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American Violent Women in the Early Twentieth Century: Murderesses, or
Victims?

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Vedoucí práce: prof. PhDr. Josef Jařab, CSc.

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ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

The main purpose of the diploma thesis is to examine the depiction of female criminals in Susan Glaspell's 'Trifles' and 'A Jury of Her Peers,' Sophie Treadwell's 'Machinal' and Maurine Dallas Watkins' 'Chicago.' First, the changing roles of men and women in society are briefly outlined in the context of 1910s and 1920s America. Subsequently, the United States criminal justice system and newspaper media of the early twentieth century are discussed and their attitude towards female killers is included. The thesis also focuses on the journalistic career of the three American women playwrights, particularly on the murder trials which became the basis of their plays.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the portrayal of women who exhibited criminal behavior towards men in early twentieth-century America. The attention is devoted to three American female playwrights and their literary works, namely Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and "Jury of Her Peers," Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Maurine Dallas Watkins' *Chicago*. The aim of the thesis is also to analyze and compare the attitudes of American judicial system as well as newspaper media of the time towards female criminality.

The thesis is divided into three main chapters, all of which comment on the cold-hearted defenders of patriarchy which aroused feelings of frustration in women. The opening chapter deals with the desperate situation that American women were compelled to face during the 1910s and 1920s. First, it provides an overview of the revolutionary transformation in the lives of ordinary American citizens who were forced to abandon their farms and settle down in urban areas. Furthermore, the thesis concentrates on the changing roles of women within the conventional society that had long discriminated and humiliated female inhabitants. It is concerned with the description of the new, powerful image of womanhood and focuses on the praiseworthy activities performed by female activists. Next, the chapter contains vivid details connected with the process of courtship together with its development throughout the decades. It examines a huge difference between the traditional concept of matrimony and modern companionate marriages. The thesis is further dedicated to the crucial importance of female bonding, and the novel concept of motherhood together with the possibility of family planning is included as well. Lastly, the intellectual and economic independence of newly-liberated women form the last subchapter.

The next chapter is dedicated to the American legal system and describes its main features and characteristics at the turn of the century. It also deals with some theories offered by various historians which include speculations about the dramatic rise of female criminality. Moreover, it introduces the problematic issue of all-male juries which tended to misinterpret female experience.

Lastly, the third chapter deals with the beginnings of mass media and the immediate enormous impact which the press has exerted upon American society which commenced to be oriented towards consumerism. It is also concerned with the dreadful

working conditions that female journalists were compelled to face on a daily basis as well as with the rising popularity of murder trials newspaper coverage.

1 The Beginning of the Twentieth Century and American Women

The early decades of the twentieth century saw a major turning point in American history in view of the fact that the dramatic changes and significant events connected with the new era affected every aspect of American life. The population grew remarkably during the time period, largely as a result of an increasing number of European immigrants coming to settle in the country. American economy experienced a massive boom and, predominantly due to World War I, high export demand considerably boosted industrial production, whereas the area of agriculture suffered a serious decline.¹ As Godfrey Hodgson argues, it was an era of a massive expansion of “the electrical and chemical industries, and a myriad specialist businesses, from retailing, advertising, insurance, banking, printing, and entertainment.”² Therefore, the vast majority of American residents favored an urban mode of living over settlement in rural environments, which resulted in the rapid growth of large cities.³ Another attempt to change the habits and customs of most Americans was made in 1920 when the government imposed alcohol prohibition for the chief purpose of protecting its citizens from the damaging effects that the liquor produces. Instead, it caused the rise of secret nightclubs serving alcoholic drinks, mafia and underworld practices. The new century brought about numerous incredible inventions, many of them using novel electric power, such as radios, telephones and Henry Ford’s motorcars which revolutionized road transportation as well as people’s lifestyle.⁴ On the whole, the 1910s and 1920s were a time of a high level of material prosperity and remarkable progress.⁵

The fact that American society was undergoing major political and cultural reforms is clearly reflected in the sphere of gender roles and the position of women in life. In the literary world, skilled women writers tended to explore in depth the theme of female identity and provided a chilling portrayal of sex inequality persisting in nearly every aspect of American daily life. As has been maintained in the introductory section, this thesis focuses on selected works by three notable women playwrights and

¹ Godfrey Hodgson, “The American Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34–35.

² Hodgson, “The American Century,” 35.

³ Hodgson, “The American Century,” 35.

⁴ Marlee Richards, *America in the 1910s: The Decades of Twentieth Century America* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2009), 41–48.

⁵ Richards, *America in the 1910s: The Decades of Twentieth Century America*, 130.

journalists, namely Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell and Maurine Dallas Watkins. Apart from their common determination to pursue journalism, which will be mentioned briefly in a later chapter, they all chose to address some of the most burning issues concerning the traditional roles of men and women, justice, female criminals resorting to violence against male oppression as well as social pressures connected with various triggers for their criminal behavior. The three female writers not only managed to create immensely powerful stories revolving around women who murdered either their lover, as it applies in the case of *Chicago*, or husband like in *Trifles* and *Machinal*, but also contributed to a better understanding of the desperate situations that modern women of the early twentieth century were faced with.

As far as *Machinal* is concerned, Treadwell depicts the disastrous impact of socially prescribed gender roles on a single female protagonist who is placed under the unrelenting pressure to conform to already established norms. The play's division into nine brief episodes clearly outlines the real-life situations that almost every woman encounters, but neither of them can be termed favorable. The tragic fate that befalls Helen Jones condemned to death for murdering her husband is expected to arouse deep public sympathy for her. The irony lies in the fact that she receives the severest punishment for savoring the only precious moment of freedom in her entire life. Hardly ever does the poor woman earn any compassion from the others, but with the central character appearing in *Chicago* the opposite is the case. The drama produced by Watkins focuses on a young beauty named Roxie Hart who shot dead her lover the moment he decided to abandon her. The playwright satirizes the protagonist's skilful reinforcement of the stereotypical image of femininity as well as the way she keeps the majority of people in her vicinity under her thumb. It is worth noticing that Watkins refers to numerous thorny issues widely debated in early twentieth-century America through one of the male characters in the play. In the Prologue, Jake, a zealous crime reporter working for *The Morning Gazette*, expresses appreciation for an unbeatable combination of the four key features that characterize the latest murder case involving Mrs. Hart, namely: "[...] wine, woman, jazz, a lover."⁶ First, he touches upon excessive alcohol consumption stimulated by the Prohibition and a large network of speakeasies which sprouted throughout the country. Clearly, women's roles and the perception of womanhood represent another complex topic that has passed through his mind. Next,

⁶ Maurine Dallas Watkins, *Chicago*, in *The Theatre of Today*, ed. George Jean Nathan (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), 16.

the sensation hunter mentions the massive popularity of jazz music associated with dance halls and cabarets, and, last but not least, sexual liberation with the alarming rise of cases of extramarital affairs. It will be proved later that these subjects played a pivotal role in American society during the 1920s. Some of the above-mentioned topics are covered in Glaspell's *Trifles* as well. This one-act play recounts a story of a childless housewife, Minnie Wright, faced with an accusation of murder. Despite her absence in the story, two major female characters Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters follow their natural feminine instincts when analyzing seemingly invisible clues that they happen to discover in Minnie's kitchen and succeed in uncovering her ultimate motive for committing such a serious crime. It is no coincidence that the story takes place in a purely female domain, as it shows that certain things remain wholly unfamiliar to men. In addition, *Trifles* differs markedly from the two literary works in its setting in the country. The female protagonists are forced to cope with the hostile rural environment, which further emphasizes the themes of loneliness and seclusion elaborated in all three plays.

It is worth making a reference to a short story entitled "A Jury of Her Peers" written by Glaspell in 1917, i.e. a year after *Trifles* was first produced on stage. It may be considered unique for its elaboration of the underlying themes found in the original play *Trifles* as well as for its masterly characterization of women characters. Glaspell manages to breathe life into them, enabling readers to empathize more readily with their life story. Wrights' closest neighbor Mrs. Hale is given particular attention in the short story and her role within the narrative thus gains wider significance. Besides learning Mrs. Hale's forename and some interesting sidelights on her personal life, readers are allowed to follow her stream of thoughts, showing the psychological processes occurring in her mind. These factors contribute directly to the creation of a more intimate familiarity with the character and help show the profundity of Minnie's misery in a broader context.

Both Treadwell and Glaspell focused on the names that their characters would bear throughout their plays. *Machinal* has been labeled as highly unconventional with regard to its style, as Treadwell experimented with various expressionistic devices, one of them being an unorthodox method of naming characters. She avoided addressing characters stereotypically by their forenames, surnames or nicknames. Instead, the individual characters are identified either by the profession they have been practising or by their role within society, which serves to suggest the ordinariness of each character.

Therefore, readers encounter such characters as Mother, Reporter, Stenographer, Husband, and Lawyer for Prosecution who are deliberately portrayed as flat, cold-hearted and rather unsympathetic compared to the sensitive female protagonist presented as the Young Woman. The employment of such a device proves successful, as it highlights Helen's isolation from her community through a striking contrast, which enables the unfortunate story to come to the fore. In contrast, Glaspell emphasizes the insignificance of women by omitting their first names, whereas male characters are referred to by their full names. Accordingly, the characters appearing in *Trifles* include Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, and three representatives of male gender, George Henderson, Henry Peters, and Lewis Hale. As can be deduced from the list, two married couples are found in the play, but neither of the two female characters bears an equal appellation as her male counterpart. It is apparent that men are attributed a higher status than women directly from the beginning of the drama, which is closely comparable to the patriarchal system deeply rooted in American society since time immemorial.

Moving on to *Chicago*, Watkins provides her readers with brief, but peculiar descriptions of several characters in the opening pages. In order to define the role of an individual character within the complex story, she includes direct quotations from the drama. This unconventional technique allows the author to refer to the fact that social roles are constructed for each of us and they have us bound hand and foot to a large extent. In other words, little influence can be exerted over the status which society has attached to us. Nevertheless, we tend to present ourselves to the world as attractively as possible and make a good impression. In this regard, it is necessary to highlight that the rise of popular culture together with the development of photography and mass media in the first half of the twentieth century had a profound impact on shaping people's perception of reality with respect to public identity. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent paragraphs, a vast majority of characters in *Chicago* appear blindly interested in polishing their public image to be able to join a more prominent social group and win some admiration. Therefore, the quoted parts in the list of characters might suggest that more weight is placed on pretence and rumors spread about one's behavior or personality than on true facts, which is closely connected with the practices of tabloid journalism discussed extensively in the play as well as in this thesis.

1.1 The Birth of Modern, Liberated Femininity

Martha H. Patterson, an English Professor at McKendree University, discusses a new, complex phenomenon of progressive females who defied the outdated image of the nineteenth-century womanhood and expressed a keen interest in liberation from male power and involvement in public affairs.⁷ With steely determination, they founded and contributed to several organizations struggling for women's suffrage and their persistence was finally rewarded in 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted into the U.S. Constitution.⁸ Thus, in the following years some female activists were able to realize their potential in the political domain, at least to a certain degree.⁹ Women's engagement in public life was also stimulated by the establishment of various movements rejecting the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages during the age of Prohibition. As Patterson explains, this connection stemmed from the long-held belief that alcohol abuse leads to serious economic problems and that, more importantly, men's dependence on alcohol causes mistreatment of their female counterparts.¹⁰ As J. Ellen Gainor and Jerry Dickey, professors of theater, maintain, both Glaspell and Treadwell were deeply interested in political and social activism, and joined several women's associations formed for the purpose of sharing the common experience of femininity with other women. By studying carefully the obstacles which the female club members had come across, the playwrights could, therefore, easily draw upon this knowledge throughout their career and point to the most serious feminist issues in their dramatic works.¹¹

It is worth pointing out that Glaspell, Treadwell and Watkins all seem to place a special emphasis on the voice of female characters. In *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale represents a typical physically as well as mentally strong farmer woman, fully acquainted with all the hardships that women must endure. She appears honest and is ready to justify Minnie's behavior whenever it is being questioned by either male characters or Mrs. Peters. In contrast, Mrs. Peters is portrayed as a quiet, submissive woman of a slight

⁷ Martha H. Patterson, "Introduction," in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894–1930*, ed. Martha H. Patterson (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1–2.

⁸ Patterson, "Introduction," 6–7.

⁹ Richards, *America in the 1910s: The Decades of Twentieth Century America*, 129.

¹⁰ Patterson, "Introduction," 8.

¹¹ J. Ellen Gainor, and Jerry Dickey, "Susan Glaspell and Sophie Treadwell: Staging Feminism and Modernism, 1915–1941," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 36–37, 45–46.

figure. Both women feel more relaxed and free to express their opinions as well as to make deductions concerning the murder case in the absence of male characters. When surrounded by them, the women's inferiority is strongly emphasized, which is most evident at the beginning of the play. Having entered the Wrights' kitchen, female characters follow their male counterparts, unwittingly sticking together and maintaining stiff posture near the doorway. They eschew any interference in the investigation carried out by the men and stay mostly quiet.¹² Glaspell exhibits the popular image of silent, obedient wives who keep themselves aloof from men's business and oversee domestic duties. Nevertheless, the short story "A Jury of Her Peers" includes a scene in which the sheriff's wife feels a sudden urge to break free from passivity and prove equal to male characters. In fact, she decides to break the silence that reigns between her and Mrs. Hale during the opening journey to the farmhouse, belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Wright: "The country's not very pleasant this time of year,' Mrs. Peters at last ventured, as if she felt they ought to be talking as well as the men."¹³ The shy woman is fully conscious of male superiority and makes a daring move to redress the imbalance between the sexes. She opens a dialogue with Mrs. Hale and in spite of the fact that it revolves around the atrocious weather in Dickson County, her action corresponds with the experience of the early female activists in the 1920s. Similarly, they had to pluck up the courage to be heard and, thus, be able to make a difference in American patriarchal society.

The insignificance of female voice is discussed several times in *Machinal*. The Episode One depicts a conversation held by white-collar employees in George H. Jones Company. The Telephone Girl is criticized for a lax attitude towards her boyfriends during the phone calls answered in the workplace:

FILING CLERK. That's all you ever say to a guy –
 STENOGRAPHER. Hum – hum – or uh huh – (*Negative.*)
 TELEPHONE GIRL. That's all you have to. (*To phone.*) Hum – hum – hum
 hum – hum hum –¹⁴

¹² Judith E. Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," in *Plays by American Women: 1900–1930* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1985), 72–76.

¹³ Tony Hillerman, and Rosemary Herbert, "A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell," in *The Oxford Book of American Detective Stories*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 143.

¹⁴ Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), 8.

The switchboard operator explains to her fellow workers that men need to demonstrate their superiority over the weaker sex at all times and dominating the dialogues gives them a feeling of control. It follows that women are expected neither to pass their opinions nor to offer any suggestions. All they are asked to do is to show that they are paying attention and have resigned themselves to the grim fate of powerless creatures. However, Helen finds it unbearable to let men dominate her and gradually succumbs to depression. While on honeymoon with her spouse George in the Episode Three, she is told that it would be better for her “[...] to learn to relax [...],”¹⁵ as if there is no other way how to deal with her situation than to submit. The subsequent episode which takes place in a maternity hospital shows a serious mental deterioration of the Young Woman’s state of health. When her husband pays her a visit after a child delivery and enquires the medical staff about her condition, both Nurse and Doctor answer that “[s]he’s getting stronger”¹⁶ even though the patient expresses sharp disagreement with the diagnosis. Treadwell suggests that women are prevented from engaging in the discussions that affect them, as no one takes the slightest interest in their personal needs.

In comparison with *Machinal* and *Trifles*, *Chicago* presents a dominant female figure who takes complete control over the others instead of being controlled and, therefore, rejects typical Victorian stereotypes of women as passive victims. One may call her a ruthless manipulator, as Roxie takes advantage of every situation that she finds herself in. Otherwise, she is capable of playing hardball with those who are going to thwart her plans. This is noticeable in her wild confession made to police officers after the moment her crime is openly revealed: “Yes, it was me! I shot him and I’m damned glad I did! I’d do it again—[...] ‘Through!’ ‘Done with me!’ I showed him, all right. If I don’t have him, nobody does!”¹⁷ Her honest, nearly hysterical tone confirms the surmise of the Assistant State’s Attorney that the murder was committed by her and out of mere rage. Readers find out very soon that the protagonist avoids telling elaborate lies only when she is driven to distraction, as it happened in the case of the criminal offence. Moreover, Roxie is endowed with extraordinary acting talent. Her behavior is portrayed as mere spectacle owing to her ability to display various kinds of emotions any time it suits her, which will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

¹⁵ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 23.

¹⁶ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 28.

¹⁷ Watkins, *Chicago*, 12.

1.2 Sexuality and Married Life

It seems almost impossible to overlook the revolutionary social changes occurring in early twentieth-century America together with their impact on interpersonal relationships and family life. According to Coleman, Ganong and Warzinik who focus on the role of family in the context of American history in their detailed publication, courting a woman in the Victorian era was “based on the premise that men were going to be the breadwinners or providers,”¹⁸ so the main criterion that women chose in assessing a prospective spouse was his economic security. The process of courtship used to involve a set of stereotypical rituals and was often arranged by parents. Nevertheless, it turned into a much more natural, spontaneous process during the 1910s and 1920s and a new phase of dating was established. Young men and women freely met in places of public entertainment, enjoyed long carefree rides in automobiles and engaged in petting which became standard practice among the dating couples.¹⁹ The substantial reform leading to more liberal sexual attitudes altered the old-fashioned view of married life as well as female sexuality. Back in the nineteenth century, people were not expected to get married for purely emotional reasons, as matrimony was commonly understood as a practical affair.²⁰ Modern women of the new era sought love, mutual understanding and sexual satisfaction, which they found in so-called companionate marriages. This model of an ideal marital union granted both spouses equal status and contributed to the increased perception of female individuality and sexual needs.²¹ The bond of marriage definitely became one of the most contentious as well as widely discussed subjects and the three women playwrights do not hesitate to make caustic comments on it in their plays. As it will be manifested in the following paragraphs, they concentrate predominantly on the unequal position of wives within marriages.

In *Machinal*, the concept of matrimony is viewed as an instrument for improving women’s social as well as financial standing. Faced with a sudden marriage proposal made by her superior, the Young Woman initially seems inclined to turn it down, since

¹⁸ Marilyn Coleman, Lawrence H. Ganong, and Kelly Warzinik, *Family Life in 20th-Century America: Family Life through History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 4.

¹⁹ Coleman, Ganong, and Warzinik, *Family Life in 20th-Century America: Family Life through History*, 3–5.

²⁰ Coleman, Ganong, and Warzinik, *Family Life in 20th-Century America: Family Life through History*, 16.

²¹ Martha May, *Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century America: Women's Roles in American Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2009), 39.

Mr. George H. Jones matches none of her preferences with regard to an ideal marriage partner. In the Episode Two, she describes her idea of a perfect soul mate as a wavy-haired handsome man for whom she would feel a powerful attraction as well as genuine affection. Never in her dreams has she pictured herself entering a romantic relationship with a substantial age gap. Nevertheless, George represents an unsightly middle-aged businessman, baldheaded with a scrawny body. Even Helen's co-worker, the Telephone Girl, who seems to have an increased sexual appetite for men, makes negative comments on Mr. Jones' appearance and lack of sex appeal: "Well, I'd hate to get into bed with him."²² In view of Helen's apparent emotional detachment from him, it can be argued that she considers her boss extremely unpleasant and repulsive. Irrefutable evidence confirming such an argument is included in her utterance addressed to her mother: "When he puts a hand on me, my blood turns cold."²³ Sadly, the inward-looking Mother apparently lacks understanding of her daughter's uncomfortable feelings. Taking into consideration her miserable financial situation, she is prone to make speculations about someone's character based on their economic status. Therefore, it is easier for her to ignore Helen's uneasiness and view wealthy George as an exemplary son-in-law. Regarding the fact that the father is missing in the play and the Mother expresses lifelong disappointment and frustration, it may be concluded that her former husband or partner abandoned her some time ago. This is why she perceives love to be a complete fabrication and manages to shatter the romantic dreams of finding true love her daughter has cherished all her life. According to her, there is nothing to look forward to in life, as it involves an endless series of routine tasks: "I'll tell you what you can count on! You can count that you've got to eat and sleep and get up and put clothes on your back and take 'em off again – that you got to get old – and that you got to die. [...] All the rest is in your head!"²⁴ Helen's only parent proves to be a bitterly disillusioned woman who strongly believes that the only certainty left in the world with increasing age is death. Finally, the Young Woman accepts the inevitability of the grim fate she is about to meet and enters into marriage with her superior.

It is worth noticing that Helen's subordination in the workplace is clearly projected into her subsequent marital life. George asserts complete dominance over his wife right at the outset. Treadwell presents him as a selfish, self-centered individual,

²² Treadwell, *Machinal*, 7.

²³ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 18.

²⁴ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 17.

since he refuses to listen to Helen on their honeymoon and devotes himself to narrating annoying stories.²⁵ In addition, Mr. Jones holds a fixed idea that he has reached a full comprehension of a female complex character and emotional equipment. In the Episode Four named Maternal, he states confidently that he is completely familiar with the hardship that his spouse endured in the past hours in the operating room:

HUSBAND. [...] I know all you've been through but – (*YOUNG WOMAN signs 'No'*.) Oh, yes I do! I know all about it! I was right outside all the time! (*YOUNG WOMAN makes violent gestures of 'No'. Ignoring.*) Oh yes! But you've got to brace up now! [...]²⁶

Clearly, the play deals with men's inability to feel real empathy for female experience. Mr. Jones is completely oblivious to the Young Woman's strong objections against his attitude towards childbearing. He fails to consider its psychological impact, especially on young primiparas, and the excruciating pain that the process of delivering a baby may involve. Moreover, it becomes evident that George derives great pleasure from supporting her mother financially, as the dependence helps boost his ego and, at the same time, effectively prevents his spouse from escaping the pervasive feeling of entrapment.

As Patterson remarks in her comprehensive book, a fair number of American women joined local associations to pursue common interests and to occupy themselves with social activities in their communities, which helped make sense of their identity and develop a sense of belonging to society.²⁷ In *Trifles*, Minnie Wright is depicted as a poor homemaker who has been virtually excluded from her own community, its common interests and purposeful activities. In accordance with her husband's wish, she has been denied an active membership in a local women society in which she could have realized her unfulfilled potential and shared her feelings and dreams with the other members. The following quoted lines include a piece of speech delivered by Martha Hale to the sheriff's wife. Mrs. Hale proves to have a profound knowledge of her neighbor's past as well as of John Wright's character. She points out a dramatic transformation that Minnie has undergone during the period of time spent with John:

Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part,

²⁵ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 24.

²⁶ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 28.

²⁷ Patterson, "Introduction," 10–11.

and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir.[...]²⁸

Both women wake up to a realization that the lonely housewife must have felt shoved aside as if she did not fit in anywhere. After the marriage, she was forced to give up her musical talent together with genuine passion for social gatherings and to conform to a hard and miserable life with a man who failed to provide her with a secure home and clean, respectable clothing. Even though Minnie adopted her husband's last name Wright, Mrs. Hale continually refers to her as Minnie Foster, i.e. by Minnie's maiden name. It follows that Minnie has been remembered as a girl full of boundless energy, optimism and hopes for the future. By marrying a hard country man, she lost her identity as well as independence and became her husband's possession.

It is important to point out that Minnie's deceased husband physically appears neither in *Trifles* nor in "A Jury of Her Peers." Therefore, readers are forced to gradually derive some information concerning his character and personality from the discussions led by other characters. One of the first people in the story who comments on John's behavior is Mrs. Hale's husband who found him dead. The short passage quoted on the next page is taken from the interrogation process involving him and County Attorney George Henderson. The local farmer is asked to cover the sequence of events which occurred on the day of John Wright's murder. Among other things, Lewis Hale states that his original intention was to discuss a party telephone with the Wright family:

HALE: [...] I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet [...] I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—
COUNTY ATTORNEY: Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. [...]²⁹

It follows from the short extract that similarly to George H. Jones from *Machinal*, John Wright was completely uninterested in his spouse's desires. He regarded himself as the man of his house with the final say on all important matters and Minnie who has been demonstrably inferior to her partner was expected to entrust him with the power of decision-making and obey his orders unquestioningly.

²⁸ Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," 78.

²⁹ Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," 73.

The short story “A Jury of Her Peers” also introduces Mrs. Peters standing in striking contrast to Mrs. Gorman, a wife of the previous sheriff in Dickson County, who is just briefly mentioned in the opening pages. Mrs. Gorman is remembered for her man-like dominance in speech, as her “voice somehow seemed to be backing up the law with every word.”³⁰ By comparison, Mrs. Peters is characterized by peaceable behavior with a marked tendency to submit to her partner, which suggests that she does not meet the prime requirements for a proper spouse of the head officer. Henry Peters seems to fit the traditional definition of a sheriff: “He was to a dot the kind of man who could get himself elected sheriff—a heavy man with a big voice, who was particularly genial with the law-abiding, as if to make it plain that he knew the difference between criminals and non-criminals.”³¹ Over the course of the story, it becomes clear that Mr. Peters identifies with the system of patriarchy existing at the time. To provide a specific example, he is sarcastic about the fact that his wife needs a company and is not brave enough to face the crime scene on her own.³² The officer laughs at the concept of female bonding which is deemed critically important in the lives of women, as it protects them from oppressive male authority.

Amos Hart, Roxie’s older but devoted husband, differs from the already-mentioned male characters in that he is depicted as a weak and vulnerable man. Owing to his secure job of a mechanic, his hedonistic, amusement-seeking wife depends on him as a source of money. It is implied that he works hard and often late at night to provide Roxie with a life full of luxury and comfort. Consequently, she develops a sexual relationship with Fred, a man incomparably more handsome and attractive than Amos, in order to prevent the boredom. Mr. Hart displays a strange combination of awkwardness and breathtaking credulity, since he is easily manipulated by his wife into taking the blame for the murder. In the Prologue, he is portrayed firmly warning his spouse of the harmful effect of enormous publicity and mass media sensational coverage of the case:

AMOS: Don’t you do it, Roxie!

ROXIE: O shut up! I guess I will if I want to!

BABE [*at camera*]: That’s the time—never let ’em boss you.[...] ³³

³⁰ Hillerman, and Herbert, “A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell,” 143.

³¹ Hillerman, and Herbert, “A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell,” 143.

³² Hillerman, and Herbert, “A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell,” 143.

³³ Watkins, *Chicago*, 18.

Nonetheless, Roxie is not used to follow anyone's orders and, thus, scolds poor Amos for his well-intended protectiveness, as she becomes obsessed with the image of a widely adored film star making front-page headlines. In fact, the situation proves her desperate need for admiration and undivided attention. Further in *Chicago*, Amos visits his wife in the women's ward and informs her about his improved working conditions. Instead of expressing satisfaction with his professional development and larger income, she humiliates her partner with derogatory remarks and claims full credit for the success. Clearly, Roxie plays Amos like a fiddle and shows neither true love nor special affection towards him.³⁴

The progressive women of the early twentieth century also called for the redefinition of the concept of motherhood. Margaret Sanger was highly instrumental in raising public awareness of the methods of family planning, thus enabling women to enjoy greater autonomy in intimate relationships, to make decisions concerning sexual reproduction as well as to avoid unintended pregnancies. Sanger's considerable accomplishment in the field of reproductive health care follows from the fact that "[b]y the 1920s, single and married couples used contraception, principally diaphragms and condoms, obtained from doctors, drug stores, and by post."³⁵ Consequently, the availability of contraceptive methods caused the decline of birth rates and reduced an average household size.³⁶

Maternal identity is discussed in all three plays. At the beginning of *Machinal*, Helen shares an apartment with the Mother who is constantly nagging her and treats her with a lack of caring and compassion. It is also mentioned repeatedly that she is extremely particular about her hands causing her mother's jealousy. When compared to her closest relative, the Young Woman appears highly sensitive and demonstrates a desperate need for affection, understanding and warm-hearted contact with other people throughout the play. In each episode, she attempts to experience a permanent sense of fulfillment and cherishes a sincere hope that she finds the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. However, she gradually realizes that the feelings of hopelessness and despair induced by patriarchal society are suffocating her, as she is faced with no prospect of escape from the stereotypical image of femininity. In her monologue delivered to her

³⁴ Watkins, *Chicago*, 37.

³⁵ S. J. Kleinberg, "Women in the Twentieth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 200.

³⁶ May, *Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century America: Women's Roles in American Society*, 40.

mother in the Episode Two, the Young Woman decides to share her deep anxiety about the conventions and humdrum routine of daily life:

But I can't go on like this, Ma – I don't know why – but I can't – it's like I'm all tight inside – sometimes I feel like I'm stifling. (*Walks up and down.*) I can't go on like this much longer – going to work – coming home – going to work – coming home – I can't – Sometimes in the subway I think I'm going to die – sometimes even in the office if something don't happen – I got to do something – I don't know – it's like I'm all tight inside.³⁷

It is clear from the short extract that Helen feels wholly incapable of coping with the enormous strain that the surrounding world has put on her. Her sheer frustration stems from the lack of progress in her pitiful life, which strongly reflects the conditions surrounding American women at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead of providing some comfort to her only daughter, the Mother rather questions the Young Woman's sanity, which produces the opposite effect upon her mind and secludes her from her only parent.

What is more, motherhood brings her no satisfaction at all. In the Episode Four called Maternal, Helen is staying in a renowned maternity ward after giving birth to a baby girl. Becoming a mother has always been regarded as one of the happiest periods in a woman's life and the whole medical personnel as well as Helen's husband try to impose such belief upon her. Instead, the unwanted pregnancy creates a rather devastating psychological impact upon the central female character. In addition, the little girl she has delivered strongly resembles the person who represents the main threat to her individuality and personal freedom, which places an insurmountable barrier between her and her own baby. It is also worth mentioning that the episode shows the callous dismissal of a male physician whose primary aim should be to provide all his patients with the best possible quality care. However, his overweening attitude as well as complete ignorance of individual patients' needs and wishes causes further deterioration in Helen's mental condition together with intense feelings of alienation. The following quotation illustrates the Doctor's total disregard for the Young Woman's protests against breastfeeding:

DOCTOR. [...]Bring the baby!
YOUNG WOMAN. No!

³⁷ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 19.

DOCTOR. Well – that’s strong enough. I thought you were too weak to talk – that’s better. You don’t want your baby?
YOUNG WOMAN. No.
DOCTOR. What do you want?
YOUNG WOMAN. Let alone – let alone.
DOCTOR. Bring the baby.
NURSE. Yes, Doctor – she’s behaved very badly every time, Doctor – very upset – maybe we better not.
DOCTOR. I decide what we better and better not here, Nurse!
NURSE. Yes, Doctor.³⁸

The Nurse is enjoined to fetch the newborn baby girl and force the miserable patient to nurse her against her will. The direct conflict not only allows the Doctor to reinforce his impregnable position in the workplace, but it also draws attention to the overwhelming dominance of the male sex. Not once does the Nurse muster the courage to put up a strong resistance to her superior. She just raises some feeble objections to the treatment or procedure that the Doctor suggests. Regardless of what the Nurse states about Helen’s difficulty swallowing, he shows hardly any hesitation in prescribing her solid foods for nausea. It can be argued that the Young Woman’s complete detachment from the healthcare medical staff is introduced in this part of the play to show that even the professional doctors are rendered utterly helpless in the face of her serious psychological problems. A similar motif of isolation can be identified in *Trifles* as well. Mrs. Hale points out that the aching loneliness Minnie has suffered from exerted a destructive effect upon her. She has been completely isolated from the outside world given the inconvenient location of her house, so the neighbors hardly ever paid her a visit. Most importantly, Mrs. Hale refers to the benefits of maternal care which could have provided Minnie with certain comfort and a renewed sense of purpose: “Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in.”³⁹ Therefore, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters deduce correctly that Minnie acquires a canary to prevent quietness as well as to compensate for the lack of offspring.

³⁸ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 29.

³⁹ Barlow, “Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell,” 82.

1.3 Intellectual and Economic Autonomy

In the course of time, female students were granted admission to colleges and universities but the opponents of the female right to equal education proclaimed that these opportunities prevented women from fulfilling the roles of a proper wife as well as mother. However, women were enthusiastic about improving their employment and career prospects and contributing, although only slightly, to the family welfare.⁴⁰ With regard to female involvement in the labor, the majority of American women were provided with limited job opportunities in the early 1900s and usually got employed as housemaids, primary school teachers and nurses. Thus, caring professions were seen as belonging in the domain of women. Female workers tended to suffer discriminatory treatment, faced poor safety conditions and spent a considerable amount of time in the workplace, for which they received only a meager income in comparison with male employees. This forced some women to join trade unions and organize protest strikes in order to draw attention to the harsh working environment and initiate needed changes. The outbreak of World War I, which radically affected the lives of all American civilians, enabled women to challenge gender stereotypes and participate in the issues of national significance so that their male counterparts could acknowledge female ambition and equal status. At home, they replaced the men who had joined army in manufacturing industries, some of them travelled abroad to work in the health care, telecommunications and social services, and few of them were allowed to serve in the Navy and the Marine Corps. Although traditional ways reasserted themselves, as the end of the War transferred women from male-dominated occupations back to domestic duties, the situation reinforced a belief in female competence for various professions in different career fields. Another abrupt transition which took place over the course of the two decades should be mentioned. After marriage, women who had traditionally stayed at home and devoted themselves to housekeeping and bringing up children demonstrated the same willingness to earn money as unmarried women.⁴¹ This led to a dramatic increase in female employment, which was further stimulated by advances in technology, since they created new jobs to female applicants. They were able to pursue careers as office workers and switchboard operators, and performed several

⁴⁰ Patterson, "Introduction," 10–11.

⁴¹ Patterson, "Introduction," 12–15.

administrative tasks using innovative office equipment.⁴² On the one hand, women's financial security together with promotion prospects improved, but on the other, the arrival of new technology had a devastating effect on their physical as well as mental health. Clerical occupations proved to be exceedingly monotonous and exhausting, and female workers found it difficult to escape the constant pressure under which they were put in the workplace.⁴³

In the opening pages, Helen Jones occupies the position of typewriter in George H. Jones Company, but she is being constantly reproached for inefficiency. Neither does she evince the slightest interest in her routine job, nor does she manage to fulfill all the administrative tasks that she has been assigned. Male white-collar workers take delight in uttering pointed remarks concerning her sheer lack of competence and inability to perform multitasking. They have no scruples about dealing with Helen's private life and the Telephone Girl is the sole person who expresses some solidarity with her in the workplace. She encourages Helen not to be deeply troubled by men's disparaging comments and based on Helen's reference to the uncomfortable feelings that she suffers in her suitor's presence, she recommends her not to enter into marriage with him:

TELEPHONE GIRL. [...]No! Tell him no.
STENOGRAPHER. If she does she'll lose her job.
ADDING CLERK. Fired.
FILING CLERK. The sack!
TELEPHONE GIRL (*on the defensive*). And if she doesn't?
ADDING CLERK. She'll come to work in a taxi!
TELEPHONE GIRL. Work?
FILING CLERK. No work.
STENOGRAPHER. No worry.⁴⁴

The Young Woman is confronted with a genuine dilemma whether to accept George's offer or not. In case of rejecting the marriage proposal, the girl will be faced with immediate unemployment and tough economic situation. Otherwise, she and her mother will enjoy a secured life without being stressed about finances. Finally, Helen succumbs to intense social pressures. She gets married to her boss and adopts the traditional role of housewife which brings her no sense of satisfaction. Therefore, *Machinal* confirms the widely spread stereotype that married women tended to renounce their employment

⁴² Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900–1995*, 1st ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 62–64.

⁴³ Patterson, "Introduction," 20.

⁴⁴ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 10–11.

in favor of household activities. In the Prologue of the play *Chicago*, police sergeant Charles E. Murdock continues conducting interrogation with Roxie when the infidelity to her husband is publicly exposed. As soon as she identifies the working environment as a place of meeting her lover for the first time, Murdock remarks pointedly to newspaper reporter Jake: “See? That’s what happens when a woman leaves the home.”⁴⁵ The sergeant belittles Roxie’s career ambitions and simultaneously denounces any female activity performed outside kitchen. According to him, the voices of all wives are better to be silenced, as women should stay at home where they belong and take good care of their husbands and children.

Technological innovations and improvements shaped not only public life but also most American households. Middle-class housewives were faced with labor-saving domestic appliances which facilitated numerous exacting domestic tasks, including ironing, washing and cooking. It would seem that women enjoyed all the comfort and convenience of modern devices, gained some leisure time for other activities and, thus, broke the daily routine. However, housework was still an extremely difficult and time-consuming process. It took some effort to learn how to manipulate the new household equipment and women could no longer rely on the help coming from their busy family members and domestic workers whose number dramatically decreased. The domestic roles of women changed fast during the era of consumer culture, as they were assigned responsibility for managing a household budget and making reasonable purchases.⁴⁶ This brought them into sharp focus of mass media which aimed at stimulating female demand for a wide range of consumer goods and services. In order to influence their buying behavior effectively, the marketing industry chose to appeal directly to women’s needs and interests. Cosmetic products were specifically designed for the girls longing for marriage to attract and keep a man’s attention.⁴⁷ In *Chicago*, Roxie is presented to possess “*all the known weapons of offense and instruments of preservation*,”⁴⁸ i.e. a wide variety of cosmetic and personal care products, as well as countless women’s clothing items and accessories. On the one hand, this points clearly to the new cultural phenomenon of consumerism and heavy advertising of mass-produced goods, but on the other hand it indicates how fully the main character is engaged in the pursuit of physical

⁴⁵ Watkins, *Chicago*, 11.

⁴⁶ Mary Beth Norton et al., “The New Era, 1920–1929,” in *A People & A Nation: A History of the United States, Volume II: Since 1865*, 10th ed. (Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2014), 632.

⁴⁷ May, *Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century America: Women's Roles in American Society*, 30.

⁴⁸ Watkins, *Chicago*, 3–4.

perfection. Additionally, the witty wordplay in the quotation intensifies the meaning of the expression “weapon,” as the female protagonist is armed with purely feminine assets like stunning beauty, fragility, deep sensitivity and innocence which help her achieve her egocentric goals.

Other advertising companies used a deep female desire to cultivate a blissful domestic life.⁴⁹ However, Norton et al. maintain that some technological advances imposed new restrictions on housework: “the availability of washing machines, hot water, vacuum cleaners and commercial soap put greater pressure on housewives to keep everything clean.”⁵⁰ The quotation serves to illustrate the point that modern women still dedicated long hours and hard effort to carry out day-to-day domestic chores, since a more thorough cleaning was demanded.⁵¹ This stereotype connected with the gentle sex may be aptly termed as “[...] the homemaking instinct.”⁵² This phrase is used in *Trifles* by Mr. Henderson to address Minnie’s negligence in household duties. Glaspell dedicates a few lines to a detailed description of the opening scene indicating unfinished domestic chores, which the male characters consider a bad management of household and personal failure. However, courageous Mrs. Hale defends her neighbor who is being condemned as lacking the desirable housekeeping qualities. It is suggested that men are unable to imagine the overwhelming amount of time-draining routine chores that busy farmwives are supposed to carry out:

COUNTY ATTORNEY: [...] Dirty towels! [*Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink*] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS. HALE: [*Stiffly*] There’s a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet [...] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. [...]

MRS. HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men’s hands aren’t always as clean as they might be.⁵³

Mr. Henderson maintains that females are expected to manage the household successfully and burden themselves with all the responsibilities stemming from their assigned role of proper housewife. In his view, the women violating these strict, unwritten rules should be prepared to receive harsh criticism like the female protagonist

⁴⁹ May, *Women's Roles in Twentieth-Century America: Women's Roles in American Society*, 31.

⁵⁰ Norton et al., “The New Era, 1920–1929”, 632.

⁵¹ Norton et al., “The New Era, 1920–1929”, 632.

⁵² Barlow, “Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell,” 76.

⁵³ Barlow, “Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell,” 76.

for the disorderliness in her kitchen. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hale dares to utter that men are not as innocent and exemplary in their behavior as one might expect and alludes to the ongoing female humiliation and servitude. In contrast, Roxie Hart in *Chicago* uses the stereotypes associated with the gentle sex and poses as a woman born to be a full-time homemaker in order to create a favorable impression on the Jury consisting of men. She is only willing to accept traditional female responsibility for cleaning, cooking and raising children for the sake of appearances: “[...] I wanted a home! I didn’t want to work—he was makin’ his forty a week and I wanted a . . . real home—with children. . . .”⁵⁴ The cunning young lady touchingly describes her dissatisfaction with office work as well as delight in serving home-made cookies to her husband Amos because, as Mark Gado points out, female

[...] independence represented a threat to the traditional image held by many men of what a woman, and especially a wife, should be. The sexually dominant male had a vital stake in the continued subjugation of women. Rejection of that role, symbolized by the Jazz Age flapper, directly threatened the established order so cherished by the average man.⁵⁵

His statement manages to capture perfectly the growing concern shared by the representatives of the opposite sex. Roxie is perfectly aware of the fatal consequences that she would have faced if she had exhibited signs of threatening female independence. Therefore, she eventually manages to get in the male Jury’s good graces and move them to tears thanks to her skillful manipulation.

Considering the events that radically transformed American social life in the early twentieth century, it would be naïve to assume that the common perception of femininity remained unchanged. Women seized all the opportunities which modern times offered with both hands and managed to break free from the tight restrictions placed upon them. They did not hesitate to rebel against society’s deep-seated preconceptions about female body image and behavior. As far as physical appearance is concerned, a slender figure began to serve as an important indicator of female attractiveness. In consequence, a large number of women adjusted to new dietary habits in order to lose surplus weight. The fashion-forward young females of the 1920’s emphasized function and wore dresses which were practical, comfortable and, at the same time, stylish. They stopped lacing themselves into stiff corsets and showed bare

⁵⁴ Watkins, *Chicago*, 98.

⁵⁵ Mark Gado, *Death Row Women: Murder, Justice, and the New York Press* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 11.

ankles and calves in knee-length skirts.⁵⁶ Physical beauty is one of the central topics explored in *Chicago*. The main female character is constantly referred to as “the prettiest woman ever charged with murder in Chicago.”⁵⁷ Men as well as women regardless of their class and race consider her enchanting and sexually attractive. She has an ideal female body shape which complies with the modern beauty standards set at the beginning of the twentieth century and her red hair further intensifies the powerful sex appeal she already exudes. It is evident that Roxie has built full awareness of her physical attributes over the years, as she derives maximum benefit from them. However, Watkins reveals in the prologue that “[...]a hint of a Raphael angel—with a touch of Medusa”⁵⁸ can be noticed in the character of Roxie, which challenges the popular image of girlish innocence and points to her manipulative behavior. In contrast, it is explicitly stated in *Machinal* that Helen Jones is not seen as an exceptionally attractive woman unlike Roxie Hart. Quite the contrary, Treadwell places a heavy emphasis on the fact that the main female protagonist represents an ordinary woman leading an ordinary life and attracting little attention. By adopting this strategy, the playwright manages to address a much wider (female) audience, as she enables them to identify themselves more easily with the hardships that Helen must bear over the course of the story.

A recurring motif which connects all three plays and is related to fashion lies in the fact that each female protagonist is portrayed in white garments at some point in the story. It may seem surprising that the three female playwrights used the same symbolism in their dramatic works, but clothes have always formed an integral part of women’s social identity and, as has been outlined in the preceding paragraph, fashion and clothing changed rapidly and simultaneously grew in importance during the 1920s. In the Episode Six named *Intimate*, Helen undergoes a miraculous transformation from a shy and unimpressive figure into a stylish, seductive woman brimming with sex appeal:

She wears a white chemise that might be the tunic of a dancer, and as she comes into the light she fastens about her waist a little skirt. She really wears almost exactly the clothes that women wear now, but the finesse of their cut, and the grace and ease with which she puts them on, must turn this episode of her dressing into a personification, an idealization of a woman clothing herself. All

⁵⁶ Catherine Gourley, *Flappers and the New American Woman: Perceptions of Women from 1918 through the 1920s*, Images and Issues of Women in the Twentieth Century, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008), 87–88.

⁵⁷ Watkins, *Chicago*, 1.

⁵⁸ Watkins, *Chicago*, 4.

*her gestures must be unconscious, innocent, relaxed, sure and full of natural grace.*⁵⁹

The passage taken from the play's stage directions concentrates on the Young Woman's angelic look intensified with smooth and graceful movements. It describes her only precious moment of happiness and sexual satisfaction enjoyed with her lover. In this episode, she has finally found the desired tranquility of the mind. Sadly, the inner peace is going to be shattered soon by the harsh everyday reality from which women can hardly break free. *Trifles* contains a reference to Minnie's purity prior to her unhappy marriage which has shifted into imprisonment. Mrs. Hale vividly remembers the pretty innocent girl and expresses sincere regret at the radical transformation: "I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang."⁶⁰ In addition, Minnie's standing posture may represent personal confidence and self-esteem, all of which she has lost since the beginning of her married life with John Wright.

As far as symbolic clothing in *Chicago* is concerned, the Act Three appears to bear the most profound significance. The cell that the main character occupies is likened to "the dressing room of a star"⁶¹ owing to plenty of various make-up products she has already applied on her face, together with a large amount of bouquets of flowers located all over the place. The undivided attention is centered on the carefully chosen fair clothes worn by her for the decisive moment of her trial. The whiteness should signify an overwhelming sense of innocence that her attorney attempts to arouse in the Jury and the virginal shape of her dress suggests almost religious purity that even "[...]a nun would envy its chastity."⁶² Nonetheless, her alluring stockings contradict, to a considerable extent, the angelic image that Roxie attempts to create. The provocativeness is enhanced by the presumptuous posture that she has maintained as well as by the process of puffing away on her cigarette.

Moreover, many of them followed new trends in hairstyles and abandoned their long locks in favor of a short haircut. Owing to the sexual confidence shown by celebrated Hollywood actresses, ordinary women adopted a more open attitude towards

⁵⁹ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 50.

⁶⁰ Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," 84.

⁶¹ Watkins, *Chicago*, 79.

⁶² Watkins, *Chicago*, 79.

sex together with its connection with female sexual desires and satisfaction.⁶³ As S. J. Kleinberg claims, “[t]hey engaged in increased levels of premarital sexuality, and divorced unsatisfactory spouses more readily than previous generations.”⁶⁴ Victorian strict moral values simply vanished into thin air and the newly liberated American women were eager to experience the pleasures of life and visited notorious speakeasy bars with the ban on alcohol still in effect where they sipped cocktails, danced in a carefree manner and lit up cigarettes.⁶⁵ Female involvement in whirlwind romances is dealt with by Watkins and Treadwell, as, in *Trifles*, Minnie is provided with little opportunity to find a kindred spirit in such a harsh environment. Apart from her fondness for smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages, Roxie violates several sexual taboos. When hearing that her spouse Amos failed to gather the whole amount of money demanded from Billy Flynn to represent her in court, she suggests establishing an intimate relationship between her and the lawyer in order to settle the debt. Nevertheless, Roxie’s outrageous sexual proposition is doomed to failure, as Flynn concentrates all his efforts on accumulating material wealth and, at the same time, on achieving considerable fame in the criminal law field:

ROXIE: [...] Couldn’t—I—pay you?

FLYNN [*unconcerned*]: That depends on your bank account.

ROXIE [*softly, laying her hand on his arm*]: I mean—couldn’t we be—*friends*?

FLYNN [*vigorously*]: Good! You’ve got that out of your system. Now listen: I’m not interested in your looks, your age, your sex—nothing *except* as it affects the case. You mean just one thing to me: five thousand dollars. Get that.⁶⁶

As can be deduced from the short extract, the attorney displays strong resistance to feminine seduction and appears to be the only male character who, does not let himself be swayed by Roxie’s astonishing physical beauty. Moreover, she does not even blush when getting dressed in front of men. Without the slightest hesitation, she is willing to take off the garters, which she is wearing in the company of two men, in order to offer them to be sold in an auction taking place in her honor. The young lady also engages in marital infidelity with Fred Casely, a married car salesman, and shows no intention whatsoever of marrying the secret lover. In contrast, Helen considers her romantic relationship with mysterious Richard Roe very serious but his adventure-seeking nature

⁶³ Norton et al., “The New Era, 1920–1929”, 634.

⁶⁴ Kleinberg, “Women in the Twentieth Century,” 200.

⁶⁵ Kleinberg, “Women in the Twentieth Century,” 200.

⁶⁶ Watkins, *Chicago*, 40–41.

is wholly inconsistent with a stable, orderly life. In addition, Richard is referred to as the First Man, which symbolizes the female protagonist's first fulfilling sexual experience and personal happiness.

2 Early Twentieth-Century Judicial System of the United States

The American legal system at the turn of the century can be described as traditional due to the fact that it favored rather conventional approaches. It was based on federalism which combined the control of the national government with the local governments of individual states. In terms of the judicial hierarchy, the United States Supreme Court occupied a superior position among all American law courts and wielded an exclusive power to handle cases of national importance. In the early twentieth century, a growing number of issues that the Court had to settle were concerned with the country's Constitution. Most of the cases caused heated debates and could be regarded as highly polemical, since federal interests diverged markedly from state interests. In this connection, leading legal expert and law professor Lawrence M. Friedman provides an illustrative example of children's entry into workforce. During the period of industrial revolution, the Southern textile industry customarily recruited child workers and due to its low costs, it posed a dangerous threat to northern businesses which demanded national government intervention. This situation raised a challenging question as to what extent federal institutions are allowed to interfere into local affairs. Whereas the Congress took steps aimed at banning the child labor, the Supreme Court pronounced its actions unconstitutional and limiting state authority. Friedman ponders over the reasons behind such a decision and highlights the hidebound personality of the Court members.⁶⁷ In fact, the Supreme Court was, at the time, solely comprised of:

middle-aged men, fairly conservative; churchgoing men who believed in traditional values and clean living; honorable men, according to their lights, men who worried about the fate of their country, and who were frightened of the tidal waves of social change that they saw washing over the United States.⁶⁸

Therefore, it can be logically deduced that there is a direct link between the Court's uncompromising and narrow-minded stance towards some issues and its judges who seemed unable to abandon the conventional ways of thinking in pursuit of progressivism. Another delicate subject that the courts were faced with during the early decades of the twentieth century was women experience in the workplace. For instance,

⁶⁷ Lawrence M. Friedman, *American Law in the 20th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 16–21.

⁶⁸ Friedman, *American Law in the 20th Century*, 21–22.

the state of Oregon took into consideration female fragile physique as well as emotional vulnerability and restricted their working hours. Some other state courts followed shortly and made the harsh working environment more favorable to women employees.⁶⁹

As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, all the far-reaching reforms occurring at the turn of the century literally turned American life upside-down and the legal sphere was no exception. Technological innovations which opened doors to unforeseen possibilities together with a mass migration of people from rural to urban areas contributed significantly to a steep rise in crime in the United States.⁷⁰ Mitchel P. Roth, a professor of criminal justice and criminology, provides a useful comparison between the number of criminal acts committed in America and the United Kingdom: “By 1914, New York and Chicago were experiencing more murders than England, Scotland, and Wales combined, and smaller cities, such as Detroit and Cleveland, were witnessing more burglaries than London.”⁷¹ Such circumstances called for urgent measures imposed by the national government to combat criminal activity and protect its citizens. Thus, a federal law enforcement agency called the Federal Bureau of Investigation was established to deal with some new sorts of criminal offences, including motoring, financial as well as drug-related crimes. Social historian Mariah Adin emphasizes two federal laws adopted during the 1910s, since they represented the early expansion of federal authority in domestic matters which had previously come under the jurisdiction of each state. The Mann Act was passed to prevent sexually-motivated abductions of women who might have ended up working as prostitutes, while the Volstead Act was intended to reduce alcohol intoxication on a national level. It included specific details related to the liquor prohibition and its violation was considered a criminal offence. Both Acts were directed at the American population in general and proved the fact that crime policy became the interest of the whole country.⁷² However, the effect that federal involvement produced in some cases was quite contrary to what had been expected. Instead of witnessing a complete eradication of the social vice, the Prohibition era saw an incredible flowering of highly profitable bootlegging

⁶⁹ Friedman, *American Law in the 20th Century*, 21–27.

⁷⁰ Mariah Adin, “History of Crime and Punishment in America: 1900–1950,” in *The Social History of Crime and Punishment in America: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Wilbur R. Miller, Vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2012), 774.

⁷¹ Mitchel P. Roth, *Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 213.

⁷² Adin, “History of Crime and Punishment in America: 1900–1950,” 774.

businesses, as a large part of American citizens engaged in drinking alcohol in secret. This argument has been proven in both *Chicago* and *Machinal* and their depiction of speakeasies and young people's drinking habits. Various smugglers and bootleggers were vying with each other to seize as much power on the black market as possible and did not hesitate to use deadly weapons when achieving their goals. Al Capone may be regarded as the most infamous and ruthless crime leader of all criminals in early twentieth-century America. He operated in the state of Chicago which soon acquired an unenviable criminal reputation due to his extensive and highly illegal practices.⁷³

Another substantial change which affected the American legal system was manifested in more complex attitudes towards criminal wrongdoing. At the beginning of the twentieth century, American courts were confronted with two opposing viewpoints regarding "whether criminal offenders were free agents who made choices for themselves, or whether they were products of their social conditions."⁷⁴ Traditionally, a lawbreaker was apprehended as a sane person who is fully aware of his or her actions, but some revolutionary theories took into consideration the existence of external factors that operate beyond human control and drive individuals to commit criminal offences. The blame was placed on people's genetic predisposition to violence and antisocial behavior as well as on the immediate surroundings which shape their personality and cultural values. Therefore, new forms of dealing with crime were proposed, such as various social and therapeutic interventions.⁷⁵ It is worth mentioning that thanks to the process of modernization during the 1910s and 1920s, electric power was introduced not only to American industries and households, but its utilization can also be found in the criminal justice system. The new era brought about electrocution, an innovative execution method which required the use of electric chairs and gradually substituted the widely-used hanging. In spite of a fair number of activists who protested against sending prisoners to death row, capital punishment began to be carried out by electrocution which some of its supporters called progressive and powerful.⁷⁶ However, as Derral Cheatwood, the Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas, comments on death penalty execution rates in the city of Chicago, the data derived from the early

⁷³ Howard Rahtz, *Drugs, Crime, and Violence: From Trafficking to Treatment* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2012), 25.

⁷⁴ Joseph F. Spillane, and David B. Wolcott, *A History of Modern American Criminal Justice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 51–52.

⁷⁵ Spillane, and Wolcott, *A History of Modern American Criminal Justice*, 51–52.

⁷⁶ Roth, *Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System*, 214.

twentieth century correspond, to some extent, with contemporary statistics. He points out that the period between 1900 and 1930 even saw a slight decline in the number of American criminals who suffered execution, ranging around 1%. Clearly, non-white and indigent murderers were rather prone to receive the death sentence for the serious crimes which they committed. Additionally, the racial identity of their victim(s) occupied a fundamental role in being convicted of a capital offense as well as being executed by electric chair.⁷⁷

Watkins refers to high crime rates of the city of Chicago several times. Throughout the play, the number of female prisoners steadily increases and a huge majority of them are endeavoring to attract attention of the press which monitors their life in jail. The following quotation shows the way Jack puts hysterical Roxie at ease after her criminal act has just been revealed. The well-informed reporter provides her with a vivid description of a pleasant stay in a prison cell that she is going to enjoy in the foreseeable future. Chicago's Cook County Jail is portrayed as a recreational facility which is expected to exert a beneficial effect upon the female protagonist's body and mind, with free accommodation as an extra bonus:

Save them bedewzlin' tears for the jury, sister: for *jail's* the best beauty treatment in town. You take the rest cure for a couple uh months at the County's expense; you lay off men and booze till when you come to trial yuh look like Miss America. And that's when the big show starts! With you for leading lady! [...] ⁷⁸

In addition, Jack raises a speculation that Roxie's most serious worries are about to prove groundless when taking into consideration her striking looks. The judicial proceeding itself is compared to a theatrical performance in which she is supposed to play the main part. However, the ambitious journalist acknowledges openly that he would rather see the central character sentenced to hang for the crime than acquitted of all charges, since her conviction would help him boost his career: "[...] I'll ask God to put a hemp rope around your nice white neck! [...] *O baby*, that would mean headlines six inches high—the story of the year!"⁷⁹ As far as punishment in *Machinal* is concerned, the last episode entitled A Machine focuses on Helen's last moments and death caused by electrocution. The closing scene mirrors the tragic effects that

⁷⁷ Derral Cheatwood, "Capital Punishment for the Crime of Homicide in Chicago: 1870-1930," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 92 (2002): 855–858.

⁷⁸ Watkins, *Chicago*, 13.

⁷⁹ Watkins, *Chicago*, 14.

masculine oppression exerts upon women and it is intended to arouse strong feelings of empathy for the female protagonist as well as anger at society's narrow-mindedness leading to unfair condemnation of the frail, innocent woman.

Given the social limitations imposed on women by American patriarchal system, it should be noted that gender differences also pervaded the legal sphere and criminology. Women were still considered inferior to men regardless of their achievement in the struggle for voting rights and decent working conditions. As for the professional life, only a restricted number of female applicants were allowed to pursue a career in the police force and a majority of them were recruited to supervise women incarcerated in prisons.⁸⁰ *Chicago, Machinal* as well as *Trifles* solely portray male members of police department, the only exception being a simply-drawn, artificial character of Matron appearing in *Machinal* and Mrs. Morton from *Chicago* who is employed in the Cook County Jail as a matron supervising female inmates. In a nutshell, Watkins provides an extremely ironic depiction of two law enforcement officers, namely Assistant State's Attorney Martin S. Harrison and police sergeant Charles E. Murdock. They are principally interested in securing full confessions from suspects and closing cases by hook or by crook. Moreover, their central aim is to enhance promotion prospects in order to gain power as well as respect, all of which they, in their opinion, fully deserve. To provide a concrete example, Murdock strongly presses a journalist to include his name in the newspapers and have it spelled out correctly: "Put that in your story and don't forget who done it: Sergeant Charles E. Murdock—and *don't* forget the *E*."⁸¹ It can be concluded that both men apparently channel all efforts into generating maximum publicity for themselves and resemble caricatures in some respects.

Glaspell chose to present men as official representatives of law in *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers" in order to emphasize vast differences between the two sexes. Before a group of men is about to climb upstairs to continue with the crime investigation, Mrs. Peters is urged to keep an observant eye on any detail that might be considered relevant to the murder case. However, her abilities are immediately questioned by Mr. Hale who claims: "But would the women know a clue if they did come upon it?"⁸² This implies that the male police officers treat both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters less seriously than

⁸⁰ David Levinson, ed., "History of American Criminal Justice," in *Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment*, Vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2002), 25.

⁸¹ Watkins, *Chicago*, 6.

⁸² Hillerman, and Herbert, "A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell," 150.

themselves. They associate women with useless, household-centered activities as well as limited native intelligence. Unlike Mrs. Peters, Martha Hale is deeply conscious of the men's dismissive attitude towards women. The moment both housewives are left alone in the kitchen for the first time, she expresses deep dissatisfaction with the process of investigation conducted by the County Attorney: "You know, it seems kind of *sneaking*. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!"⁸³ She alludes to the fact that Minnie's being subjected to such a severe humiliation of having her house searched should be viewed as unethical. In contrast, Mrs. Peters appears to be torn between the world of men and women, mainly due to her role of the sheriff's spouse. She provides justification for the men's action and claims that the official proceedings must be followed strictly. Nevertheless, when Minnie's fondness for singing is disclosed and the women discover a dead canary with a twisted neck, Mrs. Peters appears terribly shocked by Mr. Wright's cruelty towards his spouse's pet. She shows a growing understanding of Minnie's criminal behavior and narrates a horrifying story from her childhood about a boy who murdered her kitten: "[...] If they hadn't held me back I would have—[*Catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*]—hurt him."⁸⁴ The woman has clearly established a strong connection with the accused woman through shared experience of severe trauma and closely identified with her plight.

On the whole, the most common crimes carried out by female offenders around the end of the nineteenth century could be classified as less serious, since they only led to mild disruptions of communal and social harmony as well as morality.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, a threatening image of women appearing as criminals was found highly disturbing by the general public, which seems comprehensible with regard to the beliefs to which early criminologists adhered at that time. According to their views, an ordinary female is not endowed with a capacity for aggression and malice and, thus, thanks to the absence of a criminal nature, she cannot involve in any kind of illegal activity. They traced the roots of female delinquency to biological or mental defects inside individuals and associated it primarily with primitive, uncultivated women belonging to specific

⁸³ Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," 79.

⁸⁴ Barlow, "Rachel Crothers, Zona Gale, Susan Glaspell, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Sophie Treadwell," 84.

⁸⁵ Randall G. Shelden, William B. Brown, Karen S. Miller, and Randal B. Fritzler, *Crime and Criminal Justice in American Society*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2015), 377.

ethnic groups. Such a small-minded approach aiming to cast light on female offenders practically ignored the impact of social environment and placed the main emphasis on the qualities and attributes of true womanhood instead. Later theories offered a rather implausible explanation of low female engagement in crime. There was a strongly held belief that women display a natural tendency towards keeping their actions concealed.⁸⁶ This inclination towards secretiveness was thought to stem from a myth about their sexuality, or, to be more precise, from the “[...] need to hide their menstruation from others.”⁸⁷ According to the theory, female lawbreaking was difficult to reveal, as the police officers either excluded women from the list of potential suspects or were unable to solve the crime for lack of motive or physical evidence.

Moreover, Clarice Feinman explains people’s negative reaction to women offenders by discussing the widely-held perception of women who show a deviation from established social norms. Putting her argument in a historical perspective, she claims that any female who has displayed somewhat eccentric and unconventional behavior “generates fear and anxiety among both women and men and is viewed as a threat to social stability. Consequently, she is subject to informal and formal sanctions and punishments intended to control her and to serve as a warning to others.”⁸⁸ As Linda Ben-Zvi explains, the concept of an evil woman manifesting murderous inclinations appeared wholly inconsistent with the traditional qualities associated with the gentle sex and was thus greeted with a critical outrage in the early twentieth century. In general, society tends to exclude any external influence which might have played any role in committing a criminal offence and categorizes the underlying motives from which a woman murderer acted as socially unacceptable and insane. Ben-Zvi highlights that society is highly susceptible to the division of people into various categories based on a stigma and the phenomenon may be recognizable as far as women criminals are concerned, which reflects a desperate effort to suppress the negative representation of female identity:⁸⁹ “Women who kill evoke fear because they challenge societal constructs of femininity—passivity, restraint, and nurture—thus the rush to label the

⁸⁶ Nikki Jones and Jerry Flores, “At the Intersections: Race, Gender and Violence,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Crime and Gender Studies*, Claire M. Renzetti, Susan L. Miller, and Angela R. Gover, eds. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 74–75.

⁸⁷ Jones and Flores, “At the Intersections: Race, Gender and Violence,” 74.

⁸⁸ Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System*, 3rd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 3.

⁸⁹ Linda Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote: The Genesis of Susan Glaspell’s ‘Trifles,’” *Theatre Journal* 44.2 (1992), 141.

female offender, to cauterize the act.”⁹⁰ Dangerous women simply did not fit into a category of model American citizens and were quickly condemned for their crimes. The portrayal of female criminals was often distorted and their behavior was, therefore, open to serious misinterpretation. What might be found disquieting is the fact that even qualified experts and scholars of the nineteenth century adopted stereotypical corrupt characters from mythology and fiction as models for a depiction of women killers. The same situation occurred in court as well. Instead of gathering objective evidence in order to reach an unbiased final decision, the court members displayed a distinct unwillingness to reveal the truthful nature of female offending which remained hidden behind a veil of secrecy. The shocking image of women resorting to unlawful violence may have triggered a defense mechanism which prevented them from confronting the actual, and apparently unbearable, issue more openly. Female defendants were put before an all-male panel and forced to produce a carefully constructed narrative compatible with their sex as a plausible account of the crime. In addition, an experienced and persuasive attorney, preferably a natural born orator, distinguished by the power of fluent and effective speech, could bring more coherence as well as credibility to a woman’s testimony and conduce to winning her case.⁹¹ To illustrate this point most accurately, I have included a brief extract from the Act Three of the play *Chicago*. The female central character is, during her trial, compelled to transform her description of a romantic meeting with Mr. Casely into an accurate police report which sounds highly unnatural:

ROXIE: Well, one evening—

HARRISON: I object, your Honor; time and place.

FLYNN: Can you fix the time and place?

ROXIE [*promptly*]: Five eighteen Tuesday, October the seventh, going south on Michigan Boulevard.⁹²

However, it is clear that Roxie has practiced giving testimony in front of her lawyer Billy Flynn very thoroughly, as she is able to recall meticulous details immediately, such as the exact time of their conversation and name of the street that they took. The whole situation refers to an almost absurd desire for hard, factual information, leaving aside any reference to subjective views and individuals’ mental states. Similarly in “A

⁹⁰ Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote: The Genesis of Susan Glaspell’s ‘Trifles,’” 141.

⁹¹ A. Cheree Carlson, *The Crimes of Womanhood: Defining Femininity in a Court of Law* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 9–10.

⁹² Watkins, *Chicago*, 97.

Jury of Her Peers,” the young County Attorney shows a particular interest in objective evidence connected with the crime as well as in the vague descriptions of events provided mostly by male characters. In his opinion, careful consideration should be given to plain facts, which prevents him from finding any rational motive behind the criminal act. All the male officers fail to uncover the tell-tale clues and solve the mysterious murder, as they are only seeking physical evidence in order to prove Minnie’s guilt. In the end, the County Attorney confesses that they must have missed an important clue because they find themselves at their wits’ end: “If there was some definite thing—something to show. Something to make a story about. A thing that would connect up with this clumsy way of doing it.”⁹³ They remain utterly ignorant till the end of the story, overlooking the crucial details and the emotional nature of the murder. Treadwell points out serious male misunderstanding of female experience as well. In Episode Eight named The Law, Helen is questioned by her attorney about her marital life during trial:

LAWYER FOR DEFENSE. Six years! And it was a happy marriage, was it not?
(YOUNG WOMAN *hesitates*.) Did you quarrel?
YOUNG WOMAN. No, sir.
LAWYER FOR DEFENSE. Then it was a happy marriage, wasn’t it?
YOUNG WOMAN. Yes, sir.⁹⁴

Her defense attorney strives to depict her loveless marriage to Mr. Jones as strong and successful. He deliberately mentions the length of the matrimony and a lack of arguments which he considers main criteria for happiness. The Young Woman, however, seems hesitant to accept his view of flawless marital union but finally she decides not to challenge it and agrees with him, since this is what conservative society expects her to do all the time.

A female murderer could, after a consultation with the attorney, attempt to diminish full responsibility for the crime that she was convicted of by pleading insanity or self-defense. As has already been maintained, women killers were regarded seriously mentally ill and the same condition would apply to those subjected to domestic violence. The abused female defendants who had murdered their violent, domineering spouses “typically pled ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty by reason of insanity’ and were routinely convicted. [...] On occasion, women pleading insanity would be acquitted because the

⁹³ Hillerman, and Herbert, “A Jury of Her Peers by Susan Glaspell,” 160.

⁹⁴ Treadwell, *Machinal*, 62.

jury was convinced that these women were hysterical and ‘out of their minds.’”⁹⁵ In other words, the defense strategy based on mental weakness was relatively welcomed by conventional court members, as it justified otherwise unaccountable motives behind such serious criminal behavior. However, killing an abusive partner was hardly ever accepted as an act of self-defense, since the victims were not usually provoked by any immediate action of the abusers. Moreover, they tended to arm themselves with a weapon to carry out the attack against their weaponless tormentors, which indeed denied the principle of proportionality that plays a crucial role in assessing self-defense. As Sandra Davis Westervelt claims, “[w]omen are more likely to kill within a domestic situation; they are more likely to know their attackers. They are less likely to possess size and strength comparable to their attackers and less likely to be trained in the skills needed to defend oneself.”⁹⁶ It follows that the grounds for female killing were wholly inconsistent with the stereotypical male view on homicides, taking into consideration a particularity of gender.

Mrs. Morton, the matron in *Chicago*, has gained a wealth of experience throughout her career and, thus, seems sufficiently qualified to introduce Roxie into the criminal law system, or, more precisely, into the world of men, reason and hard facts. She gives her valuable advice concerning the defense strategy: “It’s like divorce: the *reason* don’t count—it’s the grounds. [...] But it’s got to be accordin’ to law, dearie: like he threatened or attackted you or somethin’.”⁹⁷ What may be found suspicious is that Mrs. Morton identifies, perhaps too strongly, with the criminal acts committed by the female inmates. Clearly, Roxie obtains accurate information relating to acceptable behavior in court as well as strong defense throughout her stay in prison. To provide another example, one of the minor female characters, Liz, is considered mentally ill but, ironically, she appears to be the most reasonable prisoner in the Cook County Women’s Ward. She has no difficulty in seeing through other people’s lies and, at the same time, does not fear to tell the truth about them. When inquired about the way in which the men sitting in a jury think, both Liz and reporter Jake come up with the following:

ROXIE: What do you reckon a jury thinks about?

LIZ: Juries don’t think—they acts.

ROXIE: But what counts *most*?

⁹⁵ Sandra Davis Westervelt, *Shifting the Blame: How Victimization Became a Criminal Defense* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 65.

⁹⁶ Westervelt, *Shifting the Blame: How Victimization Became a Criminal Defense*, 67.

⁹⁷ Watkins, *Chicago*, 26.

JAKE: Just being a woman!⁹⁸

Their claim is supported by Billy Flynn who officially represents Roxie Hart in court. For this reason, they develop a carefully elaborated plan in Act Three aimed at bringing the Jury to their knees. Roxie's helpless crying, fainting, dramatic poses and pained facial expressions combined with the attorney's masterful closing plea form an indisputably unique theatrical performance for which they both deserve tremendous admiration. Watkins addresses readers several times during this act to draw their attention to the most significant speeches or demeanor. She supplies the story with subjective points of view and includes plentiful ironic comments on the self-seeking behavior displayed by the two characters. The vivid, engaging writing style, thus, makes *Chicago* enjoyable reading.

⁹⁸ Watkins, *Chicago*, 63–64.

3 Early Twentieth-Century American Newspaper Journalism

Referring back to the era of a rapid growth and startling transformation, the changing demographic and economic profile of American cities together with the impact of an urban, cosmopolitan culture substantially boosted profits accruing to the newspaper industry. The modern lifestyle adopted by America's diverse population set new social and cultural trends and created a burgeoning demand for printed news and their widespread accessibility. By the end of the nineteenth century, newspapers had grown in size as well as in importance and newspaper chains grasped the opportunity to expand the total amount of copies sold across the country.⁹⁹ It follows that newspapers occupied a crucial role in the lives of all Americans and influenced, either consciously or subliminally, their attitudes and manners. In this context, it is worth pointing out that news media contributed enormously to the propagation of commercial goods and strongly stimulated consumer demand at the turn of the century. The development of advertisements published in various newspapers and magazines brought national fame to the businesses oriented towards high-volume production. Instead of providing detailed and reader-unfriendly product descriptions, each company invented a snappy slogan or catchword in order to publicize its consumer products, capture customers' attention and arouse their interest. Therefore, print media soon became a useful and effective channel of communication between sellers and buyers.¹⁰⁰

Given the rising level of aggressive behavior and criminal activity throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, "crime emerged as one of the nation's greatest political and social issues as popular attention was focused on the exploits of bootleggers, gangsters, public enemies, and crime waves, both real and imaginary."¹⁰¹ As has been noted earlier, the national alcohol prohibition played a part in inflating the crime statistics and the alarming situation which arose over the course of a few decades caused serious concern over public safety. Roth acknowledges that most newspapers together with radios benefited enormously from the emergence of outlaws and

⁹⁹ George H. Douglas, *The Golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Press, 1999), 81–83.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Anderson, "Commercialization" in *Ideas and Movements that Shaped America: From the Bill of Rights to "Occupy Wall Street,"* Michael S. Green, Scott L. Stabler, eds., vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 238.

¹⁰¹ Roth, *Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System*, 228.

escalating violence. These media concentrated on covering the latest crime stories and delivering sensational reports on high-profile trials that left American citizens almost paralyzed with fright.¹⁰² A. Cheree Carlson shares the same view on the early twentieth-century dramatization of crime and notes that “[t]he popular media of the period did not merely ‘report’ on a trial; they also molded and transformed the narratives to suit the reading audience of both sexes.”¹⁰³ Contrary to formal broadsheets which contained precise as well as reliable information regarding serious issues, tabloid newspapers “saw truth as a concept that could be manipulated for the sake of entertainment and profit.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, reporters of the mass popular press competed with each other to master the art of exaggeration and made extensive use of the most riveting headlines for the purpose of boosting newspaper circulation together with stimulating the curiosity of a broad readership. Instead of drawing attention to plain facts, they filled their pages with trivial subjects, pursued various scandals based on controversial material and were responsible for a deliberate distortion of reality, which produced a profound effect on shaping public opinion.¹⁰⁵ However, it should be added that the differences between respected papers and tabloids often merged due to high public interest. The *New York Times* serves as a good illustration of the point. Although the newspaper was generally considered prestigious, it joined the sensational press in dealing with the most discussed murder cases and provided a wider circle of readers with unlimited access to the proceedings in courtrooms.¹⁰⁶

In relation with the issue of women employment addressed in the opening chapter, the employment opportunities offered to female applicants throughout the nineteenth century could be perceived as fairly restricted. Only few of them were enabled to build a journalistic career, since the occupation of a newspaper journalist had been traditionally associated with men. The emergence of the new phenomenon of female participation in news reporting was caused by the increasing significance of marketing strategies and product propagation in the modern age. The editors-in-chief who had the courage and ingenuity to grant women an access to journalism succeeded in expanding female readership. In fact, the male newspaper leaders soon discovered that women journalists could be entrusted with the task of reporting on strictly female

¹⁰² Roth, *Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System*, 228.

¹⁰³ Carlson, *The Crimes of Womanhood: Defining Femininity in a Court of Law*, 10–11.

¹⁰⁴ Gado, *Death Row Women: Murder, Justice, and the New York Press*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Gado, *Death Row Women: Murder, Justice, and the New York Press*, 11–12.

¹⁰⁶ Gado, *Death Row Women: Murder, Justice, and the New York Press*, 7.

issues, as they managed to appeal easily to the same-sex readers by addressing as well as identifying themselves with ordinary women's needs and desires. It is worth mentioning that the poor conditions which the newly hired professional female journalists and reporters had to face reflected, to a very large extent, the life chances of all American women. The posts in newspapers were held only by white middle-class women who had completed university education and were brave enough to ignore the scorn expressed by their male colleagues, for they perceived journalism as a strictly male-dominated field.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, female employees "were often confined to marginal areas of news – fashion, domestic issues and a form of 'society news,' that is, essentially glorified gossip about the lives of the rich and famous."¹⁰⁸ The following quote illustrates how almost unfeasible it was to escape from gender stereotypes imposed on women entering the sphere of journalism: "Men claimed that the work was too arduous for women and that women exposed to the rough-and-tumble environment of the newsroom would lose their high ideals, their sweet and tender ways, indeed, their femininity."¹⁰⁹ Despite such discouragements, newspaperwomen continued keeping their dreams alive and used their best endeavors to excel among hostile male competitors. The steely determination that entered their delicate bodies was closely connected with a strong desire for not only professional but also personal independence. Clearly, the patriarchal system of the nineteenth century erected gender barriers which prevented women from receiving fair treatment and led to a serious underestimation of their capabilities. Nevertheless, the New Journalism, an innovative form of news writing of the early twentieth century favoring subjective observations over honest, unbiased reporting, was highly instrumental in boosting the popularity of female newspaper articles published in a tabloid-like format. In order to increase its sales and revenue, the New Journalism broadened the scope of central issues and oriented towards gossip, sex as well as crime investigation.¹¹⁰

Thus, a growing number of women, including Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell and Maurine Dallas Watkins, dedicated themselves to writing the most exclusive news stories and becoming journalists with respected American newspapers. At the time of writing their powerful plays, the prominent female dramatists were at least partially

¹⁰⁷ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 15.

¹⁰⁸ Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 15–16.

¹⁰⁹ Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 19–20.

inspired by homicide trials involving female criminals who murdered men. Glaspell covered the murder case of Margaret Hossack at the beginning of the twentieth century for the *Des Moines Daily News*, Treadwell's dramatic work contains references to the trial of Ruth Snyder, and Watkins based her *Chicago* on notorious female killers Beulah Annan and Belva Gaertner who are renamed Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly.¹¹¹

Unlike *Trifles* in which the female protagonist is provided with no access to media, newspaper journalism is commented on in *Machinal* and *Chicago*. As far as *Machinal* is concerned, Treadwell touches upon the practices adopted by journalists. In the Episode Eight, two male reporters are hired to monitor Helen Jones' trial and provide full details to their newspaper readers. Even though they follow the same story and occupy the same room, their in-depth coverage differs markedly.¹¹² Watkins provides the most vivid illustration of how enormous amounts of publicity commenced to surround American criminal trials in the early twentieth century. Taking into consideration her extensive journalism career together with first-hand experience in the two murder cases, the playwright was capable of recounting the compelling story in her three-act play without employing much embellishment or exaggeration. Literally overnight, a seemingly dull case tended to turn into a sensation. In the Prologue, right after the arrival of Babe, a news photographer whose intention is to capture the vivid details of the crime scene, all the present characters turn into vultures gathering to usurp the most advantageous position in the photographs. Instead of pursuing a thorough investigation, both law enforcement officers Harrison and Murdoch are portrayed vying with each other to avail themselves of the opportunity to dominate all tabloid headlines. Whereas young Roxie transforms into a widely experienced top model posing for a renowned fashion magazine, Jake is forced to lie down on the floor and pretend to be a corpse of Casely, the murdered man.¹¹³ The elaborate preparations for press photographs strongly resemble a stage setting for a mystery thriller movie or play, and the absurdity of the described scene highlights the public's avid interest in the horrific aspects of violent crimes. It is also suggested that unsentenced prisoners awaiting trial needed massive public support based on the news media:

¹¹¹ Lisa Hall Hagen, "Female Playwrights, Female Killers: Intersecting Texts of Crime and Gender in Glaspell, Watkins and Treadwell," in *Intertextuality in American Drama: Critical Essays on Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller and Other Playwrights*, eds. Drew Eisenhauer, and Brenda Murphy (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 172–176.

¹¹² Treadwell, *Machinal*, 66.

¹¹³ Watkins, *Chicago*, 17–19.

AMOS: I won't have My Wife dragged into—

JAKE: Here you, get this: We're not draggin' your wife—she dragged herself, see? You don't want publicity, but you're goin' to get it anyway. The question is: what kind? Do you want the papers for you or against you? Well, you gotta play ball!¹¹⁴

Tabloid journalists are portrayed in a negative light, as they have no scruples about stealing any material that might prove useful for the purpose of writing provocative articles. Even the police department is controlled by the press. Both Roxie and Velma, the female inmates who are eager to fill the front pages of all newspapers with their name, are shocked at the reporters' impudence to carry out a room search and take possession of their private correspondence and secret diary.¹¹⁵ In addition, the cunning reporter Jake puts forward a brilliant idea about how to profit hugely from the murder case in question. His ludicrous suggestion resides in the insolence to conduct an auction sale of Roxie's personal belongings for exorbitant prices. In the speech addressed to Roxie's defense attorney, he points out the future burning public interest in all her possessions:

Why, they'll go *wild* at the chance to own a teacup drank out of by a real live murderess—and of course if she dies by due process of law, the value is enhanced! We could use a carload of underwear! And victrola records—I'll kill a chicken over 'em—think of owning the record she played while the Boy Friend lay dying!¹¹⁶

The newspaperman intends to take advantage of the extensive media attention focused on the attractive woman criminal and, thus, improve his promotion prospects as well as economic situation, and achieve fame. In contrast, the play also introduces Miss Mary Sunshine, a rather emotional and affected female journalist reporting on the personal stories of female criminals for *The Evening Star*. Thanks to her, Watkins is able to depict male superior attitude towards women reporters during the 1920s. It is evident in the Act I that Roxie's lawyer Flynn treats all women with little respect, as he remains seated when giving a handshake to her instead of standing up in the woman's presence. What is more, the self-opinionated attorney has developed a crafty strategy aimed at fawning over the print media representatives in order to win their full support and easily influence a broad mass of population during the future murder trial. He pretends to be

¹¹⁴ Watkins, *Chicago*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Watkins, *Chicago*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Watkins, *Chicago*, 45.

filled with genuine admiration for his suffering client and admits with a serious look on his face that “[o]nly a woman can understand.”¹¹⁷ Of course, he satirizes the issue of female bonding and thus cherishes conservative, patriarchal values like a vast majority of male characters appearing in all three plays, analyzed in this thesis.

¹¹⁷ Watkins, *Chicago*, 43.

CONCLUSION

The chief purpose of this thesis was to examine the image of women murderers presented by three American female writers in their literary works, namely Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers," Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Maurine Dallas Watkins' *Chicago*. Furthermore, the negative stance of American courts as well as the press of the beginning of the twentieth century towards female non-conforming behavior was outlined and analyzed using the details from the above-mentioned works.

The early twentieth century changed the course of American history with respect to gender roles, since it shifted the view of women from dependent domestic figures to modern self-reliant individuals who were able to stand up for their rights and voice their opinions. During that time, social mores and conventions were loosening in terms of women's sexuality and their participation in social, economic as well as political life. Women achieved remarkable progress in raising their inferior status and all the ongoing transitions were slowly approaching gender equality. Consequently, this situation was seriously undermining oppressive patriarchal system advocated by men, together with the male-dominated environment of the criminal justice system and mass media, mainly newspapers. The brave American women were thus seen to break widely-accepted social and cultural norms, for which they received sharp public criticism, as it applies to the works analyzed in this thesis. All the female characters appearing in the three plays (and one short story) are forced to face harsh criticism voiced by men.

Glaspell successfully manages to capture the patterns of female subordination as a result of society's patriarchal attitudes and stresses desperate female need of acceptance as well as a sense of social belonging. As has been mentioned at the beginning of the first chapter, she skillfully played with the references to female characters in order to introduce the issue of gender inequality. Minnie, whose story is seen and explained through two understanding women's eyes, is the chief suspect in the murder of her husband John. Both Minnie and John are physically absent from the play, so a great importance lies in the speeches delivered by other characters. Whereas Minnie is portrayed as a nice, shy woman with a passionate interest in music and singing, John appears as a hard and insensitive farmer who needs a servant for domestic chores. It is evident that their marital life is far from perfect, which might be proven by the dead bird which Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters find among Minnie's personal belongings.

Both housewives who accompany their husbands to the crime scene are being put under constant pressure based on the deep-seated gender prejudices and traditional stereotypes related to the gentle sex. Women feel empathy for Minnie's miserable life and create strong emotional bonds among themselves. Nonetheless, the voices of arrogant police officers are full of bitter sarcasm when it comes to women and serious situations, as they tend to be preoccupied with concentrating on trivialities.

Unlike Glaspell who deals with the motif of loneliness and isolation in a village, Treadwell as well as Watkins chose an urban setting for their plays and focus on the different influences that the female characters are exposed to. Helen, the central female character in *Machinal*, meets with constant criticism and lack of understanding. Despite her low wage, she is forced to take care of her bitter and unsupported mother and listen to her nagging. The vision of serious financial difficulties leads her to an unhappy marriage with her unattractive superior whose physical presence she finds unbearable. After her romantic affair with Richard and first experience of love, she kills his spouse for the one and only reason; to break free from the unbearable suffocation of gendered oppression. In comparison, the marriage of manipulative Roxie and Amos in *Chicago* is also depicted as unsuccessful. Nevertheless, this was not a motive behind the crime. Even though the awkward man loves her from all his heart, the arrogant lady shows no interest in him and is capable of putting the blame for the murder she committed on her devoted husband. It has been pointed out that the three eminent playwrights were inspired by notorious female murderers and, thus, the dramas contain various similarities with the homicide trials.

It may be concluded that the readers of the analyzed literary works might admire the masterful elaboration of traditional gender stereotypes addressing the supposed weakness of the female. Most of male characters, exception being Roxie's spouse Amos, exhibit a strong intention to maintain patriarchal power and control women, whom they consider inferior and dependent. Clearly, the social conditions of American women might have differed together with the female motives for criminal behavior in the early of twentieth century, but it is safe to say that Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell as well as Maurine Dallas Watkins did a first-rate job in depicting female criminals, and their phenomenal literary works should be, therefore, dealt with more in the future, as it would be pity if they are to be fallen into oblivion.

RESUMÉ

Hlavním záměrem této práce je analyzovat postavy ženských zločinců vykreslené třemi významnými americkými autorkami. Rozbor se vztahuje na drama *Trifles* a povídku „A Jury of Her Peers“ od Susan Glaspellové a na divadelní hry *Machinal* a *Chicago* od Sophie Treadwellové a Maurine Dallas Watkinsové. Tato práce dále zkoumá a porovnává postoj amerického soudnictví a novinářské žurnalistiky k ženské kriminalitě na začátku dvacátého století.

První kapitola se zaměřuje na všechny převratné změny ve způsobu života amerických občanů, především žen, jež byla zapříčiněna strmým růstem ekonomiky a rychlým rozvojem průmyslu. Nová doba s sebou přinesla více či méně praktické vynálezy, které ovlivnily nejen průmyslový sektor, ale svoje využití našly i v domácnostech. Jelikož zemědělství zaznamenalo prudký pokles, lidé opouštěli vesnice a začali se přesouvat za prací do měst. Ožehavými tématy se stala ženská práva a nespravedlivé postavení žen a mužů v americké společnosti, jež byla do té doby ovládána pevnou rukou patriarchátu. Vzor ženskosti už nepředstavovala zakřiknutá a poslušná manželka, ale svobodně smýšlející, progresivní žena, která se nebála změn a zajímala se nejen o okolní svět, ale i o svoje vlastní touhy, potřeby a sexuální chtíč.

Většina těchto událostí je zachycena v dílech již zmíněných dramatiček. V divadelní hře *Trifles* se objevují dvě hlavní ženské postavy, paní Haleová a paní Petersová, které doprovázejí své manžele na místo, kde byl zavražděn zdejší farmář John Wright. Hlavní podezřelou osobou je jeho plachá manželka Minnie, která se ale ve hře fyzicky neobjevuje. Zatímco dochází k oficiálnímu vyšetřování vedeného muži, obě ženy se díky svým zkušenostem a intuitivním schopnostem postupně dopátrají hlavního motivu spáchaného zločinu. Jako zástupkyně ženského pohlaví jsou schopné pochopit těžkou životní situaci jiné ženy, které byl svým mužem upřen kontakt s okolním světem i každodenními radostmi. Povídka „A Jury of Her Peers“ se zabývá stejným příběhem, pouze s tím rozdílem, že rozpracovává některé situace do většího detailu. Nalezneme zde i myšlenkové pochody Marthy Haleové, která je oproti paní Petersové chápavější a statečně brání Minnie před jízlivými poznámkami představitelů zákona. Na rozdíl od Glaspellové, jež se zaměřuje na venkovskou samotu a odloučení, Treadwellová a Watkinsová zasazují své příběhy do městského prostředí a ukazují, jakým vlivům jsou ženy vystaveny v místech s vyšší populací. Ve hře *Machinal* je hlavní hrdinkou Helen, jež se v příběhu setkává jen s kritikou a neporozuměním. Tato mladá dívka se se

skromným platem stenografky musí starat o zatrpklou a životem zklamanou matku, s níž žije ve společné domácnosti. Tíživá finanční situace ji donutí vzdát se zaměstnání a provdat se za svého zaměstnavatele, nevhledného postaršího muže, ke kterému cítí odpor. Jediným světlým momentem se stane seznámení s přitažlivým dobrodruhem. Ten jí ukáže, že i ona má právo prožít lásku a milé zacházení, a dodá jí sílu bránit se svému osudu. Jediným východiskem je pro ni, stejně jako pro Minnie, zavraždění manžela. Protagonistka hry *Chicago* se od Minnie a Helen podstatně liší. Roxie je mladá a sebejistá žena, která navzdory svému manželství s poněkud nevýrazným, ale slepě milujícím Amosem, hledá zábavu u jiného muže. Ze strachu a ponížení z rozpadu tohoto románku svého milence zastřelí a vinu se snaží svalit na svého nevinného manžela, jež je ochoten jít se udat strážcům zákona. Z toho vyplývá, že neváhá chladně manipulovat s lidmi, kteří jsou jí nejbližší. Roxie tedy představuje naprostý opak hlavních hrdinek *Trifles* a *Machinal*. Dokáže využít každou situaci ve svůj prospěch a místo, aby se nechala ovládat muži, raději jim vládne sama. K tomu jí dopomáhá nejen její důvtip, ale i nepřehlédnutelná krása.

Následující kapitola je věnovaná právnímu systému ve Spojených státech a popisuje jeho základní znaky a skryté mechanismy na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století. Soudy konečně začaly řešit kruté podmínky žen na pracovišti a musely čelit zvýšené kriminální činnosti ve větších městech. Nejvíce znepokojivým faktorem se ale staly zločiny, za něž nesly odpovědnost zástupkyně něžného pohlaví. Kriminalisté se mimo jiné domnívali, že zdravé, kultivované ženy nejsou schopné spáchat kriminální čin. Tato kapitola obsahuje i několik příkladů dobových teorií, které měly za úkol osvětlit ženské kriminální chování. Jak autorky ukazují ve svých dílech, velice často docházelo k nesprávným interpretacím zločinů a pachatelky byly konzervativní společností brzy zavrženy. Všechny tři divadelní hry spojuje vražda muže spáchaná hlavní hrdinkou. Pouze Helen z *Machinal* si za ní vyslouží smrt v elektrickém křesle, jež bylo v té době nově zavedeno. Problémem amerického soudnictví bylo hlavně mužské složení poroty. Muži jsou ve většině případů vylíčení jako přezíraví a necitliví jedinci, jež nemají dostatek pochopení pro zoufalé činy ženských představitelk. V *Machinal* se u soudu hodnotí spokojenost v manželském svazku podle počtu roků strávených s partnerem a výskytu hádek, z čehož by manželství Helen vyšlo jako ukázkové. Ve hře *Trifles* si zase policisté nevědí s případem rady, protože nemohou narazit na žádné fyzické důkazy, které by je navedly na správnou stopu. Netuší, že ženy už dávno našly rozluštění vraždy v království každé ženy farmáře, tedy

v kuchyni. Roxie naopak velmi vyhovuje, že muži disponují mylnými představami o ženách a jejich mentalitě, a přizpůsobí tomu svoji obhajobu. Nebojí se se svým obhájcem zajít až do extrému a na závěr převedou pečlivě nacvičenou grotesku proloženou zkroušenými pohledy a dramatickým omdléváním, jelikož ženy jsou všeobecně vnímány jako křehké bytosti s naprosto počestnými úmysly. Nicméně, porota ji vnímá jako oběť systému, čímž si zaručí vstupenku na svobodu.

Poslední část této práce mapuje prvopočátky médií a rychlý nástup tisku do americké historie v první polovině dvacátého století. Popisuje rovněž, jak se za obrovského vlivu reklamy a chytlavých sloganů změnilo nákupní chování celé společnosti, jež se proměnila v konzumní. S růstem kriminality se noviny přeorientovaly na kriminální reportáže a šokovaly svoje čtenáře detailními popisy zločinů a zločinců. V této kapitole se poukazuje i na těžké osudy žen reportérek, jež zrcadlí nevyrovnané poměry mezi muži a ženami ve společnosti, a nekalé až nemorální praktiky novinářů, kteří baží po úspěchu ve svém oboru a následném povýšení. Ve hře *Chicago* se například nezastaví ani před vloupáním či krádeží osobní korespondence a deníku líčící intimní zážitky. Mladý reportér Jake neváhá navrhnout rozprodání nábytku a oblečení půvabné vražedkyně Roxie v aukci za přemrštěné ceny. Watkinsová popisuje až absurdní momenty, ve kterých se policejní seržanti přetahují o to, kdo bude lépe viděn na fotografii otisknuté na titulní stránce, či situace, kdy si reportér lehne nehybně na zem a hraje mrtvolu milence Roxie, aby byl snímek v novinách co nejvěrohodnější a vzbudil mezi lidmi hojné ohlasy. Treadwellová také odkazuje na fakt, že jedna realita se dá popsat naprosto odlišnými způsoby, a tím dochází k manipulaci s pravdou, jako je tomu v případě tištěných médií. V závěru je v práci zmíněno, že Treadwellová, Glaspellová i Watkinsová čerpaly při tvorbě svých děl z osobních zkušeností z krutého novinářského světa a byly alespoň zčásti inspirovány skutečnými případy ženských vražedkyň.

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ANNOTATION

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The chief purpose of this thesis is to explore the depiction of female criminals in the following literary works by three American women playwrights: Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers," Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Maurine Dallas Watkins' *Chicago*. First, the changing social roles of men and women are briefly outlined in the context of 1910s and 1920s America. Subsequently, the United States criminal justice system and newspaper media of the early twentieth century are discussed and their attitude towards female killers is included.

Keywords: American women, patriarchal society, legal system, newspaper journalism

ANOTACE

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Předmětem této práce je analyzovat zobrazení ženských vražedkyň v následujících literárních dílech amerických dramatiček: v divadelní hře *Trifles* a povídce „A Jury of Her Peers“ od Susan Glaspellové a v dramatech *Machinal* od Sophie Treadwellové a *Chicago* od Maurine Dallas Watkinsové. První část se zabývá měnicími se rolemi mužů a žen v americké společnosti během raných dekád dvacátého století. Práce se dále zaměřuje na moderní americký systém trestního práva a počátky novinářiny a nastiňuje jejich postoj k ženské kriminalitě v dané době.

Klíčová slova: americké ženy, patriarchální společnost, právní systém, novinářská publicistika