

现代英语语言文学论丛·醇熟系列

Susan Glaspell and
the Plasticity of Her Dramatic Art

苏珊·格拉斯佩尔戏剧的 艺术塑性研究

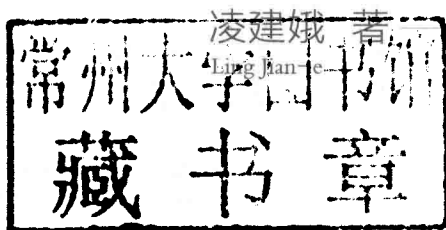
凌建娥 著

现代英语语言文学论丛·醇熟系列

Susan Glaspell and
the Plasticity of Her Dramatic Art

苏珊·格拉斯佩尔戏剧的 艺术塑性研究

凌建娥 著



本项目获教育部人文社会科学规划基金项目“美国作家苏珊·格拉斯佩尔戏剧研究”（编号12YJA752017）以及湖南科技大学学术著作出版基金资助，特此致谢。

The project is supported by Humanities and Social Sciences Fund of China's Ministry of Education (Grant No. 12YJA752017), and Fund for Academic Publications of Hunan University of Science and Technology. Special thanks are due to the specified patronages.



南京大学出版社
Nanjing University Press

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

苏珊·格拉斯佩尔戏剧的艺术塑性研究 = Susan Glaspell and the plasticity of her dramatic art : 英文 / 凌建娥著. — 南京 : 南京大学出版社, 2014. 12
ISBN 978-7-305-14205-5

I. ①苏… II. ①凌… III. ①格拉斯佩尔, S.
(1876~1948)—戏剧文学—文学研究—英文 IV.
①I712.073

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2014)第 268820 号

出版发行 南京大学出版社

社 址 南京市汉口路 22 号

邮 编 210093

出 版 人 金鑫荣

书 名 Susan Glaspell and the plasticity of her dramatic art
苏珊·格拉斯佩尔戏剧的艺术塑性研究

著 者 凌建娥

责任编辑 董 颖

编辑热线 025-83592655

照 排 南京南琳图文制作有限公司

印 刷 江苏凤凰数码印务有限公司

开 本 880×1230 1/32 印张 7.125 字数 262 千

版 次 2014 年 12 月第 1 版 2014 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

ISBN 978-7-305-14205-5

定 价 32.00 元

网址: <http://www.njupco.com>

官方微博: <http://weibo.com/njupco>

官方微信号: njupress

销售咨询热线: (025) 83594756

* 版权所有, 侵权必究

* 凡购买南大版图书, 如有印装质量问题, 请与所购
图书销售部门联系调换

To my mother, Huang Xiuying, who is illiterate and irresistible for her boundless love; and my father, Ling Haiming (1934 - 2004), who lived a plastic life of transformations in the name of love.

We live close together and we live far apart.

— Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (1916)

And life grows over buried life!

— Susan Glaspell, *The Outside* (1917)

Why, if now — in this our day — our troubled day of many shadows — came a light — a light to reach those never lighted place — wouldn't *want* it?

— Susan Glaspell, *Bernice* (1919)

I'd like to have been a pioneer! ... A whole big land to open up! A big new life to begin.

— Susan Glaspell, *Inheritors* (1921)

We need not be held in forms molded for us. There is outness — and otherness.

— Susan Glaspell, *The Verge* (1921)

She [Alison] loved to make her little gifts. If she can make one more, from her century to yours, then she isn't gone. Anything else is — too lonely.

— Susan Glaspell, *Alison's House* (1930)

The only thing that is really ours is the thing that is in us — not yet done.

— Susan Glaspell, *Springs Eternal* (1943)

List of Illustrations

1. Susan Glaspell at work in Provincetown	viii
2. Interior of Provincetown Playhouse	35
3. <i>Trifles</i> staged by students from China's Soochow University	55
4. Susan Glaspell playing Abbey in <i>Bernice</i> (1919)	65
5. <i>Inheritors</i> staged by students of Hunan University of Science and Technology	82



Susan Glaspell at work in Provincetown (564 Commercial Street)

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my gratitude goes to Professor Liu Haiping at Nanjing University (NJU) whose expertise in Eugene O'Neill studies inspires this project evolved from my doctoral dissertation under his guidance; also to other NJU faculty of the English Department for enlightening and sustaining my intellectual inquiries, especially Professor Wang Shouren, Professor Zhu Gang and Professor Yang Jincai; to Professor Linda Ben-Zvi at Tel Aviv University and Professor Barbara Ozieblo at University of Málaga for providing me their Glaspell literature along with advice; to Professor Carol Martin and Professor Robert Vorlicky at New York University for co-sponsoring my 12-month fellowship funded by China Scholarship Council; to The International Susan Glaspell Society and Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature at New York Public Library for their indispensable resources; to the members of my dissertation defense committee for their suggestions: Professor Yao Junwei and Professor Chen Aimin at Nanjing Normal University, Professor Yang Jincai, Professor Jiang Ningkang and Professor Zhao Wenshu at NJU. My indebtedness is still due to the faculty of the English Department of Xiangtan Normal University (currently Hunan University of Science and Technology, HNUST) along with that of Changsha Railway University (currently Central South University), wherein my interest in literature has been well nurtured and navigated by Professor Zeng Yanyu and Professor Luo Xuanmin (currently at Tsinghua University) respectively; to Professor Wu Bing (1935 – 2012) at Beijing Foreign Languages University for tolerating my intellectual rashness with encouragement of earnest pursuit for truth. Last but not least, I thank my NJU classmates and friends, Professor Zhang Min at Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) and Dr. Zhu Xuefeng at NJU in particular, my colleagues and graduate students at HNUST, and my family for their support one way or another.

Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
1 The Verge, Again	1
2 Art of the Square	36
3 Art of the Temple	83
4 Art of the Clinic	130
5 Toward a Plastic Criticism	163
Works Cited	175
Afterword	193
Appendix Susan Glaspell Chronology	204
Index	209

The Verge, Again

Mankind massed to kill. We have failed. We are through.
We will destroy. Break this up ...Break up. And then – and
then –!

– Susan Glaspell, *The Verge* (1921)

2010 witnesses, among many other events, the publication of three books. Coming out first is the English translation of *La Plasticité au soir de l'écriture* (2004, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*) by Catherine Malabou, contemporary French philosopher. Next is *Living in the End Times* by Slavoj Žižek, willingly “the most dangerous philosopher in the West” (Kirsch). The third is *Susan Glaspell: The Complete Plays*, an anthology of fifteen plays by the Pulitzer-winning American writer Susan Glaspell. It may be an accident that they all come out in the first half of the year, it is no accident that they all address to certain human condition that yearns for attention. If the publication of a book is an event – event that is “ideal by nature” (Deleuze *Logic* 52), whoever has read these books and encountered their own “ideal” cannot help feeling something in common. If improvisation is our art today, one may create an installation piece by placing these books together under this title, “Voices from/of/for the Verge.”

The verge is, of course, a metaphor. Does not Socrates show speaking metaphorically is a better rhetoric in defending himself as “that gadfly which God has attached to the state [of Athens]” (Plato 414)? Do not George Lakoff and Mark Johnson painstakingly persuade us that we live by metaphors? Cognitive scientists may be interested in mapping this cognitive mechanism, literary scholars simply embrace it by eulogizing P. B. Shelley’s west wind, Walt Whitman’s leaves of grass, or T. S. Eliot’s waste land. Any metaphorical conception of the verge relies upon its

lexical meaning of being “a border, limit, or boundary of a space; an edge, margin, or brink of something definite in extent” (“Verge”). It provokes sense of crisis as well as promise, for the edge of one space also denotes the beginning of another. It is, in other words, a plasticity in Malabou’s terms, like the dusk. Regarding this cornerstone of her philosophy, Malabou reiterates its tripartite etymological sense in simultaneously giving/taking/annihilating form. In *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, which she calls “a portrait of the concept of plasticity” (1), she reminds her readers of the Greek origin of the word, *plassein*, that means “to model, to mold,” and the fact that it refers to both “the aptitude to *receive form* (for instance, clay is “plastic”) and the ability to *give form* (as in the plastic arts or plastic surgery), yet is also characterized by “the power to annihilate form” as in “plastic explosive” related to bombing (87). In *The Future of Hegel* (1996), her first engagement with the concept and an evolvment from her doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Jacques Derrida, she has written of the “plasticity” of the word “plasticity” drawn to two extremes, “both to those concrete shapes in which form is crystallized (sculpture) and to the annihilation of all form (the bomb)” (9). After tracing Hegel’s use of the word and its history in continental philosophy, she concludes that

Plasticity is a name for the originary unity of acting and being acted upon, of spontaneity and receptivity. A medium for the differentiation of opposites, plasticity holds the extremes together in their reciprocal action, enabling the function of a structure of anticipation where the three terms of the temporal process are articulated: the originary synthesis, the hypotyposis or embodiment of the spiritual, the relation of the moments of time. (Malabou *Future* 186)

Of plasticity thus understood, Derrida insists Malabou has “invented” this concept as “an event” for Malabou discovers “plasticity” as the “unforeseen Hegelian philosophy” (xvi-xvii). The verge foreseen by Malabou, Žižek and Glaspell is such a plasticity, a medium that enables “a structure of anticipation” for the authors.

Chronologically speaking, Glaspell starts this voice from/of/for the verge first. She writes all sorts of verges in her plays: Greenwich Village on the verge of a new culture boiling with

Freudian psychoanalysis and New Woman (*Suppressed Desires*, 1915; collaborated with her husband George Cram Cook), with socialism (*The People*, 1917), with birth control movement (*Chains of Dew*, 1919); a woman on the verge of life and death (*Trifles*, 1916; *The Outside*, 1917; *Bernice*, 1919); America on the verge of a lost tradition that defines the country (*The Inheritors*, 1921), or a commercial culture (*The Comic Artist*, 1927, collaborated with Norman Matson; *Alison's House*, 1930). But it is her dramatizing of humanity on the verge in the wake of the First World War in *The Verge* (1921) that highlights her literary career beginning with the novel *The Glory of the Conquered* (1909) and ending with the novel *Judd Rankin's Daughter* (1945). She thrives on exploding the form of being a novelist and taking the new form of being a modernist playwright between 1915 and 1922, during which time she mainly writes for Provincetown Players co-founded by Cook and herself. As is indicated by Carpentier's study of Glaspell's novels, which recognizes only Glaspell's novels after 1915 as "mature" (8), this dramatic experience transforms Glaspell into a better novelist. While her peers around the same time famously mourn "things falls apart, the center cannot hold" (W.B. Yeats, "The Second Becoming," 1920), or "April is the cruelest month" (T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," 1922), she mourns the verge of humanity by configuring a new beginning in her dramatic rhapsody. She has her most sophisticated dramatic persona Claire Archer declaring clearly and sharply, "Mankind massed to kill. We have failed. We are through" (*Complete Plays* 240). When the whole country is celebrating the victory of the Great War, and people care for nothing but "gay" on the eve of the Jazz Age, Claire decides it is time to "break this up" for the chance of "and then —!". She dares the "the spirit" of the age that "didn't take the tip" to break it up like her plants, and in so doing she is considered insane. Stuck in the impasse, Claire opts for madness that "breaks though" for it seems to be the only "stunning chance" of "and then —!" (*Complete Plays* 240). As such, the verge dramatized by Glaspell is not unlike Malabou's dusk.

Dusk is the verge of the day, or its "transformational mask" to use Malabou's word borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Way of Masks* (1972). By addressing the dusk of writing, Malabou does not mean to address the end of writing. What she

wants to do most is to find a “motor scheme” for the present epoch, adding still the “motor scheme is not a *Zeitgeist* (*Dusk* 57). It is a tool in the form of a thought that is “capable of gathering the greatest quantity of energy and information in the text of an epoch” (*Dusk* 14). For Malabou, plasticity is on the verge of replacing Derrida’s “writing” as the “motor scheme” for the contemporary era. So far as she can see, plasticity is “becoming both the dominant formal motif of interpretation and the most productive exegetical and heuristic tool of our time” (*Dusk* 57). Drawing upon the lexical signification of the word in receiving/giving/exploding the form, informed still by the use of the word in neuroscience, she appropriates the term as a Deleuzian creative concept^① that is “the motor scheme” for the twentieth-first century. Although Malabou admits plasticity at the dusk of writing involves mourning and melancholia that describes “the dusk of farewell,” she also has Heidegger by her side to declare that the “real meaning” of dusk is metamorphosis (*Dusk* 62). In a later talk, she wonders if plasticity can also be taken as “a political mode of being.”^② In both cases though, plasticity is negotiated by Malabou for the message of mutability, metamorphosis, or transformation in exploding the form. It is also in this sense that this book undertakes to investigate modernity and plasticity in a contemporary encounter with Glaspell as a modernist playwright. An encounter here may be understood in the same way Deleuze encounters Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Fredrick Nietzsche and Henri Bergson among others. That is to say, to encounter to see what may happen, or “to see (what is)

① Gilles Deleuze suggests the job of a philosopher is creative in the sense that he/she creates new concepts. He writes, “What I am interested in are the relations between the arts, science, and philosophy. There’s order of priority among these disciplines. Each is creative. The true object of science is to create functions, the true object of art is to create sensory aggregates, and the object of philosophy is to create concepts” (*Negotiations* 123).

② The talk was given at Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles on 9 November 2010, an event for Cal Arts Aesthetics and Politics Lecture Series. The title of her lecture bears evidence to her thesis, “Plasticity: Looking for New Political Modes of Being.” See the video retrieved on 20 January 2011 <<http://aestheticsandpolitics.calarts.edu/lecture-series>>.

coming”^① to use Malabou’s word of Wittgensteinian family resemblance for plasticity in *The Future of Hegel*.

The verge for Žižek is the “end times” of global capitalism. The “simple” premise of his book is the fast approaching of “four riders of apocalypse” for the economic Armageddon: the global ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the capitalist system that lead to problems with intellectual property and forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water, and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions (x). The end times of capitalism, the coming to “an apocalyptic zero-point” in particular, is where Žižek sees the Glaspellian “stunning chance” of “and then —!” or Malabouian plasticity of the dusk understood as metamorphosis or transformation. Speaking from this verge, Žižek seems not surprisingly nostalgic for the “good old” communism in his enthusiasm for the “emancipatory collective” that concludes his study (402). His voice from/of/for the verge for the West to honor the apocalyptic zero-point by accepting is it, for acceptance denotes “the cause regained” (353).

This may seem too brief an account of the plasticity of the verge conceived by these diversified writers, but it is only meant to serve the purpose of illustrating the improvised installation of three books that give a glimpse of our contemporariness of being on the verge again. In the West, this sense of being on the verge again is first marked by a general sense of the end of Western modernity whether as a historical category or aesthetic category. On the whole, a tragedy like “Mourning Becomes Modernity” has been haunting the global amphitheater.

Mourning Becomes Modernity: A Tragedy in Four Acts

Stage Manager: To begin with, the stage manager in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938) is my master lest you are curious. For those of you who are still haunted by the walking dead in the

① Malabou’s French word is “*Voir venir*.” Her English translator Lisabeth During explains “*Voir venir*” means “at the same time to anticipate while not knowing what comes.” Her use of the parentheses is meant to mark “the reserve inherent in waiting itself.” See “Preliminary Remarks” in Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, xlix.

Wilder play, you would be less alarmed by our play, "Mourning Becomes Modernity." It is jointly written by Western scholars in the humanities and social studies in the past two decades or so without losing their individuality. For the bulk of it and the popular taste of theater today, it is given the form of being a closet drama, an otherwise forgotten tradition in the history of Western drama. Act I shows Žižek's latest narrative of Western capitalism arguably lived as a grieving experience not unlike five stages of grief from denial, anger, bargaining, depression to hopefully an eventual acceptance, concluding with an aside from Michael Moore's documentary film on American capitalism. Act II turns to several reports of literature and art in the last decade of the twentieth century when their death is repeatedly announced. Act III traces a general rhetoric of loss in the Western critical theory since at least the early 1990s that cast modernity as a mourning site of pure loss. Signs of mutability of this discourse in the twentieth-first century are detected in some efforts to perceive loss as an ontological epistemology of modernity. Act IV deals with the rhetoric of loss embodied in modernist studies when literary modernism is unanimously configured as a literature of loss to mourn the injuries of Western capitalism. To be sure, it does not seem to be an interesting play, nor does it become very well for the form of an academic study. But what is the loss if the molded form of academic writing is exploded for at least once in this particular study of modernity and plasticity?

A word on the concept of "modernity" in the play is necessary. To be inspired by Anne Bradstreet, this improvised verse on modernity is not without sense: "If ever two (words) were one, then surely capitalism and modernity; if ever one (word) is loved by all, then modernity."^① For modernity to be presented as one with capitalism, as if the galaxy of other definitions does not matter, Fredric Jameson is an important guide. For one thing, Jameson defines modernity as "a narrative category" (40). For another, he prompts, while noticing how "alternate" or "alternative" modernities are used to mark their

① Bradstreet's "To My Dear Loving Husband" begins, "If ever two were one, then surely we. / If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee." See the whole poem at <http://www.annebradstreet.com/to_my_dear_and_loving_husband.htm>.

differences from the “standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model,” that “a fundamental meaning” of modernity is “a worldwide capitalism itself” (12). As if this is not convincing enough, he emphasizes, albeit in a side kick, that “the only satisfactory semantic meaning of modernity lies in its association with capitalism” (13). Thus by saying modernity is one with capitalism is just a poetic leap to place modernity in the iron cage of capitalism for the present purpose.

Lest Jameson as the guide does not seem strong enough to confront the flux of intellectual energies of trying to name modernity, Matei Calinescu is another. As a matter of fact, he actually notes there exist two modernities, one as a stage in the history of Western civilization, a product of “scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by *capitalism*,” the other is modernity as an “aesthetic concept” (41). For modernity to be given two related but complex forms, and in periods, Calinescu finds Jameson an ally, if not a follower. Jameson narrates tersely, “one cannot not periodize,” adding to no one’s surprise that there exists a stage of modernity that is called postmodernity, or “a postmodern break” (94). In the mean time, he explodes this form of capitalist modernity to acknowledge that modernity still has an “undeniable” aesthetic category (94–95). The paradigm of two modernities configured by Calinescu and Jameson is followed in due faith throughout this study.

Act I Living in the End Times of Capitalism as Grief-Work

When Western modernity is understood as capitalism, Žižek not only announces its “zero-point” but also contends living in the end times is like living through the five stages of grief affected by those who are informed of a terminal illness or suffer from any catastrophic personal loss, which is proposed by the Swiss-born psychologist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in *Death and Dying* (1969). Believe it or not, he sees the five faces of grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, in the Western social consciousness that attempts to deal with the forthcoming apocalypse anyhow. To start with, there is the ideological *denial* that there is no fundamental disorder; there is *anger* expressed at the injustices of the new world order; there is *bargaining* in the attempts to change here and there to preserve

the present order; where bargaining begins to fail comes *depression* and withdrawal that will not give away until a “zero-point” when the subject no longer perceives the situation as a threat but as the chance of a new beginning (xi – xii). It is his hope that the West will come to accept the truth that hurts and start to perceive this crisis as a new beginning. What remains significant in his narrative is his endorsement and development of Malabou’s idea of the rise of a posttraumatic subject in asserting the stage of depression expressed in “neuronal trauma, or, the rise of proletarian *cogito*” (279).

Žižek sees what makes the present historical moment unique is what he calls “abstract” violence that is like a Hegelian speculative “infinite judgment” positing the identity between two extremes. One extreme is financial speculation pursued in its own sphere, with no obvious links to the realities of human lives; the other extreme is a pseudo-natural catastrophe that claims thousands of victims like a tsunami for no apparent reason (291). For him, Malabou’s *Les nouveaux blessés* (2007; translated into English as *The New Wounded*, 2012) deals with the very topic of psychological consequences of this rise of new forms of “abstract” violence – neuronal traumas rather than Freudian psychological traumas that produce a new subject, a post-traumatic subject that suffers from neuronal lesions like victims of organic traumas from natural catastrophes. The trauma, organic or socio-political, has made a permanent wound in the brain that when the damage occurs, “it is another self which is affected, a ‘new’ self founded in misrecognition,” writes Malabou (qtd. in Žižek 293). Žižek describes the features of this new detached and indifferent subject as no longer “in-the-world” in the Heideggerian sense of embodied existence. This subject, he continues, “lives death as a form of life – his or her life is the death drive embodied, a life deprived of erotic engagement” (294). In regard to why victims of socio-political traumas share the same profiles with those of natural disasters, he let Malabou speak for herself. In his translation, Malabou states,

we have entered a new era of political violence where politics draws its resources from the renunciation of the political sense of violence All traumatizing events tend to neutralize their intention and to assume the lack of motivation proper to chance

incidents, the feature of which is that they cannot be interpreted. *Today, the enemy is hermeneutics* This erasure of sense is not only discernible in countries at war, it is present everywhere, as the new face of the social which bears witness to an unprecedented psychic pathology, identical in all cases and in all contexts, *globalized* [original emphasis] (qtd. in Žižek 294).

“This erasure of sense,” continues Malabou, makes social conflicts become “as anonymous as natural catastrophes.” The border between politics and nature is thus blurred in that “politics cancels itself as such and takes on the appearance of nature, and nature disappears in order to assume the mask of politics.” There appears, as Malabou concludes, “a global heterogonous mixture of nature and politics” that is characterized by “global uniformization of neuropsychological reactions” (qtd. in Žižek 295). Drawing from Malabou’s thesis, Žižek opines that “global capitalism thus generates a *new form of illness* which is itself global, indifferent to the most elementary distinctions such as that between nature and culture” (295). The rise of a new post-traumatic subject in the event of neuronal trauma in Malabou’s observation also propels him to be a warning prophet:

If the twentieth century was the Freudian century, so that even its worst nightmares were read as (sado-masochistic) vicissitudes of the libido, will the twentieth-first be *the century of the post-traumatic disengaged subject*, whose first emblematic figure, that of the Muselmann,^① is multiplying in the guise of refugees, terror victims, survivors of natural disasters or of family violence? (Žižek 294)

Humanity cannot afford to see such an appalling twentieth-first century packed with disengaged post-traumatic subjects. In

① Muselmann (the Muslim) is Giorgio Agamben’s conceptive witness (his word is *der Muselmann*) of the Nazi concentration camps in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). He is so called not only because his stooped and folded posture resembles a Muslim at prayer, but also because the Arabic word “muslim” means “the one who submits unconditionally to the will of God.” For Agamben, the inmates at the death camps are Muselmann in that they submit to the will of the Nazis as “the living dead” (45–51). Žižek comments on this figure in various occasions, one of which is in *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006) where he calls the Muselmann “the ideal-impossible witness” (113).