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Staging M/Othering in Susan Glaspell's *The Verge:* A Semiotic Reading

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Abstract

This paper studies the links between psychoanalytic approach, language, and the construction of gender in Susan Glaspell's play *The Verge* (1921), with specific reference to the French feminist psychologist Julia Kristeva's theory of 'semiotics', which examines the female subject's confusing relation to the Symbolic Order from a feminist perspective. Kristeva suggests that semiotics signifies otherness; and through rhythms and a play of language, the connection to the pre-Oedipal is evoked. This language, which is linked to the mother's body, breaks through and disrupts ordered symbolic discourse. The very nature of semiotic language is juxtaposed with the abstract Law, which orders the symbolic, yet both exist in the signification of language. This paper shows that a return to the semiotic (as a feature of both subject and text) in *The Verge* could be an approach to challenge traditional literary representations and overturn prevailing social constructs of femininity.

Keywords: Susan Glaspell, Julia Kristeva, French Feminism, American Theatre, Semiotics, Motherhood.

Introduction

The latest feminist criticism has shown how female dramatists, affected by hostile conditions unknown to their male colleagues, are required to find deviant ways of interrogating their society's prevailing conventions about gender in their writing. As such criticism has specified, artistic as well as social beliefs have restricted women dramatists in particular from expressing openly their own opposition to established views of female roles, mainly those regarding marriage and motherhood. Helen Keysser, in *Feminist Theater*, suggests an explanation: "The social structure in which theater has existed for more than 2000 years […] and the networks of money and power that brought drama to the public remained not only primarily controlled by men but intimidatingly impenetrable for most women" (1984,18). Feminist critics looked at the past and noticed that the dramatic canon assumed that the viewer was male and that the subject matter often concerned fathers and sons (for example, *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, and *Death of A Salesman*). Elaine Aston, in her important study, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theater* (1995), explains that deconstructing the 'classic' periods of Western theater enables us to understand that "women have been absent from the stage", and "the female has been constructed as a man-made sign in her

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absence" (1995, 13). The most obvious meaning of this tendency is that the theater reinforced patriarchal cultures in which the foundations are the two parental poles: father as Law and mother as a prohibited desire. The feminist revision of gender in drama requires a re-examination of this imperative and suggests that there are other possibilities. The writing of the female subject in drama is a process that differs between women and men for several reasons. Women are placed differently in relation to dramatic representation than men; lacking the same type of subject position as men, their ability to articulate their subjectivity is problematic. Their relation to language can also be seen as more oppositional in that women have often been discouraged from expressing themselves, not only in speech but mainly in writing. The staging of "femininity" that can be found in women's drama in early twentieth-century American theater is therefore duplicitous: both asserting and negating identity, both representing and questioning "femininity". The concept of "femininity" in their drama reveals ambivalence. Keysser explains that as a means to articulate their ambivalence, female playwrights have had to use artistic strategies that express their concerns and represent themes related to their own life experiences, such as mother-daughter relationships, abortion, and women's desire (Keysser 1984, 63-76). At the same time, their alertness to the multifaceted and conflicting aspects of female objectives generates obscurities in their writing, a reflection of hesitation as much as of anger. The difficulty of finding means of voicing their opposition to restricting and false beliefs about femininity in their writing without breaching existing rules was specifically critical for early twentieth-century American playwrights.[1]

In order to thoroughly study the ways in which female playwrights can integrate both objection and ambivalence into a dramatic form, I have chosen the American dramatist Susan Glaspell's *The Verge* (1921).[2] Glaspell (1882-1948) wrote several plays that questioned women's roles in early twentieth-century society. Glaspell was rediscovered, and critical interest in her life and works was renewed in the early eighties. Glaspell's work motivated feminist theater critics to understand how and why playwrights, like Glaspell, had been ignored by male history. Elaine Aston proposes that "examining the (male) reviewing of Glaspell's work will show how gender bias contributed to the marginalization of Glaspell's theater" (1995, 104). Many studies emphasize the all-male theatrical context of Glaspell's plays and stress the need to consider the practical as well as the textual aspects of her plays beyond the traditional patriarchal criteria of artistic value. This feminist reassessment is reflected in the publication of six important studies: Marcia Noe's *Susan Glaspell: Voice from the Heartland* (1983), Veronica Makowsky's *Susan Glaspell's Century of American Women* (1993), Mary Papke's *Susan Glaspell: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (1993), Linda Ben-Zvi's *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction* (1995), Ellen Gainor's *Susan Glaspell in Context*: *American Theatre, Culture, and Politics (1915-48)* (2001), and Linda Ben-Zvi's *Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (2005). All studies reclaim Glaspell's position in the history of American drama as "a turn-of-the-century pioneer of the new drama" (Elaine Aston, 1995, 104). Linda Ben-Zvi explains that Glaspell has successfully established a "woman-centered" drama and "pioneered a new type of modern drama, extending the possibilities of what could be seen and discussed on the stage and what forms could be used. Finding few native models from which to draw, she created her own. She also pioneered in her depiction of the lives and struggles of women" (Ben-Zvi 2005,

xii). J. Ellen Gainor illustrates similarly that Glaspell's struggle throughout her plays "to negotiate dramatic form also seems presciently to anticipate feminist theater theory" from her own position as a playwright experimenting with gender and language in a patriarchal culture (2003, 163). This interest in her life, theater, and the impact that she has left on American drama continues with the publication of *Susan Glaspell in Context* (2023). Glaspell wrote in a changing period regarding the woman question. Legal transformation in America had started to improve women's conditions; by the second decade of the twentieth-century, most states had endorsed the act of female voting, for example. As a result, it was easier for women to protest against restricting beliefs concerning womanhood than it had been for their predecessors. However, orthodoxy continued to exercise great influence in a culture extremely occupied with preserving social rigidity.[3] Michelene Wandor's study of women in theater at the turn of the century admits that the 1920s and 1930s were a period when "struggles to improve the position of women in society continued, but less publicly" (1986, 6). In this context of conflicting beliefs about femininity, Glaspell searches for ideas defining female independence in terms other than sexual dependence and contests the authority of conservative images. Her dramatic style in her different plays is shaped by her values and experiences, which are different from those of men.[4] The literary patterns in her work thus express both her consciousness of the contradictions of her sex's situation and her own interrogations.[5]

Glaspell's *The Verge* sets out many of these issues and concerns. *The Verge* demonstrates nonconformity to the standard and feminine ideal; it also dismantles conventions that reduce women to representative images and themes. Glaspell introduces her heroine, Claire Archer, who refuses the obligations of her position as wife and mother. Indeed, the three-act play revolves around Claire Archer's independent behavior, which disturbs the balance between her desire for freedom and conformity to the proper, socialized world that her husband, daughter, and sister represent. Claire, who is in her mid-forties, has rejected many social expectations. This rejection of the normative patriarchal experience occurs when Claire rejects her traditional rules as a loyal wife, a caring mother, a graceful hostess, and a subordinate lover. Claire turns to her experiments in her greenhouse to escape her marriage and society. *The Verge* has already attracted the attention of critics of many different persuasions. Some critics have highlighted Glaspell's depiction of gender roles in *The Verge*. Veronica Makowsky's study (1993) examines Glaspell's "revolutionary" depiction of "the maternal metaphor" within the context of American history from the time of the pioneers to the war mothers of the 1940s (Makowsky 1993, pp.10-11). Drawing on the theory of the French Feminist Helen Cixous, Marcia Noe explores the fragmented language in *The Verge*. Noe finds that "through violating the norms of dramatic discourse, the norms of logic, and linear progression, Glaspell creates her own form of *Écriture féminine*, one that is ideally suited to Claire's rebellious purpose" (1995, 137). More recent studies attempt to contextualize the cultural production of *The Verge* in light of a historical understanding of the complexities of American society and the position of women in culture and theater. These studies emphasize the social and economic conditions that drive the heroine of *The Verge* – and potentially all women – to madness. In the course of Ellen Gainor's analysis of *The Verge*, for instance, she focuses on "making social/political/historical connections with the plays and discussing issues of literary form or subgenre and theater history that they represent" (2001, 5). Exceptionally, feminist critics who have addressed this context, like Linda Ben-Zvi

in *Glaspell: Her Life and Times* (2005), have had to examine Glaspell's plays by relying extensively on Glaspell's biography. For example, her analysis of *The Verge* makes a direct link between the experience of Glaspell's marriage and her representation of Claire Archer, the play's heroine. Ben-Zvi argues that the men in Glaspell's life have an ill-impact on her career: "Susan Glaspell was obviously a victim, beset by patriarchal villains (O'Neill and Cook [her husband]) who were somehow responsible for her erasure" (2005, xi). But Ben-Zvi's contextual consideration of *The Verge* as theater has been left out of modern feminist frames and methodologies. The more recent considerations of *The Verge* go beyond the common trend of introducing Glaspell as a female author interested mainly in female issues. In *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression: Language and Isolation in the Plays* (2006), Kristina Hinz-Bode discusses Glaspell's use of language "both as theme and as a medium of artistic expression" in her plays (2006, 5). She also examines Glaspell's philosophical exploration of the artist's engagement in theater and her tendency to link an individual's freedom to language in connection to a wider modernist cultural context that includes works by Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, and Ibsen. Other critics examine intertextuality in *The Verge* and describe its dialogical relationships among other genres and other texts by European writers. Monica Stufft, for example, views the intersection between *The Verge* and the Swedish playwright August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, while Rytch Barber situates *The Verge* within the context of European expressionism.[6] Barber argues that Glaspell "used expressionist techniques to intertwine the personal with the political and place the dichotomy firmly at the center of feminist thought", and that "her radical play, *The Verge*, marking one of the first theatrical examples, not only of a particularly American version of expressionism, but also of a well-articulated, politically-charged feminist point of view" (2006, 93). Barber explains that "expressionism's call for the objectification of one's subjective experience of the world, then would seem to serve as auspicious terrain for Glaspell and those who came shortly after her, both to explore the limits of dramaturgy and to enunciate a specific feminist perspective which highlights the lived experiences of women" (2006, 93). Noelia Hernando-Reals, in *Self and Space in The Theatre of Susan Glaspell* (2011), examines Glaspell's use of stage space to explore her characters' identity and selfhood. Hernando-Reals deals with *The Verge* from a theatrical rather than literary perspective. She argues that "Glaspell's fictional spaces are not decorative backgrounds to support a character's identity, as happens in realistic theater, but an entity she makes her characters engage with in a verbal and kinesic dialectic" (2011, 176). She discovers in *The Verge* metaphors of enclosure, entrapment, and shelters – tropes long favored by women writers. In a similar study, "Home as an Activist and Feminist Stage" (2019), Lourdes Arciniega argues correctly that Glaspell introduced revisionist staging of conventional domestic places in her plays by emphasizing the architecture of the setting to redefine and reconsider the traditional meanings of home by showing a female character's interiority and by visually depicting splitting in concepts of gender and family. Through a close analysis of major plays by Glaspell, Emeline Jouve, in *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion* (2017), examines the political potential of Glaspell's theater within the wider field of feminist theater. Jouve analyzes how Glaspell reveals the double standards of American society and its

tendency to silence those considered incapable of playing along gender and social lines. Emeline Jouve argues that "rebellion permeates every level of Glaspell's dramatic endeavor" (2017, 15).

While many of the above-reviewed interpretations of *The Verge* have noticed the illusive psychological nature of the play, which centers on the heroine's quest for selfhood, critics haven't fully applied a psychoanalytic approach to *The Verge*, which is also a quest for and construction of subjectivity. In addition, Glaspell is directly preoccupied with the psychic subjectivity and experiences of the central character, Claire Archer. Therefore, this paper will discuss the relationship between the psychoanalytic approach, female subjectivity, and forms of language in *The Verge*, with specific reference to the psychoanalytic critiques of the French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva. Her theory of semiotics, which uses the discourses of Lacanian psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, focuses on subjectivity and language. Since Kristeva's ideas are described in more detail in the following section and in the reading of *The Verge*, we will only briefly note here that in *The Revolution of Poetic Language* (1974), Kristeva argues that the "semiotic" is a hidden evidence of the pre-oedipal experience with language. It is linked to the maternal body and becomes an excluded Other. Following Lacan, Kristeva believes that female subjectivity is absent and repressed by cultural and social languages, or the symbolic that is shaped by linguistic laws of syntax. The feminine is identified with the imaginary and is therefore a gap, an absence in the syntax of the symbolic. Kristeva's main argument in *Desire in Language*: *A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980) is that the rigid signification of the symbolic and its patriarchal codes of God, father, etc. can be destabilized by finding a discourse closer to the mother's body (the semiotics), which is subdued by the symbolic. According to her, literary texts are heterogeneous, made up of elements of the semiotic and symbolic. For example, Kristeva argues that speaking subjects in literature often reveal raptures of the symbolic in deviation from grammar. *The Verge* shares with Kristeva's theory a desire to look at the relationship between female subjectivity, mothering, and language. And it also addresses Kristeva's understanding that systems of language derive from systems of cultural power. By analyzing the power as well as the problem of the maternal, *The Verge* foregrounds Kristeva's ideas. *The Verge* is inherently a difficult text because of its lack of transparency and simple resolution. This elusiveness of meaning conforms to Kristeva's work on modernist writing. Part of the resolution will be encouraged by testing out the ambiguities and absences in the social construction of mothering, as Glaspell does so well in *The Verge*. This paper aims at studying the ways in which *The Verge* might reveal the suppressed feminine. A Kristevan reading of *The Verge* depends on creating a split between the manifest and latent text that allows signs of gender to enter, redefine, and reveal their meanings. The heroine of *The Verge*, Claire Archer, compares her rebellion against being locked into gracious conventions of femininity to the total independence of the metamorphosing plants that she grows as a horticulturist. Disguised as an acceptable feminine topic (interest in flowers and gardening), Claire's horticulture comes to occupy the heroine's entire reality. Gradually, unveiled, her horticulture becomes a metaphor for women's discourse. Once exposed, her horticulture expresses what is somewhere else kept veiled and symbolizes language that the patriarchal order ignores, represses, dismisses as "queer" (Glaspell 1921, 35), or fails to recognize at all. This emphasis on discourse – the act of speaking, language – draws us to the central issue in this play: the

heroine's quest for artistic creativity and self-expression. Thus, *The Verge* is concerned with the problematic relationship between women and language. A Kristevan Reading *The Verge* shows certain points of conflict between patriarchal language and women's discourse. This conflict, in turn, raises a number of questions relevant for both literary and feminist scholarship: In what aspects can language be said to be repressive toward women? How does *The Verge*'s innovative structure and language pursue breaking this linguistic repression? And what is the relationship between the way in which *The Verge* constructs femininity and the material constraints with which it works? In this paper, the heroine's horticulture stands for a new vision of women, one that is constructed differently from the representation of women in patriarchal language. *The Verge* is therefore in part about the psychological conflict between two kinds of discourse: one is the symbolic patriarchal discourse of the "ancestors" (Glaspell 1921, 22), authoritative and prevailing; the other is the excluded semiotic innovative visionary discourse of "otherness" (Glaspell 1921, 19), which is drawn from the maternal. *The Verge*'s outcome makes a statement about the relationship of a visionary feminist project to material reality. A Kristevan analysis would enable a sophisticated understanding of *The Verge*, locating the politics and aesthetics of Glaspell's theater precisely in her textual practice. It allows a way to locate repressed elements of *The Verge* that work to undermine the authority of the patriarchal symbolic codes in operation.

Kristeva's Semiotics

Kristeva's work on language, gender, and subjectivity has its roots in Lacanian theory. Before moving on to the reading of *The Verge*, this section will provide a short summary of the Lacanian model of the constitution of the subject on which much of Kristeva's theory is based. It will proceed with an account of those aspects of Kristeva's theory, which specifically offer a helpful guide to the psychological features of *The Verge*. In her explication of Lacan's account of the child's acquisition of language, Ruth Rubbins clarifies that Lacan distinguishes between the "imaginary" and the "symbolic". "The imaginary" is a state in which the infant "still sees the world and himself as continuous, with no separation between self and other" (Rubbins 2000, 114). In this "pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal phase […] the child passes through 'the mirror stage' […] and identifies the image as himself" (Rubbins 2000, 114). At this stage, Lacan argues that the baby gains an individual and unified image when it can look in a mirror and see its mother as another. Through the acquisition of language, the child enters the "Symbolic realm", as called by Lacan. The Symbolic is "the realm of consciousness, rules, order, differentiation, logic, and power, in contrast to the imaginary realm of the unconscious with its anarchic, uncontrolled desires" (Rubbins 2000, 115). The Symbolic is defined as the Law of the Father. According to Lacan, the father is both "the literal father", and also "the symbolic father of society at large, representing the institution of socialization – the church, the law, education etc." (Rubbins 2000, 115). Lacan argues that "the unconscious is structured like a language, there is always a residue of that anarchic, arbitrary psychic space of the Unconscious and the Imaginary. Rationality and disorder coexist in the speaking subject" (Rubbins 2000, 116). In order to enter the Symbolic Order, some features of the Imaginary that cannot be articulated are silenced, and suppressed in the unconscious.[7] A transition from the "imaginary" to the

"symbolic" order therefore depends on separation from the mother. The world of early childhood creates, in other words, a disjointed imagistic space whose language can never be fully recovered by the symbolic order. This Aspect of Lacan's theory is a key to understanding what Kristeva terms the 'semiotic' (or the zone of the unconscious on which conscious speech depends).

Kristeva's concept of the semiotic has been one of the most important of recent theories on the relationship between women, language, and society. As her theories have by now been comprehensively explained by many critics,[8] I will limit myself to the analysis of the main ideas that this paper uses as a basis for reading *The Verge*. In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), Kristeva defines the maternal imaginary as the semiotic subtext of symbolic language. Appropriating Plato's concept of *chora* "from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb" (Moi 1987, 160), Kristeva suggests that *chora* "denotes an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral states […] Neither model nor copy, the *chora* proceeds and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (Kristeva 1974 a, 453). Kristeva proposes that there is "a chora, receptacle, unnamable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father, and consequently maternally connoted" (Kristeva 1980, 133). Kristeva follows Lacan's idea that at the pre-Oedipal stage, the flow of impulses centers on the mother, and allows no separate sense of self: "Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother" (Kristeva 1974 a, 454). Kristeva suggests that this primary stage can be seen as a *chora*, a state before subjectivity and language acquisition. According to Kristeva, the *chora* is an inclusive space across which the physical and psychic drives of an infant flow rhythmically: "a rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position […] a modality of *significance* in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (Kristeva 1974 a, 454). A disordered pre-linguistic fluidity of movements, gestures, sounds and rhythms sets a foundation of "semiotic" material which remains active beneath the mature linguistic performance of the adult. Kristeva proposes that:

> The kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* proceeds the establishment of the sign; it is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by knowing, already constituted subject. The genesis of the *functions* organizing the semiotic process can be accurately elucidated only within a theory of the subject that does not reduce the subject to one of understanding, but instead opens up within the subject this other sense of pre-symbolic functions. (Kristeva 1974 a, 454)

Kristeva follows Lacan in suggesting "the mirror phase" as the first stage that "opens the way for the constitution of all objects which from now on will be detached from the semiotic *chora*" (Kristeva 1974 a, 454). This indefinite fluidity of drives is gradually regulated by "sociohistorical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure" (Kristeva 1974 a, 454). Kristeva keeps Lacan's concepts of Symbolic and Imaginary, and doesn't suggest that any subject, male or female, could ever live 'outside' the Symbolic. As the semiotic becomes regulated, the alternative ways become the coherent syntax and rationality of the adult, which Kristeva calls the "symbolic". The symbolic works with the elements of the semiotic and achieves a certain mastery over them but can never produce its own

signifying constituents. (Kristeva 1974 a, 455; 456-457). The semiotic is continuously at work within the structure of the symbolic, and expresses itself in linguistic and literary presentations through textual incoherence. Kristeva suggests that, "This heterogeneousness to signification operates through, despite, and in access of it and produces in poetic language 'musical' but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations but, in radical experiments, syntax itself" (Kristeva 1980, 133). Therefore, Kristeva identifies semiotics not only in children's developing language skills, but also in 'poetic language. Although the semiotics' characterization as part of the subject's 'repressed unconscious' would show that such eruptions should rise compulsorily in speech or writing, Kristeva's own literary examples are all modernist texts in which the frequent 'incoherencies' are part of a self-conscious, aesthetic experiment evident in "carnivalesque discourse, Artaud, a number of texts by Mallarme', certain Dadaist and Surrealist experiments" (Kristeva 1980, 133). In other words, any literary representation of subjectivity is continuously being pressured by the drives of that pre-Oedipal time.

Toril Moi's shrewd reading of Kristeva's work emphasizes its revolutionary potentials for feminist readers.[9] Moi argues that "the strength of Kristevan theory lies in its emphasis on the politics of language as a material and social structure" (1987, 15). Although Kristeva's theory of the semiotics is not associated with femininity, it is basically a theory that female subjects preserve a special relationship to this stage of development. Moi explains that Kristeva's greatest emphasis is placed on the ungendered and pre-linguistic nature of the semiotics. She writes, "the fluid mobility of the semiotic is indeed associated with the pre-Oedipal phase, and therefore with the pre-Oedipal mother […] Kristeva sees the pre-Oedipal mother as a figure that encompasses both masculinity and femininity" (1987, 164). Thus, for Moi, "any strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions, and not at all a reinforcement of traditional notions of 'femininity'" (Moi 1987, 164). Moi adds that this is why "Kristeva insists strongly on the necessary refusal of any theory or politics based on the belief in any absolute form of identity" (1987, 164-165), but for her "femininity and the semiotic do, however, have one thing in common: their marginality. As the feminine is defined as marginal under patriarchy, so the semiotic is marginal to language" (1987, 165). Accepting that patriarchal culture did work to exclude women from the Symbolic Order, Moi explains that Kristeva focused instead on the pre-Oedipal stage of subject development and how the female subject's relationship to this phase might be redefined. Moi suggests that,

> There is no *other space* from which we can speak: If we are able to speak at all, it will have to be within the framework of the symbolic language. The revolutionary subject, whether masculine or feminine, is a subject that is able to allow the jouissance of semiotic mobility to allow disrupt the strict symbolic order. (1987, 169-170)

This may show the way in which feminist critics such as Kristeva have become used to rethinking "the unconscious" of a text in gendered terms; tracing a text's operations of binaries and disruptions reveals that femininity is the repressed other of the Symbolic. Besides, Kristeva's theory is insightful for feminist readers because it focuses on "textuality rather than the intentions of the author", and this emphasis has

provided readers the chance "to identify those areas of disjunction, silence, or contradiction, which count as evidence for a suppressed feminine within the text, unable to make itself fully heard, because it cannot be contained within the symbolic order which it threatens to disrupt" (Mills and Pearce 1996, 158). This view assumes that the linguistic and psychic structures given to female characters will be different from the abstract rationalism associated with male characters. A kristevan reading of *The Verge,* as argued before, would not accept a binary opposition of aesthetics on the one hand and politics of gender and writing on the other; indeed, tracing the politics of Glaspell's writing would be inseparable from her textual and theatrical practice.

Re-writing the Female Subject and the Maternal Body in *The Verge*

Kristeva could have used *The Verge* as an example of a speaking subject in literature who can subvert the symbolic and its social codes and paternal functions by revealing the semiotic, which is repressed by the symbolic. Kristeva's discussion of the semiotic must be recognized in relation to the sociopolitical and philosophical positioning of women, their bodies, and their voices. Women are silenced because they are alienated from the discourses molding their bodies. As far as its application within this reading of *The Verge* is concerned, it could be argued that the semiotic can be expressed in two ways: first, through a metaphoric model of *The Verge* as a psyche within its own conscious and unconscious, in which particular disrupting features can be seen as similar to the semiotic (even if their existence has been deliberately structured by Glaspell); and second, in a reading of Glaspell's heroine, in whom the semiotic occasionally breaks out.

The Verge throws into question those elements in the symbolic order that have been accepted as cultural norms. Like Kristeva, who "tries to go against metaphysical theories that ensure what [is] labeled "a woman"" (Kristeva 1974b, 268), Glaspell chooses Plato's theory of Forms as the site of entry into a new imaginary. *The Verge* opens as such:

> The frost has made patterns on the glass as if – as Plato would have it – the patterns inherent in abstract nature and behind all life had to come out, not only in the creative heat within, but in the creative cold on the other side of the glass. And as the wind makes patterns of sound around the glass house. (Glaspell 1921, 1-2)

Kristeva has described this feature of women's writing as "ethics of subversion". For her, "it is an attempt to locate the negativity and refusal pertaining to the marginal in 'woman', in order to undermine the phallocentric order that defines woman as marginal in the first place" (Moi 1987, 162). In other words, this revisionary exploration of Plato's theory of Forms is a revisionary meaning-making that deconstructs sanctuaries of existing signification where our meanings of "male" and 'female' have been preserved. In Rachel Blau Duplessis's words, the classics, "are tools of social consolidation: knowing or not knowing the Greek-Roman classics in the original had highly symbolic status as a social marker of both class and gender caste" (1985, 106). However, Duplessis argues that "the classics still seem to have induced that mixture of defensive paralysis and assertive transformation characteristic of female position in culture, the defensive situation on the margins of speech and culture, and the assertive repossession of voice when oppositional narratives are invented" (1985, 107). What Claire senses is getting into "the byways of

perversion" (Glaspell 1921, 15), or a revision of this symbolic scene. Julia Galbus explains that, "Glaspell revises Platonic metaphysics by using the term "form" to represent a new and original creation rather than a preexisting metaphysical form. She applies the term more broadly than Plato did by including gender roles and species of plants in order to demonstrate how pervasively the idea limits human activity" (2000, 81-82). Glaspell attended Drake University, where she studied Greek and philosophy. When she chooses Plato's Forms as her revisionary subject, she is faced with a material that is considered universal, natural, humanistic, and indifferent to gender considerations. In fact, one could take the position that Glaspell's rewriting of Plato's Forms in *The Verge* represents the opposition between the patriarchal symbolic discourse of philosophy and the maternal semiotic, which actually systemizes the exclusion of the feminine. Claire's attempt to make new forms is powerful, even violent – it can tear away and create new species, kinds, or forms, but it can also mean gender or sex. Kristeva perceives the distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic order as a gender opposition. Claire desires to dismantle the symbolic order, however, not in the name of sexual justice but because "there would be strange comings together – mad new comings together, and we would know it is to be born, and then we might know – what we are" (Glaspell 1921, 19). Glaspell's rewriting of Plato's theory of Forms, which necessarily includes a vision of gender, is reminiscent of Kristeva's understanding of the revolutionary nature of semiotics, which is critical of existing patriarchal culture and its rigid social language. The realist traditions of drama are so saturated with male bias that construct women in fixed subjectivities and roles; women have almost never had a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes. *The Verge* interrogates the boundary between inner and outer, producing a play that is characterized by its fragmentation. The plot or structure of *The Verge* is fragmented and broken into dramatic incidents, each having psychological importance in itself. The early reserved reviews of *The Verge* were indeterminate and mixed about what stands behind its "refusal to be contained by form or by language" (Bigsby 1982, 29)", and even the play was criticized for "the disintegration of character and the loss of social form" (Bigspy 1982, 30). But in the context of women's theatre, Elaine Aston explains that "it is the breaking up of dramatic dialogue, form, character, etc, which is analyzed in relation to the semiotic" (1995, 53). Indeed, *The Verge* doesn't follow an orderly sequence in which the heroine and other men in her life are led into socially accepted truths about marriage and family, and there is no conventional character development.

Remarkably, *The Verge* gives us a different mode of reality and a different use of language through figurative associations as a way of opening into Claire's unconscious. As the play opens, Claire and her assistant, Anthony, are working in the green house. Claire has switched the house's heat to the greenhouse, where she is trying to grow a new kind of plant, the "Breath of Life" plant, one "that is outside what flowers have been" (Glaspell 1921, 17). It is about to blossom and needs a constant temperature (Glaspell 1921, 17). Her greenhouse is described in the beginning of the play as "not a greenhouse where plants are being displayed, nor the usual workshop for the growing of them, but a place for experimentation with plants, a laboratory" (Glaspell 1921, 2). Because the house is cold, her husband, Harry Archer, orders the maid to serve breakfast for him and his male guests in the greenhouse. Claire cannot submit to the men in her life and their desire to tame her. She struggles with her assistant

gardener, Anthony; her husband, Harry Archer; her lover, Richard Demming; her soulmate, Tom Edgeworthy; and finally the neurologist, Dr. Emmons. Nira Tessler argues that the greenhouse might be thought of as "a metaphor for feminine sexuality, and the men's physical entry into the greenhouse symbolizes their aggression" (2015, 48). Therefore, the greenhouse is Claire's last frontier against the external patriarchal grid. Claire's greenhouse is not described in spatial terms; space and time exist only through the female subject. Claire's hidden workspace beneath the greenhouse touches metaphorically in the way Kristeva depicts the *chora*. Glaspell builds her setting around the figure of a staircase. It is used to suggest that her workspace exists below a trapdoor in the greenhouse. Modeling her metaphor of the staircase explicitly on Plato's *Symposium*. Northrop Frye explains that the "figure of a ladder recurs in Plato's *Symposium* as the image of the progress in love from fascination with a physically beautiful object to union with the ideal form of beauty" (Frye 1990, 217). Claire, also a female artist, seeks to present a newly created beauty: "I believe in beauty. I have the faith that it can be bad as well as good. And you know why I have the faith? Because sometimes – from my lowest moments – beauty has opened as the sea. From a cave I saw immensity" (Glaspell 1921, 82). This quest would often be, at the same time, a journey into oneself or a plunge into the unconscious. Significantly, what Glaspell stresses about Claire's hidden space is its depth, suggesting an unexplored interiority and closeness. It is a container, a 'mould', which is also 'invisible'. It allows Claire to remain hidden while providing her with a place to actualize her interiority and create herself for an 'other', even if that 'other' is also herself. It is in response to the discrepancy between her inner needs and what her husband and other men in her life offer that Claire turns toward an inward path. Claire's obsession with creating unknown species is the birth thrust into herself. The physical organs of birth have been translated into the imagery of the womblike hidden lower "cellar" (Glaspell 1921, 45), and the birth canal is through the staircase, or the "gutter", as she calls it sometimes. There is already, in Clair's action of ascending and descending the staircase into her own hidden space, a "kinetic rhythm" (Kristiva 1974, 453). She let it uphold her and sustain her up and down. Claire says, "From the gutter I rise again, refreshed. One does, you know. Nothing fixed – not even the gutter" (Glaspell 1921, 98). Glaspell uses this image of fluidity, describing Claire flowing in and out of her hidden workspace, as a metaphor for Claire's untamed ferocity and protest against patriarchal authority. Using the imagery that Virginia Woolf used in *A Room of One's Own*, we could say that Claire refuses the choice of either being "locked in" or being "locked out" (Woolf 1928, 25-26). For her, "the verge" is not a hesitation, not a refusal to become part of a different story, but its own beginning. Claire protests: "I don't want to die on the edge! […] Many do. It's what makes them too smug in all-ness – those dead things on the edge, died, distorted" (Glaspell 1921, 78). The immense suggestiveness of this action can also be seen as a process, rooted in the private dimension of living that does not take its goal or form from its status as a social and cultural artifact. This might suggest that there is no escape except by a kind of explosion of the ego-self into the spiritual body, that is the real form of itself.

As one of the many possible images for the metaphor of the *chora* in *The Verge* is "the thwarted tower" (Glaspell 1921, 60), the setting of the second act. From her position as an invalid, Claire cultivated a detachment, which is the same quality of detachment that we can perceive in her tower. It hovers above the demands of family and conflicts, to which it is a response, offering a precious transcendence. Claire's

residence in the tower, near her marital home, is by choice. According to her husband, she bought the house because she liked the tower. Claire is fascinated with the tower's architecture, which is,

> thought to be round but does not complete the circle. The back is curved, then jagged lines break from that, and the front is a queer bulging window in a curve that leans. The whole structure is as if given a twist by some terrific force, like something wrung. It is lighted by an old-fashioned watchman's lantern hanging from the ceiling; the innumerable pricks and slits in the metal throw a marvelous pattern on the curved wall like some masonry that hasn't been. There are no windows at the back, and there is no door save an opening in the floor. The delicately distorted rail of a spiral staircase winds up from below. (Glaspell 1921, 58)

When we first encounter Claire in the tower, she is seen through "a queer bulging window", or has been framed in a "huge ominous window as if she shut into the tower" (Glaspell 1921, 58). Like the figure of the Kristevan *chora*, the hieroglyphic depiction of Claire's tower with its "bulging" window and curved back seems analogous to the maternal body or the membrane that encloses a fetus in a womb. It gradually becomes clear that Claire's tower objectifies the pre-Oedipal repository of semiotic on the stage. The twisted structure of this perfect solitude, with its "marvelous pattern […] that hasn't been", cannot adapt material from culture but must delve into a region whose patterns are less likely to conform to socially available forms and structures. It also seems appropriate to suggest extensions of time or unknown forms of existence. To be caught or trapped in a window is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self. Clair's fascination with threatening, largely unexplored forms of being is followed up by exploring the depths of the self at the same time. Clair's visit to the tower is what enables her to see the point of her quest. This patterning seems illogical from a normative perspective. "The delicately distorted rail of a spiral staircase winds up from below" (Glaspell 1921, 28), suggesting that the central drive of the self, called up from the depths of the unconscious, creates an alinear, cyclical, timeless pre-consciousness. Claire turns away from her culture, which is hostile to her development, entering a timeless achronological world appropriate to her rebellion against placelessness in her patriarchal society. It is a space, where Claire has experienced a transformation of personality, centered on personal rather than patriarchal space. Therefore, the tower is a space where Claire rejects all men in her life, and she insists on the need "to purify the tower" (Glaspell 1921, 74). The Neurologist was brought by her husband to see Claire while she was in her tower. This scene invokes and combines the disinterested professional authority of the physician with the legal and emotional authority of the husband, who sees her "getting hysterical" (Glaspell 1921, 35), to impose constraints on her desire as a woman. To her society, she attempts to transmit her unspeakable ideas: "I'm feeling all right. Just because I'm seeing something, doesn't mean I'm sick" (Glaspell 1921, 73). Moreover, both Claire and her sister, Adelaide, in their different responses to the tower, emphasize the almost stifling conflict between them. Adelaide (a mother of five children), "who is fitted to rare children" (Glaspell 1921,47), is summoned in by Claire's husband to remind her of the duties of marriage and motherhood. Adelaide's eyes are "rebuking the irregularities of the tower", and she says "a round tower should go on being round"

(Glaspell 1921, 59). She describes it as "an unsuccessful tower" (Glaspell, 61), and "it lacks form" (Glaspell 1921, 89). But for Claire, "nothing is the matter with her. She is a tower that is a tower" (Glaspell 1921, 60). Following Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's argument in their book *The Madwomen in the Attic* (1979), Claire's withdrawal to her tower is colored by her insistence that "[she] doesn't want to be shut in with [her sister]" (Glaspell 1921, 66) and because "it saves [her] from being a natural one" (Glaspell 1921, 72) – both of which place her outside the role of sexual woman. This personal space, therefore, is achieved at the cost of being seen as "queer" (Glaspell 1921, 67) and "lonely up on top here" (Glaspell 1921, 75). *The Verge* suggests that the symbol of the tower is gendered as well as it might be seen in terms of other attempts to shift and transform Claire's "ancestor's" discourse of femininity, so it subverts expectations and offers an alternative account of the feminine. The tower may self-consciously exist for Claire as an alternative place for identification. Claire is resisting or changing what is known about her. Her place within culture – the place from which she works – is produced by difference and produces difference. She is finding a point of balance between inner and outer, a momentary fullness, as well as a place inside herself that is also outside the roles offered to her by her society. Glaspell constructs alternative and oppositional stories about femininity beyond the patriarchal formula of family romance in realistic drama. Within this context, we need to investigate the ways the maternal surface in *The Verge* as a symbol of women's defiance or even perhaps indifference to the patriarchal stability of symbolic order. We can take our clue from Kristeva's concept of "abjection". The process of abjection occurs in the chaos of the original mother-infant dyad. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva's concept of abjection describes the mixed horror and desirability that inform the infant's first consciousness of the mother as other. Abjection literally means "casting out", according to Kristeva, it is through this process of exclusion that the infant establishes the limits of its body, rejecting whatever is perceived as alien, unclean, or improper to the self. (Kristeva 1982, 2-3). According to Kristeva, "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 1982, 4). According to her, the mother is not only the first object of desire, but she is also the first signifier of the presence to the infant; however, the child's training by patriarchal institutions involves a negation of the infant's first recognized "feminine object": the maternal body. Kristeva's argument implies that before the development of the superego, there is still a possibility of mutual recognition of the ego and the feminine object (Kristeva 1982, 1-5). Kristeva explains that the domination of the symbolic is reflected in the relationship between the superego and the abject, in which the patriarchal institutional language is sanctioned and maternal derives are subdued (Kristeva 1982, 45). Thus, the object is changed into the abject, which pressures the symbolic from its excluded, unseen position. As a result, the excluded object, the abject, turns into subversive. What is expelled, however, can never be eliminated but hangs at the borders of identity, disturbing the subject with reminders of its alienated identity. As Kristeva states:

> The abject has one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically

> excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. (Kristeva 1982, 1- 2)

This concept of abjection is one way to account for women's oppression within patriarchal cultures. In patriarchal cultures, women have been reduced to the maternal function. considerably, it is the very act of exclusion by the superego that changes the maternal object into the subversive abject (Kristeva 1982, 2-4). Therefore, the maternal is connected with what is considered by the superego as "unclean and improper". This view of the pre-oedipal is helpful in analyzing Glaspell's representations of Claire as a mother, and Claire's uneasy identification with the maternal role. It also helps to explain the connection between the formation of the individual and the ways in which women's relations to women are structured in patriarchal societies. "Abjection is above all ambiguity", Kristeva writes, it is that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982, 4). This ambiguity shapes the representation of the mother in *The Verge* in such a way that Claire hesitates between two needs: to reject the maternal role and to mourn her loss. Claire's discomfort with the cultural formation of the mother's body and her feelings of repulsion towards her daughter show that, like abjection, it is based on two somewhat contradictory impulses: the need for distancing as well as the desire to merge. Glaspell represents Claire's struggle to liberate herself from the psychic and social patterns of conventional motherhood. The most frequent images of mother-daughter relation in *The Verge* emphasize differentiation and separation. By the time she began her experiment, Claire had been firmly established in her role as an invalid mother. Having been unable to reconcile her ambitions to achieve artistically and intellectually would have meant competing with her sister and daughter, with different 'feminine' expectations of her to be selfless and good. Claire breaks with her sister who insists that she should find a way to be like her, "free, busy, happy. Among people, I have no time to think of myself" (Glaspell 1921, 80). In one important scene, Claire tries to strike her daughter with her new plant, The Edge Vine: "No, I'm not mad. I am – too sane! [*Pointing to Elizabeth – and the words come from mighty roots*.] To think that object ever moved my belly and sucked my breast!" (Glaspell 1921, 56). This scene recalls Kristeva's formulation of the abject. It shows a complicated fear of intimacy with the daughter, an association of unbearable closeness that seems almost exaggerated. The reader is struck by the force of the words said to the daughter. We could thus explain Claire's repulsion as a refusal to share in the feminine destiny, yet this seems an insufficient explanation of her horror. It is possible that Claire might not want to acknowledge identification because of a socially constructed need for distance from someone who is seen as inferior. This would increase the difficulty of acknowledging the connection with her daughter.

However, the subject of abjection remains, as Kristeva herself puts it, "eminently productive of culture" (Kristeva 1982, 45). In *The Mother/Daughter: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Marianne Hirsch explains that for Kristeva, "the maternal position is still the site of privileged femininity, either the idealized metaphor for 'poetic revolution' or a revolutionary poetics, or the denigrated place of horror

whose ab-jection is the condition of subject-formation" (1989, 172). The abject subject rejects and reconstitutes herself through her textual practice in language, though, as Hirsch clarifies, "maternity remains virtually inaccessible, except by way of mediation through the symbolic, the paternal, the phallic" (Hirsch 1989, 171-172). The conflict between the fully domestic aunt, who makes strong demands for conformity to exactingly interpreted feminine roles, and the rejecting mother, who has "hate on her ancestors" (Glaspell 1921, 22) is fully established in *The Verge*. Adelaide condemned Claire as an antithesis of the maternal; she describes her as "monstrous" (Glaspell 1921, 61), "an unnatural woman" (Glaspell 1921, 72), and "oddity" (Glaspell 1921, 72). She advises Claire that, "instead of working with mere plants, why not think of Elizabeth as a plant" (Glaspell 1921, 70). In a satiric response, Claire says, "Adelaide has the most interesting idea […] She proposes that I take Elizabeth and roll her in the gutter" (Glaspell 1921, 72). A mother's anger indeed becomes a dominant theme in Glaspell's exploration of maternal subjectivity.[10] Glaspell suggests that Adelaide is an example of those which are represented by the social values which wrench women's energies away from themselves. Claire accuses Adelaide of "staying in one place because she hasn't the energy to go anywhere else" (Glaspell 1921, 81). Marianne Hirsch argues that, "if we see anger as a particularly pointed assertion and articulation of subjectivity, we can use it as an 'instrument of cartography' to map the subjectivity of those who are denied it by culture and discourse, in this case mothers" (1989, 169-170). Hirsch argues further that, "exploring maternal anger makes it possible to confront both the cultural construction of motherhood – the angry abandoning or abandoned mother has reached the status of cultural icon – and maternal responses to that construction" (1989, 170). Living in a culture that in many ways degrades or even represses the maternal figure, it becomes very difficult for Claire herself to understand her fear of maternal connection.

The whole problem of creating new forms and species is to find a compromise between stability and breakup; to arrive at a balance between hostile forces: those that are represented by the men in this play and the more properly pictorial forces attached to the image of the mother who gives birth. Indeed, Breath of Life, which is "the womb [she] breathed to life" (Glaspell 1921, 106), metaphorically also seems to recall the mother. Horticulture is both an issue and a weapon. It is through her experiments to create and develop new species that Claire can resist the power of her husband's authority and, on an aesthetic pretext, annihilate the maternal image in a gesture that is deeply aggressive. Claire says:

> I want to break it up! I tell you, I want to break it up! If it were all in pieces, we'd be […] shocked to aliveness – […] There would be strange new comings together – mad new comings together, and we would know what it is to be born, and then we might know – that we are. Smash it. (Glaspell 1921, 19)

Within her new species, two aspects oppose and complement each other. The creation of new forms is not only a discharge of aggressivity but simultaneously an attempt at reparation, a will to fill in an empty space, to close the wounds opened in the maternal body. These representations bring back, tightly bound up with them, violent, aggressive, and libidinal drives about the image of maternity: "I knew something was disturbing me. Elizabeth. A daughter is being delivered unto me this morning. I have a feeling it will be more painful than the original delivery. She has been, as they quaintly say, educated; prepared for her place in life" (Glaspell 1921, 32). This passage is replete with a maternal image, which might be

understood as a depiction of the *chora*. "Delivery" represents the moment of continuance between two apparent oppositions: the symbolic (the realm of society governed by the law of the father) and the semiotic (the pre-Oedipal). Both coexist in this image of delivery, which seems to be a verge or a threshold, not their complete separation. As Susan Rubin Suleiman explains, for Kristeva, "the mother's body is the link between nature and culture, and as such, it must play a conserving role" (1994, 27). Nevertheless, Glaspell's view of masculine and feminine, as well as of Claire as a mother and her daughter, seems to be based on dichotomization. Here, Elizabeth can be seen as a threshold where semiotics confronts the symbolic order. Ruth Robbins explains that Kristeva:

> Will not see the culture / nature debate surrounding childbirth as the binary opposition that some feminists have claimed it to be. The so called 'natural' process of childbearing is always already also a 'cultural' process, since its 'product', the child, will become a subject in culture, and since a woman who gives birth inhabits both poles of the opposition of culture and nature in her very being. (2000, 121)

Kristeva's examination of the two seemingly opposed movements of abjection and identification can be used to articulate the varied responses of the mother in this passage. This passage, in which Glaspell describes Claire's fear of closeness or complicity between herself and her daughter, is notable for an almost inexplicable force in the daughter's need for separation. Separation is one of the first human requirements. A lack of boundaries is perhaps the source of the feelings of horror that Claire here experiences. It is this blurred boundary that causes Claire's repulsion, which is part of abjection. Furthermore, Glaspell implicitly approves Claire's own rejection of her daughter, and adds her own unflattering assessment of Elizabeth, who admits that she has "to be well-mannered because she doesn't do anything interesting" (Glaspell 1921, 43). Elizabeth, whose name is merely a patriarchal trope, has become the embodiment of conventional American standards. This appears along with the description of her in the stage directions: "she is the creditable young American – well built, poised, "cultivated," […] as to be able to meet the world with assurance" (Glaspell 1921, 42). Instead of making Elizabeth pass through the threshold into otherness as Claire does, this different configuration of the female subject places her continually on the verge, making herself a verge. In this view, the process of becoming a subject and achieving autonomy carries within itself a process of returning to maternal origins. The return can never be completed, however; if it were, the woman would be simply assimilated to the maternal body in a place outside of language. But recognizing within herself the process of return and her own interiority, she can constitute herself differently within the symbolic.

Glaspell has contested and resisted the oppressive forms of closure that characterize the theatrical traditions of staging realism. The realist traditions commonly define women in relation to the male subject (as wife, mother, daughter, etc.), and women are not permitted to assume a subject position in the patriarchal symbolic order. Linda Ben-Zvi argues that *The Verge* "is the first drama to present "the New Woman" in the person of Claire's daughter, Elizabeth, and to stage the schism between this post suffrage generation and the generation of feminists like the author, who had imagined a complete revaluation of society, not just freedom to do "something amusing," as Elizabeth says" (2005, 243). It can also be

argued that ***The Verge*** embodies the difficulties that challenge a female writer trying to express a woman who will not be a copy of a man. Glaspell's failure to create in Elizabeth 'a woman of the future' who will be both a woman and a species representative can be attributed to the patterns and forms of the earliest writing, itself a reflection of nineteenth-century views on women, as well as to the absence of any alternative, real-life models. For Claire, "she is just like one of her father's portraits. They never interested me. Nor does she" (Glaspell 1921, 60). Claire believes that what her daughter is offered is really another form of social closure; her role remains passive, and she is appropriated as an object: "[Elizabeth] has been, as they quaintly say, educated; prepared for her place in life" (Glaspell 1921, 32). Rejecting her own daughter for not breaking from conventional expectations is liberating Claire, at least temporarily, from feelings of guilt at rejecting the maternal role. Moreover, it has placed Claire in a subject position where her contradictions are exposed in an effort to subvert and alter social and symbolic order and its social codes of motherhood, family/household, and private/public positions of women.

Glaspell picks up this same image of maternity and expands its force and range. Claire's Horticulture practice, by dint of searching an ever more distant past of her ancestors in New England, brings out a world of very early representations grouped around the old-fashioned figure of the mother, which is signaled by Claire as "the old pattern, done again and again. So long done, it doesn't even know itself for a pattern – in immensity" (Glaspell 1921, 52-53). There is an episode, in which we see Glaspell's reflection on the idea of a mother's love and pain. In this episode, we see Claire expressing her sorrow over the death of her son, David. This rare incident may suggest that Glaspell's dramatization of Claire's maternity is very elusive; her role is constantly shifting. She said at first, "I'm glad he didn't live" (Glaspell 1921, 73). Later in the play, in an agitated manner, Claire narrates:

> I was up with Harry – flying – high. It was about four months before David was born – the doctor was furious – pregnant women are supposed to keep to earth. We were going fast – I was flying – I had left the earth. And then – within me, movement, for the first time – stirred to life far in air – movement within. The man unborn, he too, would fly. And so – I always loved him. He was movement – and wonder. In his short life there were many flights. I never told anyone about the last one. His little bed was by the window – he wasn't four years old. It was night, but him not asleep. He saw the morning star – you know – the morning star. Brighter – stranger – reminiscent – and a promise. He pointed – "Mother," he asked me "what is there – beyond the stars?" A baby, a sick baby – the morning star. Next night – the finger that pointed was – [*Suddenly bites her own finger*.] But, yes, I am glad. He would always have tried to move and too much would hold him. Wonder would die – and he'd laugh at soaring. (Glaspell 1921, 80)

This fragmented and frenetic speech is part of an endless monologue by Claire as she stays in her tower. Such a text conforms to the Kristevan model of textuality: "Silence and the unspoken, riddled with repetition, weave an evanescent canvas. This where […] "the poverty of language" is revealed and where some women articulate, through their sparing use of words and their elliptical syntax, a lacuna that is congenital to our monological culture: the speech of non-being" (Kristeva 1977, 303). These textual

tactics bring this muted semiotic area into focus, as it slowly emerges into *The Verge*. This passage is one of so many others that are constructed through sentences whose syntax is on the verge of collapse. To escape the sentence is to trespass the boundaries of the formal syntax of the symbolic. This passage registers Kristeva's position on women's "cyclical" time. Glaspell's preference is for dashes rather than the full stop; the use of silent graphic notations (here the dashes) allows Glaspell to avoid linear vision. The account is deliberately non-linear, not ill-logical but anti-logical, as Glaspell's delights in continuous dashes indicating her valuing of cyclical, returning thoughts rather than chronological development. This allow her thoughts to float free of social restrictions. A lack of linearity is linked to the semiotic, which allows writers to break with the symbolic language of patriarchal discourse, as Kristeva would argue:

> This linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of a sentence (noun +verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending), and, that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation – death. (Kristeva 1981, 863)

Indeed, these moments in *The Verge* exceed the "linear time" of realist drama, which "depends upon the purposeful interactive speaker-listener interchanges in which 'successful' acts of speaking drive upon action on through exposition, progression, and a climax to a closure […] therefore represses the 'speaking' of women's experiences" (Aston 1995, 51). This also strongly recalls Rita Felski's argument that "the playful text is linked to female desire, to the chaotic and fragmented patterns of the unconscious, or to the polymorphous female body. The subversive significance of the text thus lies […] in its ruptures of semantic and syntactic order, which allow the play of desire" (1989, 33). Indeed, instead of the dramatic conflict of conventional realist plays, the emphasis throughout the play is on a sequence of dramatic statements made by Claire in which the sentence sequence collapses. The dialogue, unlike conventional conversation, is poetic and emotional. At certain times, it takes the form of a long lyrical monologue, as in the passage quoted above, and at other times, it is made of phrases of one or two words of exclamation. The force of the semiotic pulses against the symbolic order throughout the text by breaching conventional units of dramatic time and action.

This Poetic monologue on David's death may also imply that Glaspell's dramatization of Claire's maternity is very elusive; her role is constantly shifting. In this passage, Claire is presented with more sympathy. She is driven mad, perhaps by the responsibility in which she has failed as a supposed source of nourishment and life. The mother's loss of her child is represented here as a personal and social tragedy. This scene also reflects Glaspell's thinking about the maternal body as a critical site for the examination of the norms that shape western thought. If the most noticeable image of the Virgin in western religious discourse is "the Sistine Madonna" (Glaspell 1921, 66), the image of the Virgin Mary nursing the infant Christ-child, the second most noticeable image is the *pieta*, the image of her holding his dead body after the Crucifixion. Here in *The Verge*, the image of Claire's dead child David in his cradle is the story about the inner world of motherhood as it is felt, instead of as it is mythologized as "the Sistine Madonna" (Glaspell 1921, 66). It is a representation of motherhood by a mother. This passage reflects Claire's suffering of ambivalence – the alternation between bitter resentment and tenderness, negation of

the child and reaching out for the child – as if these two impulses were unconnected to each other, locked in an impossible opposition, corresponding perhaps to the opposition between the mother's need to affirm herself as an artist and the child's need (or her belief in the child's need) for selflessness. In a sense, Claire as a mother begins to seem almost as unstable. She is split, and this splitting in *The Verge* is used to disrupt the sense of self as a mother that so often seems unquestioned. On the one hand, there are culturally available images of Mary in painting and iconography that belong to the conventional expression of maternity in Western Christian societies. On the other hand, there is a disjointed story of Claire's experience of maternity – a narrative that speaks poetically of love, pain, and fear, which continually destabilizes and eventually displaces the validated archetype of motherhood in realist drama.

All the way through *The Verge*, there is a sense of yearning for something submerged or not yet attained: "Fragrance that is – no one thing in here but – reminiscent. [...] We need haunting beauty from the life we've left. I need that" (Glaspell 1921, 79). While we cannot know how her plants will end up, we can see that what motivates her is precisely her desire:

> to give fragrance to Breath of Life […] What has gone out should bring fragrance from what it has left. But no definite fragrance, no limiting, enclosing thing. I call the fragrance I am trying to create Reminiscence […] Reminiscent of the rose, the violet, the arbutus—but a new thing—itself. Breath of Life may be lonely out in what hasn't been. Perhaps someday I can give it a reminiscence. (Glaspell 1921, 17)

Claire's acknowledgment of the power of the maternal emerges from this passage. This purifying recognition of the maternal is painful and nostalgic. Claire's desire for "fragrance" is a projection for her desire for the mother. Projection is a psychoanalytic concept for the state in which unconscious feelings are pressed out from the self on to another object or person. Claire's search for another hidden and overlooked version of being that is represented by "fragrance", which is "reminiscent", resembles Kristeva's analysis of the semiotic. This important expression, "reminiscence", seems matrilineal in the general sense of suggesting a realm of inherited semiotic power quite different from patriarchal symbolic order. The passage is replete with "fragrance", colors, and other sensations that are non-verbal or even pre-verbal. Re-writing Freud, Kristeva states that the hysterical female subject, instead of suffering from "reminiscences", lives the necessity of remembering and gesturing towards her own maternal origins or semiotics in order not to forget (Kristeva 1981, 862-863). In the quest for women's experiences "left mute by culture in the past" (Kristeva 1981, 864), Kristeva has highlighted the concept of "cyclical" time. For her, "the hysteric […] who suffers from reminiscences would, rather, recognize herself in the anterior temporal modalities: cyclical or monumental (Kristeva 1981, 863)". According to Kristeva, these two types of temporality "are traditionally linked to female subjectivity " and "thought of as necessarily maternal" (Kristeva 1981, 862). This "cyclical" movement is embedded in the psychic structure of *The Verge* as a whole. Claire, talking about reminiscence, suggests that a woman carries her separation from her origins within her and lives this loss endlessly. "Reminiscence" also characterizes a movement that is simultaneously forward and backward, outward and inward. She becomes a subject in process; the time of creating her Breath of Life is lost in the non-teleological structuring of past and future. Looking backward, she also eagerly looks forward; she creates an intense internal space with its own interior

dynamic for her creative work. In *The Verge*, the logic of female heritage is not consciously constructed in relation to known models and precursors but unconsciously in relation to shared experiences of oppression and the shared desire to protest of the woman writer and artist. In this way, it is also the discovery of one woman by another, implying a search for the mother who has so often been absent from western culture's dramatic representations, a mother who is neither the good mother nor the bad mother that traditions have endorsed, but a figure who defies these classifications. It could be a different sense of ancestry – a female line of descent – from whom she is alienated. The paralyzing paradox of Claire's yearning is entirely missed by the people around her. Her friend Dick suggested that her efforts to create this "reminiscence" may lead her to something that already exists: "then tell them that here is the flower of New England" (Glaspell 1921, 18), which is the flower of the ancestors who made New England and who "molded the American mind" (Glaspell 1921, 19). But Clair's restless desire "to get away from them [her ancestors]!" (Glaspell 1921, 19) leads her to blasphemy, and eventually leads her to reject the heritage of her New England ancestors. For Glaspell, the female self exists as a latent potentiality that has never fully come into being. Therefore, "reminiscence" can also be insubstantial, lacking reference to anything real. By "reminiscence", she makes her own creativity possible, infinitely realizing herself within loss at what Helen Cixous has called 'the turning point of making" (Cixous 1981, 47).

Claire's Horticulture: A Female's Subversion

There are significant moments of manifestation in which the maternal drives are exposed in *The Verge*, forcing us to recognize the maternal through semiotics, which is suggested through both horticultural imagery and poetic language. This implication of Kristeva's theory differs from the previous interpretations, which view Claire's horticulture as "symbolic of her efforts, like those of Glaspell herself, to break through barratries of the conventional roles that society designates for her as a woman" (Tessler 2015, 48); "a dramatic correlative for the struggle to free herself from those customs […] that fix women in place" (Ben-Zvi, 2005, 239); "the experimentation with dramatic form" (Gainor 2001, 160); "analogous to the efforts of theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray to create a uniquely female form of language" (Noe 1995, 133); "Glaspell's theorizing for herself a "queer" identity" (Black 2005, 61); or to stand for "the past female sentimental traditions, the current stalemate of the ideology of the New Woman, and the possible implications of radical feminism" (Rhyner 2012, 179-180). While these interpretations are reasonable and fruitful, this reading suggests that the ambiguous status of Claire's horticulture implies the semiotic hidden discourse, which is an inversion into the symbolic. Claire, as an abject, thus both intimidates and promises a disintegration of these symbolic structures. So rather than remaining anterior to symbolic structuration, women's desire and the pain of its articulation should be theorized as threatening to that masculine order. As expressed in Claire's words, "to perversion too, there is a limit. So – the fortifications are unassailable. If one gets out" (Glaspell 1921, 15). Therefore, Claire sees no options for "perversion" but through her plants. She is represented figuratively with her horticulture; the proliferation of words marking the dynamic corporeal dimension of this true action horticulture suggests the quantity of energies discharged here in this passage:

> Plants do it. The big leap—it's called. Explode their species—because something in them knows they've gone as far as they can go. Something in them knows they're shut in to just that. So—go mad—that life may not be prisoned. Break themselves up into crazy things—into lesser things, and from the pieces—may come one sliver of life with vitality to find the future. How beautiful. How brave. (Glaspell 1921, 35)

Increasingly, the distinction between Claire and her horticulture becomes difficult to sustain. Exploration into finding a form to represent "outness – and otherness"(Glaspell 1921, 19) demands the explosion of the linear symbolic. However, to be heard, such a voice has to be located at some level in the symbolic; hence Claire's description is one of 'breaking up' forms and 'exploding' them rather than speaking from outside language. Yet, the passage both enacts and thematizes Kristeva's description of female subjectivity. Claire's journey into the unknown becomes also the discovery of the unrealized potentiality of herself as a subject, which can only be made real in the attempt to do it. When she ceases to experiment with her plants, she must herself disappear. She is not more or less than her plants. When she experiences with her plants, she generates herself. Claire says, "Beauty is that only living pattern – the trying to take pattern" (Glaspell 1921, 108). It would be possible within this context to see her horticulture as the exploration of the self as absent, as a space in which the female subject creates herself. Claire, who seeks a way of expression that "no way says it, and that's good – at least it's not shut up in saying" (Glaspell 1921, 77), resembles Kristeva's understanding of the depressive side of the abject experience of loss. She argues that the melancholic female subject does not mourn an object of desire but "the Thing", which she describes as "the real that does not lend itself to signification" (Kristeva 1987, 13). The thing is loss without limits, prior to the object and prior to the advent of signification, whereby objects are identified and retrieved from the waste of the unnamable. Kristeva remarks:

> Without a sign […] Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing is insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva 1982, 2)

As we have seen in Kristeva's terms, the woman's presence encircles an absence of her, and her writing, too, exists at a threshold, referring back to a constant process of coming into being. Claire's search for a form to express the inexpressible – what is unknown, forgotten or in continual movement about herself, is expressed as suffering. She says, "Stabbed to awareness! – no matter where it takes you, isn't that more than a safe place to stay in? […] Anguish may be a thread – making patterns that haven't been. A thread – blue and burning" (Glaspell 1921, 78). This becomes a deliberate attempt to give expression to her sense of "integrity" (Glaspell 1921, 78). She talks about Breath of Life: "If it has – then I have, integrity in – otherness" (Glaspell 1921, 78). In a sense, Claire's horticulture is a metaphor for a woman's subjectivity; it is both a reaching towards the possibility of saying "I" and towards a form in which to say it. In Claire's quest for articulating her subjectivity, she recognizes herself in an absence or a loss. Claire speaks to Tom: "I feel so desperate, because if only I could – show you what I am, you might see I could have without losing. But I'm a stammering thing with you […] It's a thing that's – sometimes more than I am.

And yet I – I am more than it is […] I know I am. I want to" (Glaspell 1921, 80-81). Kristeva's explains that:

> A woman cannot "be"; it is something, which does not even belong in the order of *being*. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists, so that we may say "that's not it" and "that's still not it". In "woman" I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies". (Kristeva 1974 b, 267).

Glaspell uses the metaphor of Claire's horticulture in order to invoke the unnamable. Creating new forms has the advantage of being apparently situated outside the field of language, outside the system of words alphabetically ordered by father. This silence and simplicity have as their counterparts a limitation; both Claire and her new species are circumscribed by a cultural framework controlled by the law of the Father.

Her horticulture enacts a continual fracturing of its own surface, a breaking into disorder and uncertainty, as a way of searching behind the formal structure and the accepted pattern of order and signification. Claire is aware that articulate, paternal language, by its very nature, represses an essential part of reality and is both prescriptive and authoritative. Claire says:

> Life – experience – values – calm – sensitive words which raise their heads as indications. And you *pull them up* – to decorate your stagnant little minds […] And because you have pulled that word from the life that grew it you won't let one who's honest and aware, and troubled, try to reach through to – to what she doesn't know is there (Glaspell 1921, 69).

She wishes precisely to exceed the limits and boundaries signified and conventionalized through language. These social meanings are subtly contested and diverted from their conventional usages; for example, Claire says, "Peace is what the struggle knows in moments very far apart. Peace – that is not a place to rest" (Glaspell 1921, 108). Glaspell destabilizes conventional semantics and enacts her own revolution (though probably a conservative revolution) in the poetic language of her text. Lenka Vojtiskova argues that this poetic revolution is important for Kristeva's formulation of "revolution", or "semiotics", which "is precisely this production of a different subject, linked to the dissolution of language – of language as a tool of communication – as it occurs in avant-garde text" (2022, 147). In Kristeva's terms, Claire's "breath of the uncaptured" (Glaspell 1921, 105) could be described as the *Thing* that defeats signification, rendering language irrelevant at best. Following Kristeva's argument, Michelle Boulous Walker in *Philosophy and The Maternal Body: Reading Silence*, explains that:

> A Woman's disarticulated body remains both unspeakable and unspoken in the symbolic domain. It is the site of a contradictory and unlivable state, a body in crisis. A Woman may attempt to articulate her desire. If she does, it might propel her toward new discursive constructions and new signifying practices that shatter the law and order of symbolic prohibition. Otherwise, she might remain silent, embodying her pain mutely. (1998, 130)

In particular, there is a marked tension throughout *The Verge* between the will towards expression and the play's painful realization of the inadequacy of words to do the work of expression. Tom argues that at some level reality is inescapably linguistic: "Things may be freed by expression. Come from the unrealized into the fabric of life" (Glaspell 1921, 77). While Harry "want[s] to see [her] put things into words" (Glaspell 1921, 51), Claire protests, "One would rather not nail it to a cross of words" (Glaspell 1921, 51). "Why does the fabric of life have to – freeze into its pattern?" (Glaspell 1921, 77) She asks. In a moment of clear vision, as The Breath of Life blossoms, Claire recognizes that: "A thousand years from now, when you are but a form too long repeated, […] and from the prison that is you will leap pent queerness /To make a form that hasn't been – / To make a prison new. / And this we call creation" (Glaspell 1921, 105-106). For Marcia Noe, in this passage, "Claire begins to realize that the efforts to achieve otherness are doomed to failure. She now knows she is trapped by forms, for no matter how hard she tries to break outside the old forms, all she gets is another form, one that will be seen as revolutionary for a time, but will ultimately become as confining as the one from which it came" (1995, 139). Noe continues to argue that Claire has learned that "the language of plants works similarly to the language of words. She is trapped by form in the same way that we are trapped by language structures that came before all else and create the way we see the world" (1995, 139). This leads us back to the account of female development within this symbolic framework, which emphasizes the point at which the female child comes into language (and becomes a being now called female); because she is female, she is at first alienated from the processes of symbolic representation. Within this symbolic order, a phallocentric order, she is reduced, limited, and represented as "lack", as "other." There is no escaping the symbolic order of male determining discourse.[11] It may be argued that language merely reflects social reality and that linguistic reform is meaningless unless supplemented by genuine changes in attitudes and socioeconomic conditions that also approve women's egalitarianism.

For Kristeva, a woman's desire challenges existing social structures by shattering the coherence of patriarchal discourse. When Claire's plant, Edge Vine, failed to be "over the edge" (Glaspell 1921, 53), she uprooted it (Glaspell 1921, 56). Though the stage directions reveal that Edge Vine "is arresting rather than beautiful […] the leaves of this vine are not the form of the leaves have been. They are at once repellent and significant" (Glaspell 1921, 2), but not significant enough for the radical Claire. She feels intense frustration and a sense of defeat because the Edge Vine "is running back to what it broke out of" (Glaspell 1921, 12), it "didn't carry life with it from the life it left" (Glaspell 1921, 53), and "it cannot create" (Glaspell 1921, 53). This failure to regenerate itself "may only make a prison!" (Glaspell 1921, 55). This joy in destruction is the muse of critique. Claire's attempt to break a form, is her attempt to break certain forms of consciousness and go beyond them. What is unknown is both an external and internal goal of knowledge. Claire desires to break through restrictions, both real and self-imposed, to "lie upon the earth and know" (Glaspell 1921, 82). Her daughter, Elizabeth, can't understand the significance of making plants different "unless you do it to make them better – to do it just to do it – that doesn't seem right to me" (Glaspell 1921, 55). The implicit destination of her queer plants as a finished outcome takes us in the same direction. Claire argues that, "I don't give a damn whether they're better […] They're different" (Glaspell 1921, 50). For her, these plants "perhaps they are less beautiful – less sound – than

the plants from which they diverged. But they have found – otherness" (Glaspell 1921, 52). Like her "queer" plants, Claire defies categorization and, therefore subverts the symbolic. In response to Dick's exclamation, who says, "But isn't her daughter one of her experiments?" (Glaspell 1921, 40), Claire refuses that her daughter should be "the image-double" of her life and identity; instead, in referring to herself and Breath of Life, which "has already reproduced itself" though "timidly, rather wistfully" (Glaspell 1921, 54), she emphasizes her abjection.

In this sense, *The Verge* is an uncompromising attack on the institutionalized, fixed significations of the socio-symbolic contract as reflected in the values of bourgeois family life, in which marriage and motherhood are portrayed as "dead" patterns (Glaspell 1921, 20) or "hardened" forms (Glaspell 1921, 37). Glaspell's Claire wants to get free from the cultural uniformity in which every place is like every other place and is equally "here". Claire says, "But our own spirit is not something on the loose. Mine isn't. It has something to do with what I do. To fly. To be free in air […] Shall I go higher? Shall I go too high? I am loose. I am out" (Glaspell 1921, 31). Claire's husband tells her that he is going to take her on a nice long trip and prepare a place for them. Her sister suggests that she should go to Paris and "get yourself some awfully good-looking clothes – and have one grand fling at the gay world" (Glaspell 1921, 68). Claire protests that "I am taking a trip" (Glaspell 1921, 68), and her trip is to "undiscovered countries" (Glaspell 1921, 76). *The Verge* emphasizes first of all Claire's attempts to go somewhere else and explore the "Outside" (Glaspell 1921, 77), but she reaches the conclusion that there is nowhere to go. Her revolution against social forms of marriage and motherhood is also a revolution against social notions of "sanity" and stability. Claire is unable to hold her personal world together. She insists at the beginning of the play that, "You think I can't smash anything? You think life can't break up, and go outside of what it was? Because you've gone dead in the form in which you found yourself, you think that's all there is to the whole adventure? And that is called sanity. And made a virtue – to lock one in" (Glaspell 1921, 20). She wishes to breed insanity in the form of "perversion" to see what it may yield. She says, "You must have tried and tried things. Isn't that the way one leaves the normal, and gets into the byways of *perversion*" (Glaspell 1921, 15). She had, actually, married first a realist painter and then a pilot, anticipating in so doing to transgress the confines of common patterns through them. But the painter turned out to be "a "stick-in-the-mud artist" (Glaspell 1921, 32), and the pilot "returns [to earth] the man who left it" (Glaspell 1921, 32). In a conversation between Claire and her friend, Tom Edgeworthy, we seem to be in a more obscure area. Tom says, "We are so feeble we have to reach our country through the actual country lying nearest. Don't you do that yourself, Claire? Reach your country through the plants' country?" (Glaspell 1921, 77). Claire's words tend to slide in and out of the mind without reaching a resolution: "My country? You mean – outside?" (Glaspell 1921, 77). The idea that emerges in *The Verge* is that Claire's horticulture, in other words, can be a space of freedom that she has created in defiance. But there is another need too – for validation and acceptance. In speaking to Tom, Dick, and Harry, she is also acting out her need to be heard, and this to some extent thwarts her search for new forms of being, making her conceal emotionally as much as she reveals. Inevitably, this anxious attempt at self-justification ends in uncertainty; she is caught here within contradictory pressures. Having to transgress

codes of what is acceptable to reveal in order to explore those previously silent, unrecorded areas of experience, what she discovers can only be defined by her society as "apartness" (Glaspell 1921, 86), or as her husband says "That's an awfully nice thing for a woman to do—raise flowers", but "changing things into other things—putting things together and making queer new things […] is unsettling for a woman" (Glaspell 1921, 20-21). Therefore, Glaspell reflects on the dangers of the romantic celebration of personal liberty and self-expression for women because they will be severely punished if they insist on getting out. This might take us back to the title of the play, which invites the reader to consider the general image of an extreme edge beyond which something specified will happen. The general image is one of a crossing of limits and a journey, indicating that play writing as well as the experience of play reading will be similarly topographical – a crossing of edges that is geared towards externalizing the subconscious of the female subject on the stage but is not completed and is in process.

Claire is torn between her sense of being an exceptional, gifted woman – an image of Glaspell herself – and her proto-feminist identification with women as a structurally separate group. She is obliged to pursue her ideas in isolation from other women and is associated with their paralysis, anger, and disintegration. Such a depressing sketch of the options available to women – frustration taking shape as madness – demands explanation. At the end of *The Verge*, the realm, par excellence, of Claire as a subversive woman is the hysteric. This can be a concretization of Glaspell's frustration with the cultural restrictions of femininity. Hysteria mimics the patriarchal discourse and traditions of New England. For Glaspell, being hysteric is a method of getting in touch with powers beyond normal comprehension. Claire suffocates Tom, destroys the Breath of Life by hitting Tom into it, and she intentionally destroys the greenhouse when she shoots through the roof. This ending to *The Verge* is ambiguous and complex. *The Verge*, in general, refuses a simple resolution; however, two conflicting opinions about Claire's hysteria can be held. The conflicting judgments are simultaneously present. On the one hand, the spiritual match between Claire and Edgeworthy is foregrounded. Edgworthy's willingness at the beginning of the play to give Claire personal space rather than absorb her in heterosexual passion led to her choice of him as a spiritual soul mate over her husband. According to Tom, Horticulture gives Claire the freedom to step outside her fixed gender role, not only literally in the sexual sense but also metaphorically if her horticulture is interpreted as an imaginative spiritual space. Edgeworthy advises Claire's husband that, "let her be […] As much as she can and will […] Don't keep her from it by making her feel you're holding her in it. […] don't try to stop what she's doing here. If she can do it with her plants, perhaps she won't have to do it with herself" (Glaspell 1921, 37). On the other hand, Glaspell exposes the double face of the prevailing culture: its paternal protection of female commonness and its damaging attack on female boldness. By the end of *The Verge*, it appears that Tom's attention restricts her. He says to her, "You are mine, and you will stay with me! […] I can keep you. I will keep you – safe" (Glaspell 1921, 112). Claire disapproves boldly, "no! I will beat my life to pieces in the struggle to – […] to not stop it by seeming to have it" (Glaspell 1921, 112). As she smashes the greenhouse, Claire tries to release her muted subtext with its unsaid meanings: "Perhaps the madness that gave you birth will burst again" (Glaspell 1921, 105). This image is extraordinarily reminiscent of Charlotte Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) in its release of an imagined woman from the patterns that confine her. Once begun, liberation and

identification are irreversible. But from the perspective of normalcy, her statement demands freedom, a strong opposing force representing patriarchal protection and authority: “you are worth of my hate […] only you have threatened me” (Glaspell 1921, 110-111). With Claire’s final words to Tom before strangling him, “not to stop it by seeming to have it […] Oh, that it is you – fill the place – should be a gate” (Glaspell 1921, 112-113), Glaspell celebrates Claire’s desire to escape from what she recognizes to be her prison. By accepting Claire’s final word in the play “Out” is both triumphant and horrifying. To construct her new consciousness, Claire must at the same time sever her allegiance to the destructive views of the traditions of New England, which she describes as “our dead things – block the way” (Glaspell 1921, 54), and transcend the presence of destructive ideologies in herself, producing that critique distinctive of twentieth-century women writers: “We need not be held in forms molded for us. There is outness – and otherness” (Glaspell 1921, 19).

Conclusion

There are many similarities between the French feminist Julia Kristeva's theory of "Semiotics" and the early twentieth-century American playwright Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*. Both argue, in different ways, that there are connections between the social and psychological subjugations of women, showing “femininity” as a construct that is imposed on women. Both emphasize that language determines the ways in which we perceive gender and come to know ourselves as gendered beings, as well as the ways in which society perceives gender and creates gendered subjects. Kristeva's critical examination of cultural texts encourages readings of texts as symbolic or semiotic. This study has made use of the Kristevan semiotic/symbolic binary concepts in order to demonstrate Glaspell's desire for the semiotic. In *The Verge*, which is exemplified in this study as mainly semiotic, the sign of the *chora* blows up the symbolic, whereas in the symbolic text, the *chora* is more strictly restrained. Although Glaspell wrote realistic plays (which may be categorized as symbolic in Kristevan terms), she was nevertheless resistant to this discourse of realism, which communicates mainly male experiences. *The Verge* shows that semiotics can be a dynamic alternative to those existing theatrical strategies of realism and their phallocentric idealism. The fragmentation of the plot, structure, and dialogue is a representation of the desire for the semiotic, which disturbs the symbolic order. "Otherness," "outside," "edges," etc. are structurally and conceptually embedded in *The Verge*. The signifiers “nothing”, “uncaptured”, “otherness”, and “no way says it” are then not negatives but represent the gap many women experience between psychic experience and symbolic, public language. The increased gap between the signifier and the signified that Glaspell demonstrates in the language of *The Verge* also has an important place in much contemporary writing, which by deliberately challenging the arbitrary connection of signifier and signified creates a language that on occasion seems to evoke neurosis. Therefore, Glaspell mounts a critical attack on dominant patterns of perception, cultural practices, and the theatrical conventions of realism. She writes to investigate, to criticize, and to protest against the commonplaces of perception and behavior that animate *The Verge*. Defying the judgment that Claire demonstrates “ill-breeding” (Glaspell 1921, 74), she has followed her own logic, her own perceptions, and her own projects to this final scene in which madness is

seen as a kind of transcendent sanity, as Claire describes, "madness that is the only for sanity" (Glaspell 1921, 68). This engagement with her horticulture, her semiotic mode of expression, constitutes a form of "otherness", that has been forbidden – women's discourse – an unlawful language that escapes the "symbolic" imposed by patriarchy. As she steps over the patriarchal body (Tom's body amid the ruins of the greenhouse), she temporarily leaves the authoritative voice of her society in muddles at her feet. Working through this approach of feminist psycho-semiotics can be used to reread canonical works in the realist tradition and to further a feminist critique of realism. Furthermore, this approach can be used to analyze subject positioning, narrative, and staging techniques in dramatic and theatrical contexts. This line of investigation would also help reassess Glaspell's contribution to staging, which her contemporary critics had disregarded.

تجسيد الأمومة/الآخر في مسرحيَّة *The Verge* للكاتبة سوزان جلاسبيل: قراءة سيميائيَّة

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الملخص

تدرس هذه الورقة الروابط ما بين نهج التحليل النفسي، واللغة وبناء الجندر في مسرحيَّة The Verge (1921) للكاتبة سوزان جلاسبيل. وسيتم محاولة استجلاء الأبعاد النفسيَّة في نص المسرحيَّة من خلال منهج التحليل النفسي الذي يستند بشكل خاص على نظريَّة السيميائيَّة للمحللة النفسيَّة والفيلسوفة النسويَّة جوليا كريستيفا؛ إذ إنها تبحث في العلاقة الجدليَّة ما بين الذات الواعية للأنثى والنظام الرمزي من منطلق نسوي، ووفقاً لكريستيفا تنخرط السيميائيَّة المرتبطة بجسد الأم على شكل إيقاعات والتباسات لغويَّة للتعبير عما هو مختلف عن النظام الرمزي وما هو متعذر تفسيره، وبذلك تستطيع السيميائيَّة اختراق الخطاب الرمزي الواعي المنطقي وتتجاوزه إلى مرحلة ما قبل – الأوديبيَّة، وذلك من خلال خلق الفوضى التي تخلخل بنية اللغة المنطقيَّة وسلامتها التركيبيَّة. إذ أشارت كريستيفا إلى أن السيميائيَّة تقترن بالقانون النظري للنظام الرمزي، وهما غير قابلين للتجزئة في عمليَّة التدليل التي تميز اللغة. كذلك تبين هذه الدراسة بأن العودة للسيميائيَّة (كميزة في النص وفي مكنونات الذات الواعية) في The Verge يمكن أن تكون منهجاً لتحدي الطرق التقليديَّة في التصوير الأدبي، وأيضاً لقلب التراكيب الاجتماعيَّة السائدة للأنوثة أيضاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراسة الأدبيَّة، الكتابة الأكاديميَّة، المقابلات المبنية على النصوص، اللغويَّات الوظيفيَّة النظاميَّة.

Endnotes

[1] For a study devoted to feminist drama and theater or to women in theater, see Helen Keyssar's *Feminist Theater: An Introduction to Plays by Contemporary British and American Women*, 1984.

[2] Together with George Gram Cook, her husband, Glaspell established the Provincetown Players**.** For a study on the importance of the Provincetown Players and their history, as well as a selection of plays written and staged by them, see "Provincetown: The Birth of Twentieth-Century American Drama", in C. W. E. Bigsby' s *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama: Volume One, 1900-1940*, 1982.

[3] See on the historical context in which a specific and restrictive set of ideas about femininity became hegemonic in the United States between the two World Wars, Marcia Noe's, "The Midwest in American Culture". In J. Gainor (ed.), *Susan Glaspell in Context* (Literature in Context, 2023, 13-20). See also Maroula Joannou, *Contemporary Women's Writing: From The Golden Notebook to The Color Purple*, 2000, especially (16-20). See also Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre*, 25.

[4] Among her important works, we must refer to her first play, *Trifles* (1920), which highlights a women's world, a space that is usually ignored on stage; and the dramatization of the life of Emily Dickinson in her last play, *Alison's House* (1930), which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

[5] A useful discussion of Glaspell's plays in the light of her life and the cultural context she engages with in her work is linda Ben-zvi's *Glaspell: Her Life and Times*, 2005. See also J. Ellen Gainor, *Susan Glaspell in Context*, 2001.

[5] See Monica Stufft, "Flowers by Design: Susan Glaspell's Revision of Strinberg's *A Dream Play"*, (79-92); see also Rytch Barber, "American Expressionism and The New Woman: Glaspell, Treadwell, Bonner, and a Dramaturgy of Social Science", (93-113), in *Disclosing Intertextualities*: *The Stories, Plays, and Novels* (2006), edited by Martha C. Carpentier and Barbara Ozieblo.

[7]For an introduction to these concepts in Lacan, see also Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 4th ed., 1985. For Further analysis of Lacan's theory and French Feminist theory, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, (89-97). See also Rita Felski, "Is Language Phallocentric", in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, 1989, (40- 44).

[8]For other introductions to Kristeva, or some of the issues she raises, see Michelle Boulous Walker, "Kristeva: Naming the Problem" in *Philosophy and The Maternal Body: Reading Silence*, (1998), (101-128), and Ruth Robbins, "Julia Kristeva: Rewriting the Subject", in *Literary Feminisms: Transitions*, (119-133). For a discussion on the relation between the semiotic and the Symbolic, see Rita Felski, "Writing as Subversion", in Beyond *Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, 1989, (33-40).

[9]See "Marginality and Subversion: Julia Kristeva" in Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 150-73.

[10] In literature as in life, motherhood has been romanticized as every woman's major accomplishment. Elaine Aston, in "Home Alone: Re-thinking Motherhood in Contemporary Feminist Theatre", in

John Lucas (ed.), *Writing and Radicalism*, 1996, (pp. 281-300), has provided a summary of how contemporary feminist drama has confronted such beliefs through dramatic productions, which included the Women's Theater Group's *My Mother Says I Never Should*, 1975, and David Edgar and Susan Todd's *Teendreams*, 1979.

[11] See, for example, Julia Mitchell and Jacqueline Ros, eds., *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, 1982, pp. (1-57)

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