FACTS ARE NOT SACRED

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Abstract: The title of the paper (an adapted quotation) is meant to suggest the attempt of showing that the greater the distances (temporal, spatial, conceptual or otherwise) between a series or a set of facts and the language/s describing them, the less "sacred" these facts become, tending, in fact (sic!) to disappear completely. Our example is a 1900 murder case in Iowa, whose facts are first "concealed" in a sequence of trials and their numerous stories (testimonies, pleas, judgments, commentaries, verdicts…), then covered by journalist Susan Glaspell in 1901, then turned into a play by the same—"Trifles"—of 1916 (for other, later audiences in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world through translations and other "interpretations"), and finally reworked by the author into "A Jury of Her Peers"(1917)—a short story that partially completes the fact-to-fiction cycle in this remarkable development.

Keywords: facts, trials, play, story, Glaspell, transformation, language, fiction.

Twentieth-century America's is a culture that may be said to have begun under the sign of a President—Theodore Roosevelt—who described "muckraking" journalist and novelist Upton Sinclair (1878-1968) as a "crackpot," but after reading his *novel* The Jungle (1906), decided that an investigation take place (in the meatpacking industry of Chicago), followed by the passage of the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906; so, from facts to journalism, to fiction, to political-administrative action. Ever since, journalism and fiction have gone hand in hand and even competing with each other, with a great novelist like William Faulkner declaring that fiction is far more true than any kind of journalism—but this is only part of our preoccupation here.

Quite ominously, almost all of the facts that gave birth to both journalistic campaigns and stories or novels were murders, and some of the best-known examples might seem convincing. Thus, Sophie Treadwell's 1928 Machinal is based upon a sensational murder case of the 1920s, with Ruth Smyther as the real protagonist; Wendy Kesselman's My Sister in This House is the story of a famous 1933 murder case, in which two sisters (maids) from Le Mans, France, bludgeoned, stabbed and mutilated the bodies of their employer and her daughter; as expected, both writers have been proved to have altered the historicity to shape their readings of female experience in these early docudramas.

The most famous of them all comes in 1966 with In Cold Blood, Truman Capote's non-fiction book (or novel?) about a 1959 quadruple murder (Herbert Clutter, a farmer from Holcomb, Kansas, his wife and two of their four children) on which the author spent six years to write, including interviews (together with friend-novelist Harper Lee) with both residents and investigators and adding up to eight thousand pages or notes; the "robbers" (they found no safe in the house, as their tip had been) and killers were two parolees, Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Smith, who received a mandatory death sentence after a famous trial and

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were executed on April 14, 1965 by hanging; unsurprisingly, this factually accurate tale of high terror was to have three film adaptations, so probably millions of people in the world know (about) In Cold Blood, but extremely few 9if any) would remember the Cutters and their cruel destinies.

The "murder" in Hunter S. Thompson's 1971/1972 Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas… (the title seems to have been borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche) is the shooting and killing of a Mexican-American political activist by police officers; but there is much more to this fact-and-fiction novel (a series of journalistic reports first, by the author and an attorney, who becomes Dr. Gonzo as a character, whence the future label "Gonzo journalism"), i.e. things like what has happened to the American dream, doubled by a hippie zeitgeist; two films came out in 1980 and 1998.

The Burning Bed is a non-fiction book and film that propose a two-directional development; inspired by a real fact (March 1977 in Dansville, Michigan), in which an abused wife pours gasoline on and around her husband's bed and burns him up in his sleep—he was drunk, as usual; then she drives with her children to the local police to confess; Francine Hughes went to court in Lansing, Michigan, and was found by a jury of her peers (our emphasis) to be not guilty by reason of temporary insanity; there was a TV-movie adaptation in 1984 (with Farah Fawcett), when a husband who sees it gets the idea a burns his wife up; so, fact-fiction-fact.

Norman Mailer's 1979 The Executioner's Song is also based almost entirely on interviews with the family and friends of both Gary Gilmore (a self-destructive convict, thief and drug-addict) and his victims; Gilmore, too, was executed after being stayed on three occasions, while he fought to have his execution performed as soon as possible; naturally (this is the U.S.), there was also a film (with Tommy Lee Jones).

Finally, one can also think of none others than Steinbeck and Hemingway, who having started as reporters and (war) correspondents themselves (in Asia and Europe), used much of the "real life" materials gathered in their journalism youths to construct their stories and novels. All these—and many others—invite a student of American literature to have a look at how fact and fiction are related to one another, how reality and literature (or nature and culture, for that matter, in the larger context of cultural studies) have come to be represented in people's minds, as well as where one ends and the other begins, if anything like a boundary line could ever be drawn or envisaged.

Against this background, the comparatively lesser-known Susan Glaspell has become our choice in this investigation (n.b .) mainly because she wrote the same story as a journalist first, then as a playwright (she also acted a part in the first performance of the play), and thirdly as a short-story writer; and our "lesser known) description above invites a brief presentation.

So, journalist, playwright, actress and novelist Susan Glaspell (1876-1948)—born in a hay farmer's family in Iowa—was the author of eight one-act plays (two with George Cram Cook, her husband between 1914 and 1924, and in 1927 she published her biography of Cook, The Road to the Temple) seven full-length plays, nine novels, three short-story collections and a children's book (so one could easily describe her as prolific). By 18, Susan Glaspell was a journalist for a local newspaper (in Davenport, Iowa), then she took a major in

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philosophy from Drake University and became a reporter assigned to cover the state legislature and murder cases (among these, the conviction of a woman accused of killing her husband—see infra).

From Iowa (and Illinois) the Cooks move to New York and in 1916 she, Cook and other transplanted Greenwich Village writers (Edna St. Vincent Millay, Theodore Dreiser, Floyd Dell…), artists and political activists (she herself was a leading member of Heterodoxy, and early feminist debating group) were summering at Cape Cod, in Provincetown, Massachusetts, amusing themselves by staging their own plays on a fishing wharf converted to a makeshift theater; and thus was founded the Provincetown Players, the first modern American theater company; next she discovered Eugene O'Neill, who joined the group with his Bound East for Cardiff. Glaspell herself submitted twelve of her plays to the company (in which she also participated as an actress). In 1931 her play Alison's House (based on the life and family of Emily Dickinson) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. From Provincetown she and Cook moved to Greece, at Delphi, where Cook died; two best-seller novels follow (Brook Evans and Fugitive's Return)—both on feminist issues--, then poor health, depression, and alcoholism, resulting in her death (of viral pneumonia) in Provincetown. America's first important modern female writer (her plays received better reviews than those of Eugene O'Neill) and a pioneering feminist is still remembered for The Verge, her 1921 expressionist masterpiece, and Trifles, often regarded as a significant work of American theater.

Our intention in what follows is to look at Trifles and its short story adaptation, "A Jury of Her Peers," as they come out of real, actual facts and then develop, via journalism, into drama and fiction. Like most—if not all—of the examples we used at the beginning, Glaspell's one-act drama and short story are based upon facts that make up a murder case, so—from this point of view—one can wonder how all can possibly be sacred (other than from a figurative perspective); but no facts seem to ever remain sacred (i.e. unchanged, eternal, everlasting) for other reasons as well, as we shall attempt to show.

First of all, anyone who claims to be giving facts in a confession, a testimony, a report, a play, or a story of any kind can only give those facts through the medium of words—and this already places him or her at one remove from reality; once done or performed or happened, facts as such are gone and lost (forever), only to be recounted in words and stories, once, twice, several times… So all we can do here is use a number of words for what we found in our sources (also words) described as "actual facts." And they are: sometime after midnight on December 2, 1900, as he lay asleep in his bed, John Hossack, 59, a prominent well-to-do farmer in Indianola, Iowa, was killed by two powerful blows to his skull (one that cut deeply his skull and another one, with a blunt weapon, that crushed it). His wife (of 33 years) Margaret, also in her fifties, who slept next to him, was to declare in court (we are already gradually moving away from "bare, hard, clear, unquestionable facts") that, when she woke up heard a door close, saw a flash of light as she jumped out of bed and went into the adjoining sitting room and called her children (of their nine in all, five—13 to 26 years old—still lived at home); she also heard her husband's groans.

Re-entering the bedroom they discovered Hossack bleeding profusely, brain matter oozing from a gash, his head crushed. Terrible sight! Still, one of his sons claimed (facts are already pushed somewhere in the background) that his father was still able to speak; when he

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said, "Well, pa, you are badly hurt," Hossack replied, "No. I'm not hurt, but I'm not feeling well." Fiction has already entered too deep into the world of fact (whatever that may be). The children then go to neighboring farms, several neighbors gather during the night, together with two of the married Hossack children and their spouses, and a doctor; John Hossack lived through the night with his wife Margaret caring for him; he died early Sunday morning with her and eight of their children at his side.

Still, the facts move on to another stage; a coroner's inquest follows, the presumed—words like presume, claim, pretend, remember, think… become rather frequent—murder weapon—an axe smeared with blood and several gray hairs sticking to the blade—is found under the family corn crib, close to the house; no evidence (another name for facts) of burglary was discovered, Hossack's pocket book with $40 was by his bed, there was no sign of an intruder; there was also a loaded gun, untouched, in the bedroom. Hossack had no known enemies, he was a God-fearing and church-going Christian.

As Mrs. Hossack seemed to have had both the motive (probable abuses), the opportunity and the means (the axe, rather than the gun, for instance) to kill her husband, the sheriff arrested her as she was leaving her husband's gravesite; she was imprisoned in the county jail, "as a matter of precaution." However, she was soon released until trial, which began in the Polk County courthouse on 1 April, 1901; on the first day over 1,200 people attended, and in the last day (the tenth)—more than 2,000.

This is obviously the next stage in our fact-to-fiction development: all the "facts" above are taken over by various people and turned into words, and words are then combined and recombined, replaced with synonyms or paraphrases, arranged in various syntactic orders and sequences, uttered with various intensities and at different pitches, even changed from one moment to another, and thus accepted or denied by both users and receivers—therefore transformed and translated into a great number of stories that come to be distributed over large areas and to many audiences (witnesses, prosecutors, attorneys, other lawyers, judges and, naturally, newspaper people); and then interpretations follow.

In this trial there were seventy-eight "witnesses" (fifty-three for the prosecution and twenty-five for the defense), i.e. seventy-eight stories, many of them conflicting, with the focus on seven specific questions, i.e. possibilities of interpretation (could John Hossack have talked; was the blood on the axe his or the turkey's one son had killed; how come the axe was under the corn crib; has anything been washed; was the family dog drugged; had the domestic troubles been resolved; how about a possible intruder—and a rider who was seen and heard in the night?); and, of course, the character of the speakers was thought of, their reliability or credibility, their own specific type of relationship to the language, the people, the facts and contexts in which their stories are given…

On the 10th of April, 1901, the judge charges Mrs. Hossack as guilty of first degree murder of her husband (though she all through the trial professed her innocence—"Well, gentlemen (n.b.), I hope you don't think I killed him. I wouldn't do such a thing. I loved him too much…"—and, moreover, maintained a calm fashion all of the time); then the (all male) jury returns its verdict—guilty as charged and the recommendation that she be sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor. All these in spite of the lawyers' impassionate plea to the jury that Margaret Hossack be found not guilty (jury's sense of human nature, she was an aged

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woman with a few years to live, mother of nine and with several grandchildren)—with jury members and courtroom observers moved to tears by family members' attitude during the trial.

But this (third) jury's verdict did not lay the case to rest in the minds of many members of the community (Margaret Hossack's final statement in front of the judge was "Before my God, I am not guilty…"); no wonder, one year later, in April 1902, the Supreme Court of the State of Iowa agreed to (re-)hear the case and requested a subsequent trial; the reversal was based upon several procedural, technical points (the expert testimony concerning the murder weapon, jury instruction concerning the evidence for domestic abuse…). Two months later Margaret Hossack was released on bail (a $15,000 bond) as a doctor testified as to her "serious condition." As she goes to live with one of the daughters and her husband, the defense required a change of venue for the second trial, to Madison County; a new witness comes up, (a Mr. Hainey, dismissed as not credible on reasons of insanity), other (different) testimonies are given (another series of stories), and after a twenty-seven hours' deliberation, the new jury is unable to agree on a verdict (nine were for conviction, and three for acquittal), and Margaret Hossack is not retried; now sixty years old and in failing health, she was ordered released (with her guilt or innocence still in question). With this hung jury and such an order, the Board of Supervisors expressed its desire that the case be dismissed (followed by the county attorney's subsequent decision that the case be dismissed). Margaret Hossack lived for thirteen years after this second trial and was buried in the New Virginia cemetery next to her husband, John Hossack; their true story—like the story of any marriage?—remains unknown, so one can easily conclude that there never is anything like a true story (upon which both legal judgment as well as literary judgment could be based) and that "case closed" has no meaning in terms of story-telling.

In the meantime—in fact, before, during, and after the trial, sometimes even long after, as we will see—the newspapers had their own stories about all of these "facts"—already contaminated by the "fiction of language" from the very beginning. Here we will only refer to Glaspell's role in this "sensational murder case" as a journalist. She was only twenty-four years old, in 1900, when assigned to cover the Hossack case, i.e. the arrest, trial, and, finally, conviction of wife Margaret Hossack (by, in order, a sheriff, a coroner, a trial judge, lawyers and a jury made up only of men). But on the tenth day of the first trial (the sentencing of Margaret Hossack), Susan Galspell resigned from the Des Moines Daily, left her job as a newspaper reporter and moved home to Davenport to write fiction—probably a safer, more agreeable, and palatable "outlet for a suppressed imagination" (in another woman writer's view—Ellen Glasgow's). So she reported the story from 2 December 1900 to 13 April, 1901 (four and a half months during which she frequently visited the farmhouse where the murder took place), but one can safely speculate that she must have also known (read) about the second trial and the fact that other men (not Margaret's "peers") decided otherwise; but, as a dramatist and short-story writer, she chose to ignore these later "facts." She then moved to Chicago to soon become a student there.

As she heard this verdict, Susan Glaspell remained in doubt, disquiet, and uncertainty (as almost everyone else): couldn't one of the children have committed the act? Did not Margaret want to protect a murderer whom she knew and loved? How about—

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again—the horseman riding away into the night?... Anyway, she had filed twenty-six stories for the Des Moines Daily on the Hossack case, signed or referred to for the readers as "your correspondent," "a representative from the News" or "a member of the press"; this often opinionated persona rarely avoided hyperbole, invention, and supposition, mixing fact, rumor and commentary with rousing language and imagery. She also offered two different descriptions of Margaret Hossack, as either big, tall, calm, cold and menacing, or maternal, old, frail, worn and emaciated (plus, at one point, the issue of her insanity); suspense was often kept up by withholding (probable) information (with such hidden promises as "till next time"), as—we all know—selling the newspaper was also a priority, primarily by keeping the readers interested in the case. Glaspell thus became a primary contributor to the shaping of public opinion about the woman being tried (that John Hossack had been brutally murdered in his own house seemed to matter less and less as the trial progressed).

And there is another turn to the relationship fact-journalism-fiction (see References) that comes almost one hundred years later; interested in a "factual account of the case," but also in the relationship between literature, journalism, and power, Patricia Bryan, in 1997, goes to find and read handwritten transcripts, copies of court papers, newspapers of the time on microfilm, but also talks to a great-grandson and a great-granddaughter of the Hossacks; the great-grandson, who was working on a family genealogy, gives her a privately published memoir written by his great uncle, who was living near the Hossacks at the time of the murder. Having her previous knowledge confirmed--the the coroner's jury, the grand jury, and the trial court jury were made up entirely of men--, she tendentiously quotes a book by Ann Jones, Women Who Kill (themselves and others, as in Chopin's The Awakening, Wharton's The House of Mirth, and Plath's The Bell Jar), demonstrating that male juries, in all cases, proved to be more lenient with female defendants, out of chivalry and paternalism, so that most incriminated women had been freed (see "You know juries when it comes to women" in Trifles and "A Jury…"). And her conclusion reveals other facts at the end of these new old stories: "I will say that I am pretty sure Mrs. Hossack swung the axe and Will /the eldest son living at home at the time/ held the lamp for her to swing it by…"(even more gruesome).

And Bryan also reminds us that news accounts offer what the society will hear, i.e. journalistic stories are distorted by the norms and expectations of those in authority—or in a position to put some kind of pressure on those directly involved in the facts. Which is a good opportunity to return to our title and C. P. Scott who, in 1921 (when Glaspell, in America, had already written her newspaper reports, her drama, and her short story), to celebrate the centenary of The Guardian and his 50th anniversary as an editor and responsible editor, writes his editorial titled "A Hundred Years"; he tells his readers /and us/ here that a newspaper is both a business and an institution, that it has both profit and power as its object, that its publication implies honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, independence, and a sense of duty to the reader and the community; but, most importantly, that it should show "the unclouded face of truth"(language's clouds?). This may be the ultimate statement of values for a free press that "touches life at so many points"; his famous sentence in this article is: "Comment is free, but facts are sacred"—in our case, once more, the "sacred, unexplained murder of an

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honest farmer twenty years before"—it is true, in another part of the world (but in the same language, more or less).

The distance between Trifles (1916) and the other previous stages in our fact-to-fiction transformations increases not only in time (fifteen years)—and memory ("When I was a newspaper reporter out in Iowa, I was sent down-state to do a murder trial, and I never forgot going into the kitchen of a woman locked up in town…," in Glaspell's The Road to the Temple, p.256, quoted in Ben-Zvi, 1922, p.143)--, but also in the author's view of the facts, as they are used for her (mostly) feminist authorial purposes (she reshapes the events of the Hossack case in order to focus on contemporary issues). Also, as we read the list of characters in the play, one notable absence is striking; they are: George Henderson, the County Attorney; Sheriff Henry Peters and Mrs. Peters, his wife; Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer and his wife, Mrs. Hale (interpreted by Glaspell in the first performance for the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theater); the most striking alteration is the excision of the murdered man's wife, Mrs. Hossack, who becomes Minnie Forster/Mrs. Wright, but is never present physically on the stage; as Mrs. Wright and former Minnie Foster, she is present in the conversation of the two women, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, and is described as isolated, alone, with no children, but an elegant, attractive quire girl in her youth (as Minnie), "real sweet and pretty," and also "kind of timid and fluttery," like a bird (the bird, see infra); nothing of the cruel, monstrous, gruesome murderer in parts of the trial. At the same time, rather paradoxically, in both the play and the short story, Glaspell leaves little question that Minnie Wright murdered her husband.

The first stage directions give the audience/readers a rather gloomy, disordered kitchen in a now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright(right?)/alias John Hossack, in which there are "other signs of uncompleted work "(which only the two women notice as the play develops, and turn them into evidence for Mrs. Wright's guilt). These are part of the playwright's expressionistic techniques: a cold ("it dropped below zero last night"), dark, foreboding, rural Gothic small space, with broken things in it and a mutilated cage (elaborate symbol).

In her biography of her husband, George Cram Cook, Glaspell explains: "I went out on the wharf /in Provincetown, Massachusetts/…and looked a long time at the bare little stage. After a time the stage became a kitchen—a kitchen there all by itself… Then the door at the back opened, and people all bundled up came in—two or three men… and the two women, who hung back, reluctant to enter that kitchen." (The Road…, pp.255-56, Ben-Zvi, 1992, p.143)

At the sheriff's and attorney's request, Mr. Hale, the neighbor, recounts his visit to the Wrights' house the previous day when he came to ask John Wright if he wanted to go in with him on a party telephone (the theme of isolation and non-communication). As he enters the house Minnie Wright tells him, quite unconcerned, pleating at her apron, dull, and "not a bit excited," while "rocking back and forth" in her chair, that "John is dead" and "he died of a rope around his neck" (kind of a black humor remark), and she also laughs at several of Hale's words (with the body of her dead husband upstairs). As the attorney notices "the nice mess" in the cupboard closet and in the whole kitchen (a few jars of fruit had frozen and broken, dirty towels, unclean pans under the sink, the table was half-clean and the other half

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messy…), the sheriff also comments: "Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder /Minnie Wright was already locked up in town/ and worryin' about preserves…," with Hale's title-giving philosophy: "Well, women are used to worrying over trifles."

For the rest of the play, the stage remains the kitchen, with the two women in it and the three men coming in and going out at various intervals, as they go upstairs "to see the lay of things" there, to the barn outside, or elsewhere around the house, as "they've got awful important things on their minds." As they talk, these female Sherlock-Watsons—and also "the jury of her peers"—behave "in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they cannot help saying it." Most importantly, they keep assessing Minnie Wright's recent emotions based on the messy state of her kitchen and how she performed her routine trifles. Among other things, they discover "she was piecing a quilt" and wonder (to the men's amazement) "if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it," as much of the quilt was "nice and even," while one piece was "all over the place…," so "What do you suppose she was so nervous about?" (reflected in her erratic quilt stitching, as the quilt remained incomplete, very much like the outcome of the play; and, concerning her manner of making the quilt, they think –or know—that Mrs. Wright was knotting it, as she knew how to make a knot—even around her husband's neck?)

Next they notice a bird-cage (but where's the bird? The cat got it; but Minnie had no cat), with "the door broke" and one hinge pulled apart. So their decision as psychological investigators is that John Wright (though he was "a good man," didn't drink, kept his word, paid his debts…), who was also a hard man…, "like a raw wind that goes to the bone," must have killed the canary (that was, like Minnie, singing for freedom from the confinement of the cage/isolated farmhouse). And sooner than expected (it is a one-act play), they discover, in Minnie's sewing box, the canary with its broken neck: "Mrs. Hale—No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She /Minnie/ used to sing . He killed that, too…/i.e. her singing and the bird/."

Still, in spite of these "hard facts/evidence," they are not sure: "Mrs. Hale—Do you think she did it? Mrs. Peters (in a frightened voice)—Oh, I don't know… We don't know who killed him. We don't know." So what we have in the play are the two women (talking about an absent third) who sympathize with one another, are therefore sensitive and compassionate, but so "loyal to their sex" that they are able to conceal the truth (i.e. their implied knowledge that, in spite of what they are saying, Minnie killed John) they have become certain about; as such, the two women occupy the stage center (a kitchen rather than a courtroom—a "literary change of venue," one would think) and turn out to represent the shaping consciousness that structures the play (once again, Susan Glaspell was the actress embodying Mrs. Hale in the first performance) as they gradually patch together the scenario of Minnie Wright's life and her guilt. On the other hand, the men—mostly dismissed, and having occasional appearances, as they are either "above," or outside—are brash, self-centered, and patronizing (they always know better), rather tough and down-to-business, but ending up missing the most important clues.

The women's victory in the end—ambiguous though it may seem—is the result of their having gained control of the stage and of the case, and, more importantly, of the language; the murder and the murdered husband upstairs hardly enter their preoccupations

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and talk, nor is it really worth-mentioning that Minnie had killed him; language remains essential and, probably, factual in itself. The two women—or compeers—try the case, find the accused guilty, but dismiss the charge; they also miss some points—like the fact that the wrung neck of the canary could be proof that, before strangling her husband (rather than, more manly, using an axe), Minnie Wright had practiced it on the bird. As the two women hide the evidence against the third, the audience/readers might wonder about the message of the play: what is the meaning of justice? What is the role of women in establishing justice? How superficial is men's rational thought? What is the relationship between justice and morality? And, to suit our own theme, what is the relationship between facts and language (the greater the distance/s between them, the more obscure the facts, and the more independent the language)?

As these questions are raised, rather than answer them, one is invited to take them as sufficient in themselves for an early feminist masterpiece, gradually becoming one of the most anthologized works in American theater history.

At still another remove from facts/reality is, to some extent, Glaspell's 1917 adaptation of Trifles into "A Jury of Her Peers," with the stress thus shifted from the two women's clues (ironically described as trifles) to the makeshift trial in the farmhouse kitchen. "Adaptation" here means that the same material (of the play, not the real facts of the murder case) is re-worked into a short story: the dialogues (i.e. the "showing") are almost entirely and faithfully reproduced in the story, while the "telling" parts are again accurate renderings of the stage directions in the play: except for such occasionally absent asides as: "then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the conviction of the other woman—that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour." Thus, one cannot, in fact, see very much of a progress or development from the play to the story; as a matter of fact, one wonders why Glaspell really did decide to offer this all too faithful "translation"—except for reasons of reaching a different audience, though the play does not require much "theatrical intervention"; one act, one room, one hour, one murder (all—and more—of the classical unities), five characters and not much importance given to the character's voices as such…

But there is one interpretive turn subtly noticed by Patricia Bryan (quoted from Patricia Bryan Article…, with the query whether she and Linda Ben-Zvi knew about each other's scholarship work in this respect), and that is the importance of stories, of narratives in the law, so that the subject of Glaspell's new rendering is the style of the narrative: "The story of Margaret Hossack raises questions about stories and story-telling in the law…," as stories are indicative of the ways we understand the world and we like the facts to fit into a story line (rather than a series of rejoinders on a stage?). And the main point comes next: "We make sense of our experiences through stories, which provide explanations, predictions and interpretations… The stories we use to give meaning to the world reflect a background of assumptions and expectation…/one senses here a possible influence of cognitive theories about stories as the foundation of our thinking processes/. These are the stories that help us to decide what other stories to believe."(no page numbers)

Journalist Susan Glaspell may have decided, in 1901, that the competing stories to the jury by either the defense or the prosecution did not develop the complex story of Minnie

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Wright's life (nor did Susan Glaspell's story in the long run); on the other hand, the witnesses may not have had the proper language to articulate what they felt, and this is duly emphasized from the very beginning of the short story. Thus, the author indicates that Lewis Hale, the neighbor and the first witness to see the murder completed, "often wandered along and got things mixed up in a story," when asked by the sheriff to tell what he saw; his awkwardness in relating the details of the case, and also "saying things he didn't need to say"/from the women's point of view/, is doubled by the fact that he is very easily intimidated by the County Attorney; he "did speak guardedly as if the pencil /that the sheriff took out together with a note-book/ had affected him…" No wonder then that the men prove incompetent to determine Minnie's guilt or innocence, while, based on the "significance of kitchen things" (bottle of cherries in the kitchen cupboard, dirty towels at the sink, dirty pans under the sink, shabby and mended clothes, the sagging rocking chair, the broken stove, the flour—half-sifted and half-unsifted--that Mrs. Hale had left in her kitchen and now cannot help thinking about, dead bird, unfinished quilt) the women, also depending on their own interests, priorities, and concerns, represent and express their differences in how they discover and decode clues at the crime scene; and they thus piece together—they quilt—the story of Minnie Wright, her physical and emotional desolation. However, smart as they are, the women conceal this "crucial evidence" in order to prevent a legal judgment they believe would be unjust—by a jury of not her peers. Still, once again, they don't really know if John had killed the bird (neither do we), and they don't know if Minnie really killed John; and, in fact, it is only the women who have the clues—not the men--, and who decide that Minnie was the murderer, but they empathize with her and thus punish (?!) the men for their narrow, limited understanding and judgment.

Now we can also suppose the two women had given their story in court, side by side with all the other witnesses and members of the court (including their "ignorance" of the murder weapon, that no sign of an intruder could be found—and which they are not even prepared to consider…); but Glaspell knows this and does not take her story that far (she keeps it in the kitchen and its close surroundings), and so it is given to the world to be open to an endless number of interpretations along the years; legal judgment is final, literary judgment never is (once more); the story as we have had it ever since 1917 is one that denies all the other competing stories given in court (prosecution, witnesses, lawyers for the defense), and the real life-story that surrounded the murder remains untold.

And thus, if asked about the possible facts in the real case that the story is based upon (from the court trials, Glaspell's newspaper reports, her play and her short story), a reader would give the murder of a man in an isolated community, some time at the beginning of a cold spring in Iowa, with the wife as prime (and only) suspect, but with no conclusive evidence as to motive and means (though there was a rope around his neck in the play and the story and a bloody axe under the corn crib in the trial stories)—because the opportunity (for the wife, at least, though she always "slept sound") was there all of the time. Still, two of the women know very well the motive—the husband's killing of the wife's dear bird, a singing canary that comforted her in her loneliness (a literary evidence and motive); though, obviously, a simple-minded man (an attorney, a sheriff, a lawyer, a judge, a jury member, a counselor, or a reader/theater-goer) could never understand how killing a bird and killing a

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man can be put on the same scale. But one should not forget that Glaspell's question is not whether or why Minnie/Mrs. Hossack killed her husband, but (considering the circumstances—as all evidence was circumstantial) how she should be judged for that act—as if murder could be justified one way or another (even literarily). The story—which, we have seen, raises questions that the lawyers did not and could not raise—has also got a message to convey: men may be factual and reasonable, but they are also simple-minded, while the women know how to protect each other (even though they may have never met—but they know how women in general are, what they do on certain occasions, how they behave in a tense moment, for instance) even when murder is at stake—so, in spite of all possible evidence, they conceal their conclusions from the male investigators (who cannot be trusted), and the story ends ambiguously, with two/three (in fact, many more) ignorant men—and a dead one--, a hung final jury and Quite a number of unanswered questions.

And this is what occurs when language and fiction gradually take over—which is what has been happening in all human history, not only in our brief segment of literary history here--, and facts tend to disappear (almost completely) and lose any relevance they may have had at the beginning (though it seems hard to forget that "in the beginning…"); the readers are no longer interested in who did what and why or what happened at one moment or another; they no longer seem to care if John Hossack was murdered and his wife was or was not the murderer (rather than one of her children, or the insane neighbor/witness, or the unknown horseman in the night…); these are the "bare" facts that get more and more blurred as the first witnesses' reports are recorded, followed by the journalistic stories, then other stories (testimonies) in the courtroom, then newspaper commentaries again on the trial, followed by a play and a short story, and many other commentaries (like this one, for instance). In this chain of distancing perspective, there is a twenty-four year old journalist (a contributing reporter from the age of eighteen), Susan Glaspell, who more or less manipulated the facts of her newspaper stories so as to assure a readership for the provincial "daily news" (journalism is "business," too); then, as a dramatist, the forty-year old Glaspell made sure to isolate and select (by willful omission rather than ignorance) only those facts that allowed a symbolic-expressionistic representation of what the most probable suspect—the murdered man's wife—left behind her so that people/women in the community could absolve her while fully aware of her guilt (as they know what women can and cannot do); and, as a fiction writer, what Susan Glaspell did was simply to fill in some of the gaps deliberately created by the dramatist in order to get a more consistent picture of the whole "guilt"; so a literary trial (once fashionable in certain cultures, including ours) of Susan Glaspell would certainly find her guilty of "quilting" (apologies for the pun, but it turned out to seem inevitable), rather than "knotting."

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