BILLINGS

What's that?

ZEPHA

That's a place where they cure up people like you. It costs a lot of money--too much for poor people--but not for you. You can afford it. Go straighten yourself up. You're a mess--a mean mess.

Her help to the young wild-catter is more tangible (Act I, p. 43):

ZEPHA

How much do you need?

RICH

Not so much! I'll rent my tools, and--

ZEPHA

Got to hire two crews, ain't you? Day and night?

RICH

I'll take the night with a driller. That makes it only a crew and a half. . . .

ZEPHA

(Takes out bankbook)
Here.

RICH

What's that?

ZEPHA

It's the money to start you drillin'. It's my savings book. . . . It won't see you through but it'll get you goin'.

Zepha gives, sacrifices, and suffers. She appears to be crusty and independent, but her actions belie those

characteristics. Howard Lindsay, co-author of Life With Father and State of the Union, wrote to Treadwell after reading Highway: ". . . I just couldn't go along with Zepha. It seems to me that in the crises she behaved the way you wanted her to behave in order to demonstrate your theme, and I stopped believing in her."¹³⁸ Zepha's behavior seems to be in the mold of the traditional woman who is supposed to find her fulfillment in self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Treadwell wanted to create a character with whom the audience would sympathize and empathize. She created Zepha in this traditional, acceptable mold. Perhaps the reason the character failed is that Treadwell intellectually understood those attributes which made up the traditional woman but had little emotional understanding or personal identification with this type of character. In other words, Treadwell manipulated Zepha in those directions Treadwell thought a more traditional woman would go; but she produced a puppet and not a character.

Highway was given a workshop production in Pasadena, California, in April, 1944. Subsequently, Ned Marin and Charles MacArthur agreed to put up the money for a professional production, but, in Treadwell's words, "this fizzled." In August, 1948, she and Arthur Hopkins staged it with the Newtown Players in Connecticut. She noted in her 1948 diary

¹³⁸Howard Lindsay, Letter to Sophie Treadwell, January 24, 1944, UALSC, Box 17.

". . . audience seemed to like it, but the New Yorkers did not (as usual). . . . The Newtown Bee had actually an adverse review. I surely have put my mark on the mores of this village."

At least Highway achieved some success as a television script for the United States Steel Hour, produced by the Theatre Guild. Telecast February 16, 1954, it starred Diana Lynn and Kevin McCarthy. Treadwell was pleased by the adaptation done by Earl Hamner, Jr., and wrote to Lawrence Langner February 17: ". . . I was surprised at how much of the play you were able to keep . . . and I send you my thanks."

In November, 1942, Treadwell accepted an assignment with the New York Herald-Tribune as newspaper correspondent in Mexico. In the ten months she was in Mexico City she wrote at least ten feature articles and one play, The Last Border. She searched for a house to buy and acquired a dog, Malinche. Each morning she worked in the sun on the roof and studied Spanish in the afternoons, a language in which she already was fluent. She spent much of her time preparing lists of questions for the President of Mexico and other officials, most of which were not answered. Still, this resourceful journalist was able to write ten feature stories: "Mexico Reborn," "The Roman Catholic Church in Mexico," "Peace by Revolution," "Mexico: A Revolution by Education," "Some Mexican Problems," "The Racial Myth," "A History of Mexico," "New Design and Old Mexico," "Mexican Maze" and "The Pattern of Mexico."

On May 4, 1943, while looking at real estate, Treadwell saw a "perfect house."¹³⁹ She was excited by its prospect, and the striking aspect of the experience was that it inspired a play. The diary for this period gives a representative picture of how Treadwell worked and with what speed.

May 5: I spend morning on the roof. Play idea gets better. . . . I begin to see the set clearly.

May 11: I have decided to quit everything [news assignments] and try to put the play together.

However, she doesn't quit and spends the month of June on news articles.

July 1: Began dictation my play--notes on scenes for Act I. Went very well--am in good spirits. . . . Having started my play I feel much happier.

July 5: Dictated scene outline--scene notes for Act II.

July 6: Dictate Act III scene notes.

July 14: Work on Act II.

July 15: Work on Act III.

July 17: I dictate Act I through synopsis--am pleased with it.

July 23: Dictate synopsis Act III--not satisfied--needs more work.

July 28: I really would like to be with--know--more Spanish women. I am now convinced that what my father always said--that his grandfather came from Spain--is the truth. I am exactly like these grey-haired Spanish women. I look like them exactly and I feel like them.

July 30: I finish dictating synopsis of Act III. Synopsis of whole play now in order. Ready to start dictating dialogue.

¹³⁹ Sophie Treadwell, 1943 Diary, NWA, Case 4.

August 2: I begin dictation of dialogue of the play. I begin at the beginning--the title--which I usually put last. I call it Madrid 7 but undoubtedly this will change many times.

August 3: Dictate all morning.

August 4: Dictate all morning.

August 5: Dictate all morning.

August 6: I became terribly sick in the street--struggle back to my room.

August 7: Still sick. . . . I have come to a decision--to go home--if the paper will give me leave. I must finish my play--and can't take these poisonings anymore.

August 8: I get up and crawl down to the kitchen to make myself some "tea" (a sick old woman).¹⁴⁰

August 9: Dictated on first act to Margie. Am way behind now, of course. . . . Margie calls in the afternoon to quit. I go to bed disturbed by news from Margie. I so want to have Act I before I leave.

August 10: I feel sick and weak. Work on act along. . . . Character of Kent becomes more interesting. . . . May call play Across the Border.

August 11: Carmen comes [Margie's replacement] . I dictate a scene.

August 15: Work on scene between Christina and the new Kent. Work out the rest of the act with the new slant on these characters.

August 16: Work on synopsis in morning--not quite smooth yet. Need a lot of quiet to get in the clear.

August 17: Cannot work on play--too much confusion in the room.

¹⁴⁰By "tea," Treadwell meant a special mixture of herbs she had concocted from her various experiences around the world with gastrointestinal maladies.

August 18: Got my pullman reservation--will take Malinche and go home.

This play, The Last Border, was copyrighted February 5, 1944, little more than five months later.¹⁴¹ The script was completed before the copyright date, however, because Arthur Hopkins sent Border to Twentieth-Century Fox and Warner Bros., on January 17, 1944. Treadwell recorded her intentions for The Last Border on a page marked "Notes:" "The theme I had in mind when I started to write this play was the necessity for violence in life. I was trying to justify--for myself perhaps--the urge for destruction that now rules the world. But I do not feel that I succeeded."

The Last Border centers on two Spanish refugees, Christine and her son, Tony, who flee Spain after the fascists murder Christina's royalist husband. They take refuge in a boarding house in Mexico City peopled by various Mexican and American characters: Herculano, an old, drunken servant; Sinforosa, his employer; Lupe, the beautiful mountain woman; Constantine, an American newspaperman; Patricio, a half-Irish, half-Indian artist. Each of the minor characters has a little thread woven into the plot, but the play concerns the violent murder of Tony by a son seeking revenge for an execution of his father carried out by Tony's father. The son had been spared because Christina begged for his young life. Constantine finds revenge for Christina and for himself by shooting

¹⁴¹Sophie Treadwell, The Last Border, TS, UALSC, Box 18.

Tony's murderer. They escape together into the mountains of Mexico where they will be safe with the Indians. It is the civilized who are dangerous.

It is through Constantine that Treadwell airs her sentiment that violence is necessary in life. Christina knows the man who murdered her son but because she didn't actually see his face, she doesn't want to testify (Act II, p. 21):

CONSTANTINE

You know he is the man!

CHRISTINA

Yes! Yes! He is the man.

CONSTANTINE

You want him brought to justice!

CHRISTINA

To justice--yes!

CONSTANTINE

Then you must identify him! Or they will let him go--this brutal murderer . . . an agent of all the forces your husband died fighting! . . . Think of all the evil he has brought against you! And you have only to say you--

CHRISTINA

Oh, Senor, please! I cannot. . . . I must tell the truth.

CONSTANTINE

In a world full of lies? . . . You know what you are doing with your truth, don't you? You are letting a guilty man go free. . . .

CHRISTINA

But truth can never be proved by lies, Senor, no more than goodness can come from evil!

CONSTANTINE

(Bitterly)

Evil can come from goodness when that goodness is weakness. This evil that has made waste of your life

is the direct result of goodness--your goodness!
Your pity! You interceded for this man's life.

CHRISTINA

It was not pity. It was justice. He was
innocent!

CONSTANTINE

Then perhaps--now he is guilty.

CHRISTINA

And what has made him guilty? Injustice! My
husband's injustice! A just man--unjust! And what
made him unjust? Anger! Hatred! Fear! It is a
chain of evil! And I will not add one link--not
one! . . .

CONSTANTINE

When it breaks, the guilty one goes free! Can you
not see that evil must be fought with evil? No!
All you good people--you're all alike--vain,
fatuous and blind! You wear armor instead of a
knife! Carry a flag instead of a machine gun!
Retire to your high towers of truth and justice--and
leave the world to the ruthless and the wicked--you
must come down from your nobility! Come down and
fight--evil with evil--lies with lies--betrayal with
betrayal--or you are lost. You and all you want
life to be--gone--wiped out--murdered--dead. . . .
When truth is murdered it is dead! And the dead do
not rise--except in myths--and they, too, are dead.

A difficulty with this scene and the whole play is
that Christina and others argue persuasively for an end to
violence which weakens Treadwell's argument for the necessity
of violence. The playwright admitted in her diary that the
play should move "into a channel more near my own inner feel-
ing." In this next revision, Treadwell returns to her self-
sacrificing woman. She noted down the new synopsis:

Act I.--as is. (All the mother's capacity for love
centered on her son--and fed by memories of her
husband.)

Act II. The first part--as is. (The emptiness and
desolation of the mother bereft of this one personal

love.) It is the taking of the young street walker into the empty room of her son that gives new life to the mother and turns her love out to the world.

Act III. The mother is happy, a radiant woman (with that laughter and joy that is sometimes in some nuns), a woman filled with grace. Her relation to the street girl is strengthened. And it is she who tells the woman who has lost her lover to take his children. Constantine has gone in pursuit of Sarmonte, and comes to warn Christina of [his] return. Constantine takes the gun to kill. Christina--trying to stop the bullet is killed. The last scene is her death (where she sees Sarmonte as her son and Constantine as her husband).

The Last Border moved more in this direction until version seven and eight when it went through a metamorphosis into Woman With Lilies, a romantic comedy in two acts.

The early versions of The Last Border were interesting plays in which Treadwell mixed pro-war and anti-war themes using Mexico and Mexicans as milieu for the principles. Certainly these versions needed pruning and focusing on a single message to perfect them as well-structured plays. But, no matter how well-structured the original Last Border play might have become, it was a political play about foreigners set in a country of little interest to New York or American audiences. Experiencing repeated rejections of the script, Treadwell shaped it in the direction of a love story between two characters whose natures changed with each succeeding plot.

She continued to work on The Last Border until July, 1944, when she signed a contract to write the screenplay for Dishonored Lady. She had a preliminary meeting with Howard Hawkes which lasted all morning on July 11. By July 20, she

was in her own office at the studio with a fine secretary. She tried to work on two projects simultaneously: Dishonored Lady during the day and a revision of Highway in the evening. She was given several treatments of the screenplay by other people and it was her job to pull these all together. By August 29 she was completely frustrated. She felt she could not write to other people's order (at least in this circumstance). On August 30 she quit her job, "the picture bubble burst." But she said she knew how released prisoners felt.

On October 1, she went to a party and talked at length with Charles Laughton. Indefatigable, by October 5, she was rewriting The Last Border for Laughton. From her diary entries at the end of 1944, it appears that she laid the Border project aside, feeling stale, tired, and terribly nervous. She became increasingly ill and left Hollywood to return to her refuge--Old Trees Ranch in Stockton.

Little is known about Treadwell's activities for the next two years except that she continued revising Highway, For Saxophone, and The Last Border and explored unnumbered avenues for placing her scripts with producers.

Her next diary covers 1947, "a year of false starts," as she termed it. She spent the first five months working strenuously on the ranch: transplanting, remodeling, painting, and scrubbing. She didn't write at all, being completely preoccupied with restoring the ranch for possible sale.

She returned to Newtown on June 11, and spent time visiting with old friends: Jeanne and Jo Meilziner, Freddie and Flo March, Kyle Crichton, Paul Osborne. Arthur Hopkins, now ill, spent many weekends at her home. By September she was regaining her impetus to write but became discouraged again after Ruth Gordon, assistant to agent Kay Brown, told her they were not interested in her work. This was one of the many times when she threatened to cease writing altogether. "I decide to finish started [sic] work on Sax and then put up the blinds for good." On September 22, she received word that Machinal would be done at Marie Darrack's little theatre in San Francisco. This was good news but repeats of past successes were never enough for Treadwell. Her writing was not going well and she was discouraged. "October 6 [1947]: Worked on Border all morning on patio-- a lovely day--I have no faith in what I am doing and find it difficult and depressing."

Then on October 9, she started work on Let's Go Home, one of the early titles of Woman With Lilies. As stated previously, this play grew out of The Last Border but, as Treadwell said, "it has not much to do with the first play--except that it is in the same milieu, and [has] some of the same incidental background characters."¹⁴²

¹⁴²Sophie Treadwell, Letter to Mr. Leverton of Samuel French, Inc., New York City, n.d., UALSC, Box 21.

Retaining background characters and some incidents, Treadwell turned her anti-violence play into a romantic comedy featuring Daniel O'Higgins, a fiery, independent artist and his former wife, Ann Blair. Ann leaves a successful advertising firm to try to recapture her ex-husband's love. He's living with a native woman, Lupe, and Ann is supporting a handsome singer, Francisco. Ann and Dan work their way through jealousy, resentment, competition, to selflessness, to a new love.

Treadwell finished this very different version of The Last Border on November 25, the version so different that the play was copyrighted under its new title, Woman With Lilies, May 10, 1948. This version was never produced.

Near the end of every year, Treadwell fell into a predictable pattern. Thanksgiving and Christmas would be times of stress and sadness. Then she would become optimistic and face the new year hopefully. However, in January, 1946, Treadwell was packing scripts in her studio in Stockton and wrote of her despair: "January 28--I pack all day in studio--empty file of all my scripts--pack them for Newtown--a terrible despair drowns me when I look at all this work of a lifetime--for what result? Years of struggle. Years of escape." By December 31, 1947, she was cheered:

So, this year comes to its end--the first six months among the most dreary and defeated I have known. The last six also defeated so far as achievement goes. But curiously enough, I feel cheerful and hopeful. My mind--empty, almost apathetic so many months (the first time in my life!) is alive with thoughts and images.

In March, 1949, Treadwell sailed for France. She was working on the outline for Judgment In The Morning, an updated version of Andrew Wells' Lady discussed on pp. 146-150. She also had the idea of going to postwar Germany. She wanted to write stories of the three different kinds of government to which the Germans had been treated in the three different zones. She soon abandoned the idea for the stories and devoted all her time to Judgment In The Morning.

It was during this visit to Germany that Treadwell made arrangements to adopt a baby. The circumstances surrounding this decision will be discussed more fully in Chapter V. During the summer and fall while she awaited the finalization of these arrangements, Treadwell toured Germany, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, England, and Spain:

Spain, 1949

October 19: Took a long sunbath. Struggled with my various play ideas. Suddenly it came! A new one. I turned it around and around for two hours. Maybe this is it. . . . I have begun a new play!

October 20: My play grows.

October 21: Started outline of play. . . . I realize I have started those long days of tedium with only the mornings livable and alive. (While I work that seems to be the climate of writing a play.)

October 22: Worked on start of play. It takes shape.

October 24-26: Work goes well.

October 27: At last a wonderful character came up. He should make the play.

October 28: Play outlined in my mind--new character gets better and better.¹⁴³

Treadwell interrupted her work on the new play to return to Germany in November, 1949. Much of her time was taken up with arranging for documents required in connection with the adoption of her son, William Treadwell. The excitement of this somewhat startling new element in her life, combined with her usual state of nervous tension contributed to a physical collapse. Treadwell spent more than two months in a sanatorium in Vienna. She worked steadily on the play through her recuperation and, on April 15, 1950, she finished A String Of Pearls.

This remarkable three-act play is part melodrama, part well-made play and part suspense thriller, unlike anything Treadwell had written before. Of it, the author observed in her 1950 diary, "no play ever caused me so much time to think through. . . . I think it is a good play--technically the best I have done."

A String of Pearls limns the complex inter-relationships among the members of the Prentiss family and a half-English, half-Indian male secretary. Forty-two-year-old Edith Prentiss, confined to a wheelchair most of her life, has developed an intense interest in her brother's secretary, Sidney, who seems to possess, as part of his eastern religious beliefs, the power of healing. Sidney importunes her with

¹⁴³Sophie Treadwell, 1949 Diary, NWA, Case 4.

his love and they plan to marry, although Edith will not actually marry him until she is miraculously cured by Sidney and can walk.

Unknown to Edith, Sidney has previously seduced her seventeen-year-old niece, Katharine, who returns from college pregnant, thinking that Sidney will marry her. He refuses. She confesses to Edith both the fact of the child and the identity of the father. Edith sees in the situation the hand of God who has shown her the way to have a child by her husband-to-be. Edith convinces Katharine to give her the baby to raise as her own and they go to Mexico for four months to conceal the truth. In Mexico, Edith acquires papers which show her to be the child's natural mother.

Upon their return from Mexico, Edith makes Sidney her heir and guardian of "their" child. She conceals the will in a secret drawer in the library which once contained a string of pearls greatly valued by Katharine's dead mother who committed suicide. Katharine's mother, physically rejected by her husband, Langley, had turned to other men. Each man had added a pearl to her necklace symbolizing her beauty and value. Her suicide, which took place before the start of the play, came as the result of her discovery that the pearls were false. Edith's brother, Langley, embittered by his wife's infidelity, discloses that Sidney, who was supposed to have been praying for Edith every afternoon in a Buddhist temple, instead has been going to a house of prostitution where he

collects the earnings of one of the whores. Stunned by this revelation of fraudulent love, and weakened by illness, Edith succumbs to a heart attack.

Sidney attempts to steal the will out of the secret drawer, but Katharine gets there first and burns the will. Sidney then threatens to expose Edith's letters in which she speaks of him as the father of their child. However, as the play ends, Katharine decides to thwart him by confessing that the child is actually hers. He will have no claim to the estate and Katharine will raise the child.

A String Of Pearls is dense and very carefully plotted. The string of false pearls represents the fraudulent love exhibited by many of the characters. Sidney, objectively drawn by the author, is a fully-developed anti-hero, unsympathetic, but interesting and believable. The playwright does not load the case against him in the play: he may or may not be a fraud; and there is no evidence that he would not have made Edith a good husband had they married. The author makes clear that his attitudes have been formed partly by his treatment at the hands of English colonials and partly by his eastern religious beliefs.

After Treadwell completed the script, she gave it to Theresa Helburn who liked it and sent it to Helen Hayes. While writing Pearls, Treadwell thought that it was a possible vehicle for Hayes. Word of the play got around and Katherine Cornell asked to read it as a possible vehicle for

herself. Dorothy Gish was briefly interested. However, after this initial flurry, Treadwell could interest no one in A String Of Pearls. It was never produced.

Treadwell continued to work on other scripts during 1949 and 1950: Woman With Lilies, Judgment In The Morning, free-lance stories and a translation of work by philosopher Karl Jaspers whom she had come to admire. Her Machinal continued to be produced in 1950: on January 25 by Irwin Piscator's group in New York City; and on November 25 by the University of California at Berkeley.

Treadwell's next play to be copyrighted was Judgment In The Morning, June 27, 1952. The author had repeatedly reworked this later version of Andrew Wells' Lady, discussed on pp. 146-150 but Judgment In The Morning is changed very little from its predecessor. Andrew Wells has become a well-known lawyer who is a potential candidate for governor and perhaps future president. As in the original version, his wife is still a society woman, his daughter still a destructive debutante. His mistress is now the wife of a criminal he successfully prosecuted. The man, a psychopath, breaks jail, comes to his wife's home and discovers Wells there. He shoots at Wells, Wilma intercepts the bullet and dies. The young criminal commits suicide; Wells' secret is safe. Being a man of principle, he resolves to confess his part in the affair and, thus, ruin his career. But his wife convinces him to conceal the truth because of his potential value to society in public service.

As Treadwell admitted, she felt stale on this play. Perhaps as a consequence, none of the characters are likeable. Even Andrew Wells seems to alternate between prig and dupe in his relations with family and mistress. Judgment In The Morning is one example of Treadwell's dramaturgical recycling which failed. The characters are manipulated from outside incident instead of inner conviction. In her updating of the original story, she failed to compensate for the increased sophistication in audiences over the twenty years since Andrew Wells' Lady seemed a good idea. Judgment In The Morning was never produced.

By January, 1953, Treadwell had finished a new play, The Siren, intended for television.¹⁴⁴ This pro-American, anti-Russian, anti-Bomb, anti-war play grew out of the fear and disillusionment of the American people in the late forties and early fifties, a fear Treadwell shared. World War II had not been the end of armed conflict; Klaus Fuchs was a betrayer; the House Un-American Activities Committee was in full cry; the Rosenbergs had been convicted; we had a cold war; there was trouble in Korea; the Russians had the Bomb.

In her notes included in the front of the manuscript, Treadwell called this "a play about a traitorous scientist and the bomb. . . ." But it exposes a tangle of causes and emotions: the need for love, a plea for an end to war, a cry of faith, the bitter antagonism between the sexes.

¹⁴⁴Sophie Treadwell, The Siren, TS, UALSC, Box 20.

The action takes place in a small furnished apartment in Seattle, a hide-out which shelters Fred Miller, Russian spy. To this apartment comes Hallett Brandt, a brilliant scientist who is defecting to the Russians, and his wife, Anne. Brandt has developed a new bomb, the plans for which he is carrying to the Russians. His motivation is political conviction (Act I, p. 17):

HALLETT

Men have it in their power now at this very moment to completely destroy not only themselves--and all their works--but the world itself!

ANNE

I know all that! You mean the bomb--more bombs?

HALLETT

I mean at every level of being. Self destruction is taking place everywhere. Don't you see it, Anne? In only one place in the world--one only--are there now the forces that can keep this process in check. The Soviet Union. There only is the discipline--the dedication--the faith--the strength--that can save us--save the world.

ANNE

What about our own country?

HALLETT

Our own country is the past, Anne. . . . In twenty or thirty years there will be only one country. . . . One world--one Communist world. We live in a time of total crisis, Anne. The world is just now about to end its two thousand years of Christian civilization and enter into one diametrically different.

Brandt, who is crippled, has felt isolated all his life and now thinks he will be happy living in this Russian community of men who all hold the same convictions.

Brandt's cynicism about democracy is contrasted with the simple appreciation of America's opportunities as expressed by Helena Opid, a Polish immigrant whose son is serving in the United States Army. Helena, psychologically damaged by her exposure to violence in World War II, reveals another view of the Russians as she talks about her dead husband. In Helena's speech, Treadwell repeats Brandt's use of the word "community" and paints a horrifying image (Act I, p. 25):

ANNE

Where was your husband--at the front?

HELENA

No. In a forest. . . . A grave. A great common grave in the forest--a community of the dead. Twenty-five thousand Polish officers lie there! Lie with Lye--and he's--dead--murdered. Do you know how the Russians do it? Always the same way--single murders or mass murders--a shot at the back of the head. Sometimes for a single murder they put a tennis ball in the man's mouth first. It is cleaner--but for mass murders.

ANNE

How awful.

HELENA

Yes. . . . And yet, logically, of course, they were right. We were left an army without leaders--just a mob. It was, technically, a great victory.

Anne decides not to go with her husband to Russia.

They have an impassioned argument culminating in her accusation which eventually changes Brandt's mind (Act II, p. 16):

ANNE

You have betrayed your trust, Hallett.

HALLETT

. . . I've had to sacrifice the smaller for the greater. One faces that choice every day, in everything! Because I've dedicated my life to a great purpose--

ANNE

What purpose?

HALLETT

The great but very simple purpose--to make the world better.

ANNE

How can you make the world better--by making yourself worse?

(He looks at her--struck. . . .)

You've become twisted, Hallett!

Ann tells Miller she's not going to Russia with them. Miller makes love to her to retain her cooperation and she believes he loves her. Brandt decides not to defect. During the scene in which he tries to force Brandt to leave, Anne finds out Miller only used her to keep Brandt quiet. She shoots Miller, but it is too late to return to their former home undetected. Sirens are shrieking to signal the bombing attack by Russian planes. Brandt tells Anne to escape from the city but he will stay and be destroyed, in expiation for his betrayal.

Treadwell did not put this political play through her usual repeated revision process. There are only two versions. She was immediately discouraged about its marketability because Theresa Helburn told her the same subject had been treated in Herman Wouk's The Traitor, which failed on Broadway. Robert Montgomery's television series turned it down because they had already done a play on the same subject. Lawrence Langner's letter to her of January 8, 1954, also was discouraging:

. . . I think you have an interesting subject although the ending is not at all believable. I very much doubt we are going to have an atomic war. . . . You must pay more attention to realities and who you want us to like. . . . We must have somebody in the play whom we care about. . . . Nobody wants to see a play nowadays about some rather disagreeable and ignoble characters unless there is some kind of nobility at the end after wading through so much villainy.

Discouraged by having written another play based on a distasteful theme and dramatized by unsympathetic characters, Treadwell abandoned The Siren as a marketable work for television or the stage. Because the play was not repeatedly revised, the author didn't soften the verbal conflict between man and woman, a habit of hers developed to make her scripts more commercial. Consequently, Treadwell's perception of the contempt and hostility directed by Brandt at his wife was not blunted. At the opening of Act II, Anne has been unable to sleep and also has been avoiding her husband (Act II, p. 1):

HALLETT

What are you doing out here?

ANNE

Looking at the moon.

HALLETT

The moon?

ANNE

Moonlight makes me feel I'm hearing music-- waltz music.

HALLETT

Your nature is purely sensuous--like all women's.

ANNE

Oh, Hal, did you come out here just to belittle me--because I'm a woman?

HALLETT

No. I came out here to tell you you'll catch cold.

ANNE

I'm all right.

HALLETT

Come back to bed.
(She shakes her head, no.)
Why not?

ANNE

You want to read.

HALLETT

I'll read.

ANNE

No. I get on your nerves, Hallett. Just being there--in the room with you. You say you want community--not to be alone--someone at your side! But you loathe it. You can't bear intimacy!

HALLETT

Community is not intimacy--not intimacy with a woman.

ANNE

Oh, Hal. That's horrible what you say. You don't love me or you couldn't say a thing like that!

HALLETT

That everlasting love that you always take refuge in!

ANNE

You do not love me, Hal. You just use me--enslave me. Because I love you, you know, you can do what you want with me. And so you despise me.

Anne Brandt operates in the play as a submissive woman.

Even though she speaks honestly to her husband, she returns repeatedly to the concept of being his devoted slave. Treadwell's initial description of Anne in the manuscript reinforces this conclusion: "She is an attractive woman in her

thirties. The basis of her attractiveness is a rich effulgent womanliness--at the same time protective and needing. . . . Anne Brandt is not a very clever woman. At times, especially by the very feminine questions she asks, she seems not at all clever--rather bewildered. Her strength--and she is strong--lies in her common sense--and in her deep unexpected intuitions. She both mothers him, and looks to him as a father figure. This dual perception of women recurring in Treadwell's plays will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

In the summer of 1953, Treadwell finished the first draft of a play concerning a young criminal, For Love. The first and second versions were in longhand, scripts which Treadwell, by habit, never preserved. She despaired of these early versions, realizing that she knew nothing first-hand about any of her characters.¹⁴⁵

The various titles of this two-act naturalistic play are For Love, Love For A Criminal, In Loving Lost, and Garry. The play was copyrighted under the last title December 22, 1954.

Garry is an expansion of the secondary plot in Judgment In The Morning discussed on pp. 217-18. Now the young woman is called Wilma and her criminal husband, a psychopath, is Garry. He is homosexual although this element of his character is arrived at in various ways in the multiple

¹⁴⁵ Sophie Treadwell, 1954 Diary, February 1-7, NWA, Case 4.

versions (seduction as a child, seduction in prison, or his inherited nature). Perhaps, as often happened, someone suggested to Treadwell that the relationship between Diana and her young husband in Judgment, would make a good play. Then she would have started with pre-conceived characters and situation which she attempted to rewrite; the versions of Garry seem contrived, improbable rehashes of other stories and other characters.

Although the drama concerns Garry and Wilma, much of the play is made up of exposition and revelation growing out of conversation between Dave, a reporter, and Wilma. Garry's sister, Peggy, visits the apartment to coax Wilma to join her in prostitution. Thus, her dissolute character is contrasted with that of Wilma, a pure but naive girl from the midwest. Dave comes to the apartment seeking a story on Garry, now on parole. Dave's manly nature is contrasted with Garry's psychopathic personality. Wilma, starved for love from a clean, "normal" man falls in love with Dave, although in two of the four versions, this element is hinted at but not developed. Garry murders and robs a man whom he picks up in a bar. He assumes Wilma will accompany him as they flee the police, but she turns from this act of violence which she can no longer explain away as a mistake of youth. In the various endings, Garry goes to a former lover he met in prison; or a lover he knew in Mexico, or attempts to drown himself in the river.

Although Treadwell attempted to write a dispassionate study of a young man and his wife trapped by circumstances and environment, only Garry's characterization is believable and consistent. This aberrant nature is indicated by his "dreamy" delivery as his thoughts slip in and out of fantasy. Wilma married him to save him (her father, who was also imprisoned, was destroyed by her mother). With all this dedication, Wilma's head is easily turned by Dave, a stranger who comes to her looking for a newspaper story--an improbable circumstance. With only one character fully developed out of the four in the play, Garry does not hold up. It appears that Treadwell realized the awkwardness of this manuscript for there is no record of her attempt to market it.

Garry was the last original play Treadwell wrote for the stage, although it was partially based on material she had used before. When it was copyrighted in December, 1954, Treadwell was sixty-nine years old. She had been writing for the theatre for more than forty years. Her vigorously productive period fell between 1922 and 1941, nearly twenty years of active participation as a playwright and director-producer. Of her five best plays (Machinal, Promised Land, For Saxophone, Hope For A Harvest and A String of Pearls), only two were produced: Machinal, the expressionistic success of the twenties, and Hope For A Harvest, the realistic, patriotic comedy of 1941.

Although Treadwell had two plays televised in 1954

(Machinal on January 25 and Highway on February 16), her professional career as a playwright was at an end. She had one novel published in 1959 and a college production of Woman With Lilies in 1967, but these were anti-climatic to her.¹⁴⁶ Her diary entries indicate that writing no longer came easily to her: "My work did not go well. I had no interest in the play. . . . I am a little distressed at these wakeful nights and excited, tired days. One reason is, of course, that I do not 'write.' There is something about concentration on a play for some hours every day that skims off tension and keeps me on an even keel."¹⁴⁷

Again she experiences anxiety attacks attributed to "nerves" by her doctor. She experiences choking sensations while eating and difficulty with breathing, both complaints she incorporated in several of her character's problems over the years. She suffered from insomnia: . . . "sleeping only 3 or 4 hours a night (or no hours), and it does not seem to make me tired the next day--only keyed up! I do not get tired as most people do. I rest because I am too 'excited'. . . . I must work! To maintain my nervous balance."¹⁴⁸

She experienced many changes in 1954. She sold the property in Hollywood which she had kept for many years for

¹⁴⁶Sophie Treadwell, One Fierce Hour and Sweet (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959).

¹⁴⁷Sophie Treadwell, 1954 Diary, April 5, NWA, Case 4.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., April 7.

a dream house which she never built. She sold Old Trees Ranch in Stockton, a change which recent studies in stress would indicate a sense of loss suffered by the individual.

Treadwell's April 5, 1954 diary entry verifies this:

To this was added a sort of grief at giving up the old place to which I have given so much of my strength--plans--hopes--for so many years--20! It is 20 years since I took over this place and more than 60 that I have known it--with my mother--as home. But in all this time it always has been a place of much loneliness and unhappiness. Mama never came here except when she was unhappy so I remember our stays here--and my biggest stay here was just after college at the time of my "breakdown" (where it made me well--but as soon as I was well--I had to leave). Still, it has always meant a secure place for me. . . .

She experienced her first manifestation of what was, perhaps, an ailment of advancing years while staying in Ajiji, Mexico:

December 31: I had a blackout spell. I did not know where I was. I did not know where I was going. I found myself up at the garage house. I sat on the porch a few minutes with the man who lives there--Mr. Ryan--and I actually did not know in which house I really belonged. It was terrifying. In a few minutes I knew and set out for my own place and began to pack. . . .¹⁴⁹

It was a physical experience which repeated itself December 24, 1956: "I again faded out . . . for a few minutes sitting in my chair I completely lost consciousness of who I was. . . . I went that afternoon to the doctor to see if I could be

¹⁴⁹ Sophie Treadwell, 1954 Diary, December 31, NWA, Case 4.

helped but he said nothing--and did nothing. I feel terribly frightened and depressed."¹⁵⁰

While it is true that Treadwell was growing older, we must not assume that she wrote less only because of this circumstance. During the decade of the fifties she was raising an energetic boy, traveling at home and abroad with him, caring for his dysentary acquired in Mexico, his gashed head resulting from a fall from a horse and in the same year his broken spine necessitating months of traction and full body cast. Treadwell privately expressed surprise at the amount of work a child required, thereby revealing a touching naivete concerning the potential disruption of her routine caused by bringing a child into a life ordered around long and quiet writing periods. At first she cared for him herself, wanting the full experience of mothering she had thought about for years. As he walked and then was able to run, she could no longer keep up with him and hired a nurse, which freed part of her time for writing again.

About this time she wrote The Gorgeous Innocent, which she meant to be a one-hour television play. However, it is a full-length comedy which Treadwell described as a play in her preface in the manuscript and so it will be analyzed in this study.

¹⁵⁰Sophie Treadwell, 1956 Diary, December 24, NWA, Case 4.

I thought here to write a play that American country people (farmers and small town people) would know and enjoy.

It is about a young farm girl who is beautiful, her father, a farmer knowing and wanting only hard work; her mother a farm woman yearning for glamor; a rich boy that the girl falls in love with; his father, a Wall Street operator tired of making money, yearning for the simple life; and a worn-out one-time beauty, now a Hollywood derelict.

The story is of the mother's ambition to get a career for the girl as a beauty, her maneuvering to get the family off the ranch to Hollywood; the girl's disillusion there; and her return to the place where she belongs--to the ranch and to the boy.¹⁵¹

Treadwell evidently made little effort to sell this comedy except to send it to Blanche Gaines, her current agent. One wonders what circumstances prevented the sale of The Gorgeous Innocent. This charming, light-hearted comedy seems perfect for television of the 1950's. Paul and Ella Lindstrom, a farm couple, are readily recognizable midwesterners with typical American values. Their daughter, Teddy, is an all-American beauty who is bright and unspoiled. There are just the right amounts of suspense, romance and adventure to please a national audience; and, a peek at Hollywood eccentricities contrasted with the beauty of farmland. With television in mind, Treadwell was not forced to place all her scenes within a single set. The encounters among different characters are less contrived, more probable and relaxed

¹⁵¹Sophie Treadwell, The Gorgeous Innocent, TS, UALSC, Box 27.

because the author does not manufacture an excuse to bring disparate characters into the same room. Although speculation is difficult where so many variables are concerned, perhaps its length proved a handicap. For whatever reason, The Gorgeous Innocent remains unproduced although it is one of Treadwell's best comedies.

Treadwell turned to writing novels in the years between 1956 and 1965: One Fierce Hour and Sweet, written in 1956-7 (published 1959); an incomplete, untitled novel about a young girl in New York and Mexico, 1958-9; and The Great Name Story, 1959-66. During these years, Treadwell lived outside the United States most of the time, and she used Torremolinas, Spain, where she purchased a house, as a kind of headquarters.

Her work was not completely forgotten at home. In April, 1960, Machinal was successfully revived in New York. Directed off-Broadway by Gene Frankel, it received excellent notices but the unfortunate timing of a newspaper strike forced its closing along with a number of other plays. Treadwell did not return to this country for the opening.

In Europe, she spent much time going from clinic to clinic trying to find treatments to cure those maladies often suffered by people in their mid-seventies, ailments which she resented and believed curable: cataracts of both eyes, digestive problems, sleeping difficulties, her omni-present "nerves." In September, 1962, she suffered a mild stroke but recovered without ill-effects.

Treadwell now considered herself semi-retired. In 1963-65 she made her home in Vienna, Austria, where, in the spring of 1965, she completed The Great Name Story, a novel with auto-biographical elements. It was her intention to live in Vienna the rest of her life; and in June, she sold her home and property in Newtown, Connecticut. But an occurrence in her personal life in the summer of 1965 sent her back to America, to Tucson, Arizona. She cryptically noted it in her diary:

June 7-September 7: Two months--the incredible short story of the old woman and the young man. I regret I gave up my diary just now when, having finished my work, life came on stage. I leave Wien in the end, ill, full of disillusion and dislike. I have a new doctor . . . who gave me all sorts of shots in the last three weeks to keep me going. I have decided on Tucson for our future home. . . . I leave Wien without regret. Its Gods are for me--bad medicine. I begin to see in my few contacts with Austrian men through the years--a certain pattern that I find hard to tolerate--but its constant repetition makes me think it typical.

A diary entry of this nature is not only poignant but intriguing when one remembers that Treadwell was seventy-nine years old when she wrote it.

In 1965 Treadwell moved to her final residence in the Catalina foothills in Tucson. She had friends in the surrounding area and made many connections in Tucson, one with the University of Arizona Theatre Department. There, in 1967, the world premiere was staged of her comedy, Woman With Lilies, although the name for the production was changed to

Now He Doesn't Want To Play.¹⁵² Treadwell collaborated with the director, Professor Peter Marroney, on revising the play. For the first time, a play would be produced by the University of Arizona utilizing its Mexican-American student actors in Mexican roles.

Now He Doesn't Want To Play (the title is derived from the second line of the song lyric, "La Cucaracha"), is significantly different from the 1948 version of Woman With Lilies, discussed on pp.211-12. The Mexican characters, who formed only background milieu in the earlier version, are now expanded and woven into the action. The setting is the inner courtyard of a beautiful, old house in Mexico City owned by Dona Salvadora. Dona "Dora," former mistress of generals, now landlady and dispenser of gypsy love potions, is ". . . like the house, a relic of former grandeur. Old and poor as she is now, there is a sort of opulence about her, and a strong zest for living. She is excitable, changeable, wise, greedy, false, and--when this allows--kind."¹⁵³ Her servant, Herculano, is her only admirer now (Act I, p. 3):

HERCULANO

I have not forgotten you, Dona Dora. I am here at your side, always! To do with as you wish! . . .

DORA

Oh, my sweet little rabbit! The only one left to me of so many!

¹⁵²Sophie Treadwell, "Now He Doesn't Want To Play," TS, UALSC, Box 22.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 2.

HERCULANO

How the gentlemen used to crowd at your door
here! Generals and--

DORA

(Intoning)
General Ramirez, General Martinez, General Garcia,
General--

HERCULANO

And men of great estates!

DORA

Senor Terrazos, Don Miguel de la Guerra, Don
Jose Fuerrtes--

HERCULANO

How Don Jose loved fiestas!

DORA

Do you remember our little fiestas, Herculano?
The lanterns shining, the fountain shooting, the--

HERCULANO

The gentlemen, too! Shooting! Always shooting!

DORA

(Entranced)
The guitars playing till the dawn.

Dora is dancing and singing when Ann enters looking for not only a room, but her former husband, now a prolific painter in Mexico. The epitome of a successful advertising executive, she is also collecting "smart" things while among the Spanish (Act I, p. 7):

ANN

(Peers into the room . . .)
Oh what a beautiful old bed! All those angels!
And cupids! And garlands! And flowers! And--

HERCULANO

And birds! Birds singing!

ANN

It looks like the bed of a queen!

DORA

It was! It was mine.

ANN

(Crisply)

I'll buy it from you, Senora. Though, of course, its awfully shabby now. How much do you--

DORA

It is not for sale, Senorita.

Ann has trouble acquiring other things she wants, i.e., her ex-husband. When they were married, he wanted to live simply, like an artist, and she was eager for professional and financial success. When he didn't adopt her goals, she divorced him. Now he is achieving some success as a painter; she is tired of the treadmill of success and wants him back. Their old hostilities flare (Act I, p. 35):

CRAGG

(Mimics)

Imagine meeting you heah! How's everything been with you, dahling, all this time?

ANN

It's been all right!

CRAGG

You're looking well! Impeccable as always. What is that little number you're wearing?

ANN

Chanel.

CRAGG

I might have known! She's always so "right." And you, dahling. Always so right!

Cragg, who has come to this inn with his native woman, Lupe, to await the results of an artists' competition, discovers he has lost the competition. Bringing this bad news is Bliss, a local bar-owner, who offers him one thousand pesos to do a painting to hang over his bar, of a nude woman lying on a bed of lilies. Cragg, incensed by this offer for

hack work, goes off to get drunk. Ann paints a preliminary sketch for Bliss and passes it off as Cragg's own. A love potion of Dona Dora's mistakenly finds its way into a pot of beans eaten by Cragg and, for a time, he believes he and Ann are going to Spain on a freighter. However, she has second thoughts about sailing on a dirty freighter for Spain where they will live in picturesque poverty. She leaves the house, heading back for New York. At first saddened by losing her a second time, Cragg ends the show dancing to "La Cucaracha" with Dona Dora, both of them joyous and free.

The July production was panned: ". . . Her new play has a hackneyed plot and a cast of stereotypes."¹⁵⁴

Treadwell referred to this experience as "the Tucson debacle," and promptly rewrote the script to its final version, Woman With Lilies. The two scripts are nearly identical, the final version amounting to speeches restored that had been cut in production.

This last comedy is amusing and competent, particularly in the creation of the secondary characters. However, one should remember that its author was attempting to rework a plot that had been written twenty years before. The play seems a little stilted, perhaps old-fashioned in its concerns, not substantive enough or funny enough to make anyone care

¹⁵⁴Clipping, Treadwell Arizona Clipping File, NWA. Barbara Sears, "Top Effort Fails To Brighten Play," The Arizona Daily Star, July 23, 1967.

about the fate of Ann and Cragg. He's a bit of a chauvinist and she's a compulsive achiever. If Treadwell could have made these two major characters as sympathetic or as intriguing as her secondary characters, the play would have been more warmly received. The failure of this production was a great disappointment to her.

During the last two years of her life, Treadwell tried to work on a novel. Her diaries make clear that her health and indomitable spirit were failing. She experienced difficulty in concentrating and was in pain most of the time. On April 25, 1969 she wrote: "Utterly unable to work. Reviewed my life and work here--realized I have been living in a fantastic unreality created by my own will. I cannot write this book. Nor would it be any good if I could. I feel a sense of the end." With the help of a secretary, she labelled all her manuscripts and packed them in boxes. She asked her lawyer to burn all her papers when she died. Fortunately, he did not accede to her request.

During the night of February 11, she suffered a massive stroke in her sleep. She died February 20, 1970, in Tucson, at the age of eighty-four. Treadwell donated her body to the College of Medicine of The University of Arizona and her copyrights to the Catholic Diocese of Tucson, the royalties from which were to be used for the education of Indian children in Arizona.

CHAPTER V

Coda

Sophie Treadwell wrote thirty original full-length plays for the stage (excluding revisions), in a variety of forms, modes and styles: comedy, domestic tragedy, history, biography, melodrama, expressionism. She wrote nothing in verse and did not consider herself a poet or writer of poetic dialogue. She favored the form of what she called the well-made play, which was actually her version of melodrama. In the melodrama of the time of Treadwell's youth, emotions and language were sentimental, incidents were sensationalized, morality was simple and obvious, villainy and virtue were exaggerated. While never completely adhering to these characteristics, Treadwell's plays tended to utilize these elements but in subtle ways.

Unlike most characters in typical melodrama, her characters, male and female, felt ambivalent about themselves and each other. They were realistic characters, evidencing a blend of strength and weakness, goodness and evil, love and hate. Perhaps the juxtaposition of these realistic or naturalistic characters within the form of melodrama made her plays confusing, sending mixed signals to the audience. In

Gringo, Besita is kidnapped and seduced by the bandit. Within the form of melodrama she should attempt to protect her virginity. But Besita realizes her bandit-lover offers a kind of freedom and acceptance she has never known; when given the choice, she remains with him. Some of the critics admired Besita's courage and the reality of her characterization; others thought she was a bad girl.

Treadwell wrote about Mexico and the midwest, of farmers and working people. The fact of her western heritage seems to have influenced her choice of dramatic locale, characters and concerns. When Treadwell set a play in the city, the characters usually had come there from a more bucolic setting, traveling to the city to seek success, as had Treadwell. Her women characters are independent, honest and either find success alone, or they accept professional failure and find love as the real fulfillment for a woman. In The High Cost, Ladies Leave, and Gringo, the talented professional women forsake their careers for the more traditional fulfillment of a man's love. Treadwell's male characters are rugged, straight-forward, usually realistic and non-heroic. They either achieve success or reject the false values of the city for the more fundamental environment of the country. Reflecting these values, Treadwell's characters seem to suggest the flavor of the hearty pioneers who settled the west. Stephen Trent (Gringo), Dr. Jeffers (Ladies Leave), Dion O'Connell (A Million Dollar Gate), Andrew Wells (Judgment

In The Morning), and Anton Volkov (Promised Land), are examples of these strong, non-heroic men who make their own way in the world.

Treadwell created women protagonists who searched for an independent identity in a non-supportive, male-dominated world. They experienced conflict when their desire for achievement and recognition clashed with their need for love from a man. Typically, this man held a more traditional view of what he wanted from a woman, i.e., a wife who maintained the home, did not work to earn an income, deferred to his judgment, and loved children. These women protagonists pursued a search for self through much of the play and then collapsed under stress, turning to the men to protect them. As though exhausted by the battle for identity, Treadwell's women often begged for peace, silence, to be let alone. Lura Lawton (The Answer), Mary (Lone Valley), Diana Mallon (Andrew Wells' Lady), Nadia (Promised Land) and Lily (For Saxophone), all struggled to establish their independence but were faced with the need for love from a man. They strive toward equality with men but the pressure from their unenlightened society, still reflecting the role models of the Victorian period, overcomes their determination.

Had they struggled on despite adversity, perhaps they would have attained heroic proportions, consequently offering more popular appeal. But Treadwell was relentlessly honest. Her frame of reference was that of the objective and

dispassionate journalist. She knew that heroines are few in number; people are beaten more often by the system than overcome it. However, no matter what virtue is to be found in an objective, dispassionate presentation, an audience is less satisfied with an ambiguous character than a character who knows exactly what she wants and, despite obstacles, achieves it.

In general, many of Treadwell's characters, although well-written, were not particularly engaging or likeable. One wonders whether Treadwell's own attitude toward people was reflected in her characters. She didn't really like people, a fact to which she admitted in the January 1, 1958 entry in her diary: ". . . I do not seem to have a direct contact with people anymore. They seem people on a stage. Yet I like them more than I ever did. My repugnance--detestation of most people seems to have gone. Is this because they are farther away from me now? That I have left the stage to watch the play from the stalls?" It seems curious that Treadwell, who disliked most people intensely, should embrace an art form in which she must not only create people on a stage but create them for more people in an audience.

Treadwell's themes also reflected her honest appraisal of the society in which she lived. Many of her plays explored social problems or pathology in society: the rights of women (Rights, The Limelight, Machinal); corruption in sports and politics (A Million Dollar Gate, Judgment In The

Morning); murder (Machinal, Andrew Wells' Lady); ecology of farmland (Hope For A Harvest); unwanted pregnancy and adoption (Hope For A Harvest, A String of Pearls); the evils of a totalitarian government (Promised Land); the horror of war (The Last Border); and the sadness of betrayal (The Siren). Treadwell's treatment of these subjects was serious and often prescient. Of her thirty plays, twenty-five were dramas concerning problems either public or private. Her comedies were as well-written as the dramas, but their paucity implies their author's preference for serious plays which made a social or ethical statement.

Although Treadwell usually included a love story as one plot component in her plays, she seems to have felt ambivalent about this element. Two observations emerge from a survey of the plays encompassing love stories. First, the woman often loves unwisely, or sacrifices herself because the man, flawed in some way, needs her. In The Answer, Lura returns to Jim although she does not love him. In Rights, Mary Wollstonecraft gives her love to Imlay who treats her as a trivial woman. In Gringo, Myra Light has remained with her husband, Leonard, because he needs her. Mary loves Joe because he needs it (Love Valley); and Tania gives herself to Volkov because she is attracted to him but also because his cruelty may be abated by her love. In Three, Kit marries the brilliant but erratic Matthew Brooks to save his genius through the stabilizing influence of her love. In The Last

Border, Christina goes into hiding in the mountains with Alexander Constantine after he avenges the murder of her son. He needs her and she feels she will be fulfilling a higher purpose. In The Siren, Anne Brandt has remained with her husband because she wants to support his genius with her love and because, as a cripple, he needs her. In Garry, Wilma marries her criminal husband because she thinks her love will save him; then she stays with him because he'll "go crazy" without her.

This theme of the redeeming quality of a good woman's love is a familiar one, particularly in melodrama, where the outcome of this personal sacrifice on the woman's part is traditionally fortuitous. But this theme is transmuted in much of Treadwell's work. The woman sacrifices, but the relationship fails despite her efforts. In The Answer, Jim is killed; in Rights, Imlay leaves Mary; in Gringo, Myra eventually leaves Leonard; in Three, Matthew Brooks remains erratic and another man is introduced into the relationship to support Kit. In Garry, Wilma is killed by her husband.

Perhaps because of her feminist viewpoint, she felt there had to be more substance to the reasons why women marry. Consequently, women in her plays must not become simply chattels but must be absolutely necessary to the man and to the marriage. Is it possible that Treadwell sought to add some dignity to the position of her women characters by giving them something of value to bring to the marriage? They

have the satisfaction of knowing they are more than just wives, whatever that may have meant to Treadwell. They are saviors.

However, the second observation is that the outcome of this sacrifice is often negative. The play or the relationship ends unhappily. In general, Treadwell did not create happy endings. One is tempted to infer that she didn't write happy endings because she didn't believe in them in art or life. There is some basis for this when one looks at the entire body of written material (plays, letters, diaries, newspaper interviews, novels, etc.) written both by Treadwell and about her. In the creation of her women characters, she explored the complex relationship that seems to exist between men and women involving the ambiguity of the woman's role. The pattern that emerges in many of her plays is that the woman must be a child, a little girl for the man, except when he needs a mother; and then she must grow up and fulfill the maternal role. The woman character must always decide in the situation when to be a child and when to be a mother. In the plays, the male character seldom appreciates her as an adult woman with her own needs and desires. Although Treadwell repeatedly explored this complex relationship in her plays, she seems never to have found a satisfying solution, nor a popular one.

Again, perhaps because of her feminist viewpoint, Treadwell's women characters struggle with another conflict:

they want to be financially independent, achieve a success independent of their husband's or lover's success, but they try to fulfill traditional roles. They cry for freedom but submit to circumscribed roles prescribed by their male counterparts and the society in which they live. They alternate between a deep desire to perform worthwhile work (recognized as worthwhile in the male world), and feeling guilty because they long for a kind of achievement they're not supposed to want. These women are concerned that their desire to compete for success with men somehow abrogates their full identity as women. Consequently, their resolve is weakened, they succumb to the pressure to assume traditional activities (marriage, keeping the house, cessation of work outside the home), and then they become desperate and unhappy. In The High Cost, both Constance and her mother suffer from this conflict. In The Settlement, Beth pursues a career so that she can be financially independent and make a recognizable achievement, but she becomes unsure of herself (Act II, pp. 35-36):

BETH

I didn't want to marry anybody. I wanted my own way--my own life! My own success! . . . You see what's come of it. . . . Even if I do get another job--I suppose I will in time--my nerve is going. I'm not thirty years old yet and I'm old! I'm not a man. That's just it! And I'm breaking at a man's game. I'm so tired, Jimmie--I need you--do you suppose you want to take me? . . . Success! I really imagined I was going to be one! I couldn't imagine myself anything else. . . . I ask you just to take me, or if you don't want me, perhaps you know some other halfway decent man who does. . . .

Beth is willing to seek refuge with any man to avoid the conflict of competing in the male world. The Young Woman in Machinal experiences vague longings for a personal achievement of some kind but worries that she needs marriage to fulfill a traditional expectation. In both the 1948 and 1967 versions of Woman With Lilies, Ann values success as recognized in the male world, sacrifices her marriage to this success, and then attempts to recapture her husband because she feels incomplete, not a real woman. Here, she has had an opportunity for another man but sees him as weak. She requires a strong male, one who can dominate her and other males as well.

This deep conflict in Treadwell's feminist women is allied to another conflict which was played out in the author's life as well as in her plays. Treadwell was able to resolve for most of her characters and herself and the plight of the ambitious woman who needs or wants a man. In some cases they go on alone (Le Grand Prix, The Love Lady, Woman With Lilies), and in others they marry or ally themselves with men (Promised Land, A Million Dollar Gate). But, with the sole exception of the Young Woman in Machinal, these women feel incomplete without children. The collective attitude of her women characters is summed up in the thoughts of the retired woman doctor who is the central figure in One Fierce Hour and Sweet:

. . . No woman is complete without a child. As she completes it, it completes her. Childless women are

poor women. Poor in knowledge and poor in feeling. Life-deprived. It is from their children that women learn what life really is. And to accept it. With love. Learn what human beings really are. And to accept them. With love.¹⁵⁵

This attitude is variously voiced by the principal women characters in The High Cost, Love Valley, Promised Land, Three, Hope For A Harvest, A String of Pearls and The Last Border. They try to have children or adopt them. They meet with varying degrees of success. Treadwell had no children of her own and we do not know if this was a deliberate choice. However, it is evident that she was attacked by the suspicion from time to time that she might be missing something. Work and achievement were the motivating forces in her life but she had to defend her state in a society which still referred to childless women as barren.

This concept that women are incomplete without children is as old as the first female fertility symbol. Only as recently as the 1970s have feminists been able to even discuss the validity of the concept. Therefore, even though Treadwell considered herself an enlightened woman and a fighter for women's rights, her belief in the need for children as a component of the complete woman impressed itself on her characters and her own life. It may have compelled her to adopt an infant when she was sixty-four years old, so it

¹⁵⁵Treadwell, One Fierce Hour and Sweet, p. 38.

is not surprising that this concern would be a central one to her dramatic characters, even though they thought of themselves as achievers in a larger sphere, outside home and marriage.

Sophie Treadwell had a long and enormously productive career. She was an ambitious, versatile high-achiever: a college graduate (a non-traditional achievement for women of her time), an editor of the college humor magazine, teacher in a country school, actress, investigative reporter, correspondent, noted journalist, playwright, producer, director, novelist. The distinctive quality of those impressive achievements is that she worked in a time when it was more difficult for a female to be accepted as a serious career woman, a time in which it was assumed--expected--that males were serious career men. Work was the most important element in Treadwell's life. To say that she was goal-driven or compulsive may be overstating her concern, but certainly her work took precedence over her personal life. There are numerous references to the importance of work in her diaries throughout her life. Even the last entry written the night she suffered the stroke said, ". . . To bed early after supper. . . . Feel hopeful that I can finally get to my work now."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Sophie Treadwell, 1970 Diary, February 11, NWA.

It is reasonable to speculate that, without this singlemindedness of purpose, Treadwell would have succumbed to the cultural barriers, the blocks placed in the path of a talented woman which might prevent her from achieving her potential; blocks with which talented men weren't forced to cope. This understanding of the additional obstructions she found as a result of her sex made Treadwell a feminist.

As with many people who espouse unpopular causes, she was in conflict about her own role and the role of women. These conflicts make her seem paradoxical. She marched to Albany carrying the petition for women's suffrage but she thought many women were too stupid or too weak to vote intelligently. She kept her own name throughout her marriage but many of her women characters, seeking protection, collapse in the arms of their men. She wrote thousands of columns of newsprint, more than thirty full-length plays, short stories, and four completed novels, but privately she thought the female "genius" was weaker than the male's.¹⁵⁷ Some of her female characters speak of being in the "first rank of second-raters" and defer to the man of "true" genius.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷In her 1950 diary, March 24, Treadwell notes that she told the doctor who was treating her in Vienna that her work was "feminine genius--not strong enough."

¹⁵⁸Treadwell, Three, Act II, Scene 1, p. 4.

One wonders what kept Treadwell writing and producing for more than sixty years if she felt that, as a woman, her art was the product of a weak feminine genius. Of course, the answer is complex but we may speculate on some of its elements.

She had a great love for the theatre, born at an early age when her father took her to plays. Combine this love with a certain amount of acting talent, a greater amount of writing ability, and intense ambition, and it seems natural that Treadwell sought to build a place for herself in the American theatre.

In addition, Treadwell had a crusading element in her personality. She required a forum for her opinions on social problems and their solutions, and obviously viewed the stage and the press as perfect forums for ideas. She only miscalculated her audience's tolerance for dramas of idea and reform.

Also, it seems clear that one of the compelling elements in Treadwell's unceasing attempt at success in the theatre was her powerful ego. She had a strong sense of self as distinguished from others, a potent, perhaps massive, ego which supported her through years of work and rejection. Her sense of personal identity made her retain her own name when she married and, later, give that name to her adopted son. Surely, without a powerful ego, Treadwell would have given up as the years went on without another achievement of the magnitude of Machinal.

Treadwell did stop writing in 1968 at the age of eighty-three. She offered an assessment of her career in a letter to another writer, Gerald Brennan, August 16, 1969:

. . . You tell me a writer must write every day. Why did I quit? Because I felt I had nothing to say? No. I am bursting with things I long to say. Because of weariness? No. Some days I am just quivering with energy (mental energy). Because I had too many other demanding things to do? . . . No, the reason was because I suddenly realized the devastating truth that I wasn't a good writer. I went back over everything I had done and saw that it was all no good. Corny. I tried to solace myself by telling myself that I had been born and formed in a corny age. But I knew that others had been born in exactly the same age and had not been weakened and distorted by it. . . . There did not seem any reason, any purpose, any hope in going on. So I quit. I gave up. And that took a certain courage. It was a great loss to me. . . . My work had been the very center of my life, from childhood on one could say. Writing. My work. And yet had I really worked at it? Hours and hours at the typewriter--yes. But work? No. It was all too easy (if writing ever can be "easy"), too unconscious. I never studied, struggled, edited, compared. I just wrote. And then too, and far more serious, writing was always for me--from the beginning--a refuge from reality--an escape hatch from living. So losing it has had some good in it for me undoubtedly. But it was also my drive, my excitement, my pleasure, my joy. And being without it makes my life drab, indeed. Shall I take it up now again? A novel? (I have been thinking about one). A play? That is what I really love doing. But now? NOW? No. . . .

She makes clear how important writing was in her life, but her personal critical judgment is harsh, as was her wont in expressions to others in the nature of personal assessment.

By what stick shall we measure the success of this energetic, talented, ambitious woman? The critics reviewed her always respectfully, but often without particular

enthusiasm. Were her forceful women characters subtly distasteful to the critics and general public? Were her themes too radical, too conventional, too shrill, too languid? All these conflicting adjectives were used by those in the press and theatre who evaluated her work. Were her politics too left-wing, too right-wing; or was her vibrant, highly-keyed personality too unsettling for her less intense colleagues in both theatre and the Fourth Estate? Perhaps the fact that she was a high-achieving female who worked under her maiden name and competed with men, and often won, made her a less popular or sympathetic figure than she might have been. Study of her plays suggests that another element was operating in their consideration for production, some unknown factor that lessened their potential in the commercial theatre. We know that subtle prejudices still operate against women in the theatre today. Producers are reluctant to risk large investments in production costs on women directors or playwrights. One speculates that Treadwell's sex and her feminist sympathies at least may have aroused ambivalent responses to the woman and to her plays.

In the final analysis, it seems reasonable to judge Treadwell a successful playwright, based on her Broadway productions, her large body of work and her royalties which formed the bulk of her estate. She created a substantial body of work which addressed problems of her time as she saw them and which offers many opportunities for study by theatre

scholars. When she couldn't find producers for her work, she produced and directed the productions herself. Perhaps Treadwell's accomplishments loom larger than either her personal evaluation or theatre history texts would indicate, when placed in the context of her time. She made a place for herself as a woman creator in the American theatre during a time when women functioned in the theatre as actresses, not producers and directors and scarcely as authors. She created strong women characters for the American stage who attempted to explore problems as they found them in the larger male world, not as in the more limited sphere of female concerns. Perhaps Treadwell helped pave the way or somehow made the struggle easier for other women playwrights who came after, though they are only a little less scant in number than they were fifty years ago. On balance, the range of her interests and dramatic experiments, the size and quality of her achievement should secure a place for her in the American theatre of the twentieth century.

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