MACHINAL

SOPHIE TREADWELL

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Front cover photo of Fiona Shaw in the 1993 Royal National Theatre production by Mark Douet

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SOPHIE TREADWELL

Sophie Treadwell was born in California in 1885. She went to High School in San Francisco and then to the University of California, from which she graduated in 1906 and became a reporter on the San Francisco Bulletin. The highlights of her career as a journalist included an investigative series on homeless women, an exclusive interview with Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa, and a spell in Europe as one of the first women foreign correspondents covering the 1914-18 War. She wrote four novels and more than thirty plays, including *O Nightingale* (1922), *Gringo* (1922), *Machinal* (1928), *Ladies Leave* (1929), *Lusita* (1931), *Plumes in the Dust* (1936), *For Saxophone* (1939-41) and *Hope for a Harvest* (1941), after which she gave up writing for the stage. She died in 1970.

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Machinal was first performed in Great Britain as *The Life Machine* in 1931. It was first performed in Britain under its original title in 1993 on the Lyttelton stage of the Royal National Theatre, London, with the following cast and production team. Previews from 9 October. Press night: 15 October.

EPISODE ONE: TO BUSINESS

Adding Clerk	Bill Wallis
Filing Clerk	James Duke
Stenographer	Lynn Farleigh
Telephone Girl	Matilda Ziegler
George H. Jones	John Woodvine
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw

EPISODE TWO: AT HOME

Young Woman	Fiona Shaw
Mother	June Watson
Garbage Man	Alec Wallis
Woman	Yvonne Nicholson
Boy	Timothy Matthews
Young Man	David Bark-Jones
Girl	Juliette Gruber
Woman	Rachel Power
Man	Michael Brogan
Wife	Cate Hamer
Husband	Michael Bott
Singer	Sara Griffiths

EPISODE THREE: HONEYMOON

George H. Jones	John Woodvine
Bellboy	Timothy Matthews
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw

EPISODE FOUR: MATERNAL

Nurse	Lynn Farleigh
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw
George H. Jones	John Woodvine
Doctor	Christopher Rozycki

EPISODE FIVE: PROHIBITED

First Man	Ciaran Hinds
Second Man	Colin Stinton
Man at Bar	Roger Sloman
Boy at Bar	Timothy Matthews

Man at Bar	Michael Brogan
Woman at Bar	Rachel Power
Telephone Girl	Matilda Ziegler
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw
Man Behind Bar	Marcus Heath
Girl	Harriet Harrison
Man	Michael Bott

EPISODE SIX: INTIMATE

Man	Ciaran Hinds
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw

EPISODE SEVEN: DOMESTIC

George H Jones	John Woodvine
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw

EPISODE EIGHT: THE LAW

Bailiff	Alec Wallis
Clerk	David Holdaway
Court Reporter	Christopher Rozycki
Judge	Bill Wallis
Defense Lawyer	Roger Sloman
First Reporter	James Duke
Second Reporter	Michael Brogan
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw
Prosecution Lawyer	Colin Stinton
Third Reporter	David Bark-Jones

EPISODE NINE: A MACHINE

Priest	Allan Mitchell
Singer	Marcus Heath
Jailer	Paul Benzing
Young Woman	Fiona Shaw
Matron	Lynn Farleigh
Barber 1	Bill Wallis
Barber 2	David Holdaway
First Guard	Alec Wallis
Second Guard	Christopher Rozycki

Director	Stephen Daldry
Settings	Ian MacNeil
Costumes	Clare Mitchell
Lighting	Rick Fisher
Music	Stephen Warbeck
Movement	Quinny Sacks
Dialect Coach	Joan Washington
Company Voice Work	Patsy Rodenburg

Introduction

Machinal is the most famous work of Sophie Treadwell, a playwright, journalist, novelist, producer and sometime actor and director who was born and raised in California. She began writing plays and acting at the University of California, from which she graduated in 1906. Treadwell hoped to be a performer but her onstage career was limited to a brief stint in vaudeville and occasional dramatic roles, usually in her own works. Like many American women playwrights of her generation she was trained as a reporter, and in her early years she covered everything from theatrical premieres to baseball games for the *San Francisco Bulletin*. Treadwell soon became a respected journalist whose accomplishments included an 'undercover' series on homeless women, an exclusive interview with Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa, a European tour as a war reporter during World War One, and a year as a special correspondent in Mexico during World War Two.

As Nancy Wynn records in her dissertation on Treadwell, the playwright had a long and extraordinary life. Although she suffered from debilitating illnesses (with symptoms resembling those attributed to Helen in *Machinal*) she was an indefatigable worker and traveler. Her journeys throughout the world were sometimes the inspiration for her plays, whose settings extend from Moscow to Mexico. Treadwell was married for two decades until his death to journalist William O. McGeehan, but she retained her own name and career and often maintained a residence separate from his. A member of the feminist Lucy Stone League, she marched in favor of women's suffrage and wrote about society's oppression of women. She occasionally produced and even directed her own work, a rare accomplishment in the male-dominated world of the American commercial theater. In the course of her career Treadwell – who died in 1970 at the age of 84 – completed hundreds of newspaper stories, four novels and more than thirty plays, seven of which appeared on New York stages.

Treadwell's early works include *Gringo*, based on her experiences in Mexico, and *O Nightingale*, a comedy about a stage-struck young woman that Treadwell herself co-produced. She wrote *Machinal* (the term is French for 'mechanical' or 'automatic'), the play for which she is best remembered today, in 1928. Loosely based on the sensational murder trial of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray, *Machinal* was a critical success, ran for 91 performances in New York, and was chosen by Burns Mantle for his volume *The Best Plays of 1928-29*. Reviewers compared the work favorably to

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* in theme and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* in technique. Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* – who was so intrigued by *Machinal* that he reviewed the production twice – called it 'a triumph of individual distinction, gleaming with intangible beauty . . . an illuminating, measured drama such as we are not likely to see again.' *Machinal* was even lauded in a *Times* editorial as a play that 'in a hundred years . . . should still be vital and vivid.' In 1931 the drama premiered in London under the title *The Life Machine*. Although some reviewers were offended by the play's sexual content, the London *Times* critic had no such problem and considered all but the last scene 'expressive and beautifully clean-cut.' *Machinal* had its greatest triumph in Russia, where it enjoyed a long run at Moscow's Kamerny Theatre before touring the provinces. A television adaptation was aired in the United States in 1954, and a revival with choreography by Sophie Maslow was performed a few years later.

Machinal uses expressionist techniques to create a parable about 'an ordinary young woman' who lives in a mechanized, materialistic world. Treadwell takes Helen through the stages of a kind of modern Everywoman: work in a boring office, marriage to a boss who offers her financial security ('he's a Vice-President – of course he's decent' her mother insists), a motherhood that oppresses her and a lover who abandons her. The expressionist form – flat characters, repetitive dialogue and action, numerous short scenes, harsh audio effects, confusion of inner and outer reality – is the perfect medium for presenting the life of a young woman who asks an impersonal society 'Is nothing mine?'

Treadwell attacks capitalism for putting even intimate relationships on an economic footing, but her critique extends to technology, medicine, law, motherhood, the press, romance (including a speakeasy that closely resembles a contemporary singles bar) and even religion. It is a recognizably feminist critique as well: the audience looks through Helen's eyes, understands the events from her perspective. Throughout the nine scenes – perhaps echoing the nine months of gestation – Treadwell shows her protagonist confronting a phalanx of male characters with the power to determine her life. Again and again Helen complains of claustrophobia, a motif of entrapment that runs as a common thread through the plays of such female contemporaries of Treadwell as Susan Glaspell, Zona Gale, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Lillian Hellman.

Sophie Treadwell never had another success comparable to *Machinal*, although she continued writing novels and plays for many years. Closest in theme and style to *Machinal* is the expressionist *For Saxophone* which relies heavily on music, dance and the voices of unseen characters to tell the story of another young woman trapped in a marriage of convenience. Her works

also include *Plumes in the Dust*, based on the life of writer Edgar Allan Poe; *Rights*, an unproduced drama about eighteenth-century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft; and *Hope for a Harvest*, an autobiographical play exposing prejudice and environmental destruction in her native California. Embittered by the lukewarm reception of *Harvest*, Treadwell presented no more plays on the New York stage. In 1941, the very same year *Hope for a Harvest* appeared, the eminent critic George Jean Nathan sneered that 'even the best of our [American] women playwrights falls immeasurably short of the mark of our best masculine' because women 'by nature' lack 'complete objectivity' and the emotional control enjoyed by their male counterparts. It was in such an atmosphere of condescension that Sophie Treadwell strove to make her mark as a dramatist.

Unfortunately, most of the standard histories of drama in the United States reveal similar attitudes, and Treadwell rarely rates more than a line or two if she is acknowledged at all. Even granted that *Machinal* is her only outstanding work, the obscurity into which she and her play fell obviously has much to do with her gender (her sister playwrights suffered a similar fate) and to *Machinal*'s biting indictment of a world ruled by men. The current scholarly and theatrical interest in Treadwell and *Machinal* in the United States is partly due to feminist efforts to write women back into the theatrical history from which they have been erased, but it also stems from the fact that *Machinal*'s universe is uncomfortably like our own. The cacophony of urban sounds that underlies each scene is remarkably similar, while *Machinal*'s repetitive dialogue, woven of clichés, foreshadows the work of playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and, as critic Frank Rich recently observed, David Mamet. As our lives become ever more mechanized and standardized, the story of one lone individual seeking to make her voice heard grows in relevance. Just as timely is the way Helen – like Treadwell herself – tries to find financial security without sacrificing her dreams, to control her own body and shape her own future, in a world in which women's power to do so remains severely limited.

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Characters

YOUNG WOMAN
TELEPHONE GIRL
STENOGRAPHER
FILING CLERK
ADDING CLERK
MOTHER
HUSBAND
BELLBOY
NURSE
DOCTOR
YOUNG MAN
GIRL
MAN
BOY
MAN
ANOTHER MAN
WAITER
JUDGE
LAWYER FOR DEFENSE
LAWYER FOR PROSECUTION
COURT REPORTER
BAILIFF
REPORTER
SECOND REPORTER
THIRD REPORTER
JAILER
MATRON
PRIEST

The Plot is the story of a woman who murders her husband – an ordinary young woman, any woman.

The Plan is to tell this story by showing the different phases of life that the woman comes in contact with, and in none of which she finds any place, any peace. The woman is essentially soft, tender, and the life around her is essentially hard, mechanized. Business, home, marriage, having a child, seeking pleasure – all are difficult for her – mechanical, nerve nagging. Only in an illicit love does she find anything with life in it for her, and when she loses this, the desperate effort to win free to it again is her undoing.

The story is told in nine scenes. In the dialogue of these scenes there is the attempt to catch the rhythm of our common city speech, its brassy sound, its trick of repetition, etc.

Then there is, also, the use of many different sounds chosen primarily for their inherent emotional effect (steel riveting, a priest chanting, a Negro singing, jazz band, etc.), but contributing also to the creation of a background, an atmosphere.

The Hope is to create a stage production that will have 'style,' and at the same time, by the story's own innate drama, by the directness of its telling, by the variety and quick changingness of its scenes, and the excitement of its sounds, to create an interesting play.

Scenically this play is planned to be handled in two basic sets (or in one set with two backs)

The first division – the first Four Episodes – needs an entrance at one side, and a back having a door and a large window. The door gives, in

Episode 1 – to Vice President's office.
Episode 2 – to hall.
Episode 3 – to bathroom.
Episode 4 – to corridor.

And the window shows, in

Episode 1 – an opposite office.
Episode 2 – an inner apartment court.
Episode 3 – window of a dance casino opposite.
Episode 4 – steel girders. (Of these, only the casino window is important. Sky could be used for the others.)

The second division – the last Five Episodes – has the same side entrance, but the back has only one opening – for a small window (barred).

Episode 5, window is masked by electric piano.
Episode 6, window is disclosed (sidewalk outside).
Episode 7, window is curtained.
Episode 8, window is masked by Judge's bench.
Episode 9, window is disclosed (sky outside).

There is a change of furniture, and props for each episode – only essential things, full of character. For Episode 9, the room is closed in from the sides, and there is a place with bars and a door in it, put straight across stage down front (back far enough to leave a clear passageway in front of it).

Lighting concentrated and intense. – Light and shadow – bright light and darkness. – This darkness, already in the scene, grows and blacks out the light for dark stage when the scene changes are made.

Offstage Voices: Characters in the Background Heard, but Unseen:

A Janitor
A Baby
A Boy and a Girl
A Husband and Wife
A Husband and Wife
A Radio Announcer
A Negro Singer

Mechanical Offstage Sounds

A small jazz band
A hand organ
Steel riveting
Telegraph instruments
Aeroplane engine

Mechanical Onstage Sounds

Office Machines (typewriters, telephones, etc.)
Electric piano.

Characters: in the Background Seen, Not Heard
(*Seen, off the main set; i.e., through a window or door*)

Couples of men and women dancing
A Woman in a bathrobe
A Woman in a wheel chair
A Nurse with a covered basin
A Nurse with a tray
The feet of men and women passing in the street

EPISODE ONE

To Business

Scene: an office: a switchboard, filing cabinet, adding machine, typewriter and table, manifold machine.

Sounds: office machines: typewriters, adding machine, manifold, telephone bells, buzzers.

Characters and their machines
A YOUNG WOMAN (*typewriter*)
A STENOGRAPHER (*typewriter*)
A FILING CLERK (*filing cabinet and manifold*)
AN ADDING CLERK (*adding machine*)
TELEPHONE OPERATOR (*switchboard*)
JONES

Before the curtain
Sounds of machines going. They continue throughout the scene, and accompany the YOUNG WOMAN*'s thoughts after the scene is blacked out.*

At the rise of the curtain
All the machines are disclosed, and all the characters with the exception of the YOUNG WOMAN.

Of these characters, the YOUNG WOMAN, *going any day to any business. Ordinary. The confusion of her own inner thoughts, emotions, desires, dreams cuts her off from any actual adjustment to the routine of work. She gets through this routine with a very small surface of her consciousness. She is not homely and she is not pretty. She is preoccupied with herself – with her person. She has well kept hands, and a trick of constantly arranging her hair over her ears.*

The STENOGRAPHER *is the faded, efficient woman office worker. Drying, dried.*

The ADDING CLERK *is her male counterpart.*

The FILING CLERK *is a boy not grown, callow adolescence.*

The TELEPHONE GIRL, *young, cheap and amorous.*

Lights come up on office scene. Two desks right and left.

Telephone booth back right center. Filing cabinet back of center. Adding machine back left center.

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 – left*). 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. – ! (*Suddenly.*) What's the matter with Q?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Matter with it – Mr. J. – Mr. K. wants you – What you mean matter? Matter with what?

FILING CLERK. Matter with Q.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Well – what is? Spring 1726?

FILING CLERK. I'm asking yuh –

TELEPHONE GIRL. WELL?

FILING CLERK. Nothing filed with it –

TELEPHONE GIRL. Well?

FILING CLERK. Look at A. Look at B. What's the matter with Q?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Ain't popular. Hello – Hello – George H. Jones Company.

FILING CLERK. Hot dog! Why ain't it?

ADDING CLERK. Has it personality?

STENOGRAPHER. Has it Halitosis?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Has it got it?

FILING CLERK. Hot dog!

TELEPHONE GIRL. What number do you want? (*Recognizing but not pleased.*). Oh – hello – sure I know who it is – tonight? Uh, uh – (*Negative, but each with a different inflection.*) You heard me – No!

FILING CLERK. Don't you like him?

STENOGRAPHER. She likes 'em all.

TELEPHONE GIRL. I do not!

STENOGRAPHER. Well – pretty near all!

TELEPHONE GIRL. What number do you want? Wrong number. Hello – hello – George H. Jones Company. Hello, hello –

STENOGRAPHER. Memorandum – attention Mr. Smith – at a conference of –

ADDING CLERK. 125 – 83 3/4 – 22 – 908 – 34 – 1/4 – 28593.

FILING CLERK. Report – R, Sales – S, Trade – T.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Shh – ! Yes, Mr. J. – ? No – Miss A. ain't in yet – I'll tell her, Mr. J. – just the minute she gets in.

STENOGRAPHER. She's late again, huh?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Out with her sweetie last night, huh?

FILING CLERK. Hot dog.

ADDING CLERK. She ain't got a sweetie.

STENOGRAPHER. How do you know?

ADDING CLERK. I know.

FILING CLERK. Hot dog.

ADDING CLERK. She lives alone with her mother.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Spring 1876? Hello – Spring 1876. Spring! Hello, Spring 1876? 1876! Wrong number! Hello! Hello!

STENOGRAPHER. Director's meeting semi-annual report card.

FILING CLERK. Shipments – Sales – Schedules – S.

ADDING CLERK. She doesn't belong in an office.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Who does?

STENOGRAPHER. I do!

ADDING CLERK. You said it!

FILING CLERK. Hot dog!

TELEPHONE GIRL. Hello – hello – George H. Jones Company – hello – hello –

STENOGRAPHER. I'm efficient. She's inefficient.

FILING CLERK. She's inefficient.

TELEPHONE GIRL. She's got J. going.

STENOGRAPHER. Going?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Going and coming.

FILING CLERK. Hot dog.

Enter JONES.

JONES. Good morning, everybody.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Good morning.

FILING CLERK. Good morning.

ADDING CLERK. Good morning.

STENOGRAPHER. Good morning, Mr. J.

JONES. Miss A. isn't in yet?

TELEPHONE GIRL. Not yet, Mr. J.

FILING CLERK. Not yet.

ADDING CLERK. Not yet.

STENOGRAPHER. She's late.

JONES. I just wanted her to take a letter.

STENOGRAPHER. I'll take the letter.

JONES. One thing at a time and that done well.

ADDING CLERK (*yessing*). Done well.

STENOGRAPHER. I'll finish it later.

JONES. Hew to the line.

ADDING CLERK. Hew to the line.

STENOGRAPHER. Then I'll hurry.

JONES. Haste makes waste.

ADDING CLERK. Waste.

STENOGRAPHER. But if you're in a hurry.

JONES. I'm never in a hurry – That's how I get ahead! (*Laughs. They all laugh.*) First know you're right – then go ahead.

ADDING CLERK. Ahead.

JONES (*to* TELEPHONE GIRL). When Miss A. comes in tell her I want her to take a letter. (*Turns to go in – then.*) It's important.

TELEPHONE GIRL (*making a note*). Miss A. – important.

JONES (*starts up – then*). And I don't want to be disturbed.

TELEPHONE GIRL. You're in conference?

JONES. I'm in conference. (*Turns – then.*) Unless its A.B. – of course.

TELEPHONE GIRL. Of course – A.B.