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Liturgy and Sacred Space: Placing Susan Glaspell's *The Outside* in American Drama

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<Abstract>

Even though cultural geography has long exerted a productive influence on theatre studies, the relationship between modern drama and sacred or religious geography has yet to be thoroughly explored. Glaspell's *The Outside* is influenced by religion as much as it constructs a sacred geography for the theatre. By reading *The Outside* through the paradigm of liturgical theology, this essay argues that Glaspell uses the imagery of a natural, exterior, and sacred landscape to open her audience up to the importance of the interior landscape of the spirit.

[Keywords]: *Literature and Spirituality; American Drama; Susan Glaspell; Cultural Geography; Liturgy*

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전례와 성스러운 공간 : 미국 드라마에서 Susan Glaspell 의 The Outside 배치하기

<국문요약>

비록 문화 지리학이 오랫동안 연극 연구에 생산적인 영향을 끼쳤지만, 현대 드라마와 성스럽거나 은 종교적인 지리학 사이의 관계는 아직 철저히 탐구 되지 않았다. . Glaspell 의 The Outside 는 연극을 위해 성스러운 지리학을 구성하는 것만큼이나 종교의 영향을 받는다. 이 논문은 전례적 신학의 패러다임을 통해 The Outside 를 읽어서 Glaspell 이 자연, 외부, 성스러운 풍경의 이미지를 사용하여 그녀의 관객들에게 정신의 내적인 풍경의 중요성을 열어준다고 주장한다.

[주제어] *문학과 영성, 미국드라마, Susan Glaspell, 문화 지리학, 전례*

I. Introduction

Susan Glaspell (1876-1948), co-founder of the Provincetown Players and the first significant U.S. female playwright, was, it is increasingly recognized, an important and innovative voice in the American theatre. She is one of a core group of writers (including her contemporary Eugene O'Neill, whose talent she was the first to discern, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller) who are now regarded as creating an authentic American style of modern drama. Today, Susan Glaspell studies are rapidly expanding, as both theatre historians and scholars of women's literature have recognized that Glaspell's influence extended well beyond the few short pieces with which she is often associated (her short story "A Jury of Her Peers" and the one-act play on which it is based, *Trifles*, are often anthologized as "representative" not only of Glaspell's *oeuvre* but also of American women's writing from the first two decades of the twentieth century). As a prolific and sought-after journalist, a novelist, and a playwright who experimented with social comedy, symbolist and expressionist drama, and adaptations of the Greek tragic form, Glaspell was an intensely experimental and boundary-pushing writer who addressed the way that taboo subjects (birth control, suicide, divorce, and eugenics are just a few "impolite" topics she dared discuss) placed constraints on women's self-expression and self-realization.

Like many First World War-era artists, Glaspell also experimented with religion and spirituality. Raised as a Christian, she was attracted to a form of spiritual and philosophical thought that, along with the Occult, theosophy, and other "avant-garde" spiritualities, appeared in early 20th century American artistic circles: Monism. The underlying principle of Monism is unity, through the harmonization of dualities or opposites (such as between body and soul, spirit, or consciousness). As I argue below, her 1917 one-act symbolist play, *The Outside*, is as much a spiritual exploration as it is a social or artistically formal one.

Symbolism and expressionism in drama and literature from the late 19th century reacted against the descriptive tendencies of realism and the prescriptions of determinism so prevalent in naturalism. Well-known symbolist works with which Glaspell would likely have come in contact include Paul Verlaine's *Songs without Words* (1874) and Stéphane Mallarmé's *Afternoon of the Faun* (1876). Symbolism in drama uses an element of the stage (such as a prop or character) to signify a reality beyond the literal. For example, the wild duck in Henrik Ibsen's well-known play *The Wild Duck* (1884) symbolizes not only the psychological contradictions each of the characters face, but also broader concerns such as the suffocation of urban life in relationship to the freedom of the natural world (a prevalent modern theme). The central symbol in Glaspell's *The Outside* is a shifting line between sand dunes and woods, where each element attempts to

overtake the other – the dry drifting sands eventually engulfing the trees, the forest's vines and branches reaching and stretching beyond the sands. The symbolism reaches into the consciousnesses of the two central characters and their different approaches to life and human community, thereby exploring philosophical and spiritual concerns such as the relationship between the intimate and the public, the individual and the community, the spiritual and the physical, order and chaos, life and death.

But above all, it is a play about an environment and its landscape. While there is nothing overtly religious about Glaspell's imagery, this essay will explore how *The Outside* nonetheless constructs a sacred geography for the theatre. While cultural geography has long exerted a productive and significant influence on theatre studies, and while religion has long played a powerful part in cultural geography, theatre studies has yet to bring together religion and geography in a significant way. This is curious given the fact that concurrent with the rise of cultural geography in theatre studies throughout the 1990s, anthropologies and ethnographies of religion and spiritual practice, especially concerning ritual and performance, were also being widely considered. Since religion and ritual depend on the construction, marking, and management of space, not only architecturally but also across cities, nations, and natural environments, the lack of connective tissue between sacred geography and theatre studies seems even more curious. *The Outside* provides theatre scholars a prime example with which to fill in that gap.

With *The Outside*, Glaspell harnesses the dominant theatrical styles of her day to reverse the presentational mode of theatre and turn it inside out, in service to her own search for a new spiritual paradigm. While the newly intimate and domestic space of modern drama often depicted characters as being displaced or displacing themselves through or across the "stage-home," *The Outside* theatricalizes the site of displacement itself. Rather than only a site for presentation, *The Outside* becomes, in performance, a site of reception. In religious terms, *The Outside* is liturgical; it not only pronounces spiritual revelation, but actively transforms itself into the sacred space where ritual conversion and revelation take place. In a synecdochal relationship, the sacred geography of Glaspell's stage elaborates upon the central symbol of "the line", much in the way that sacred architectures and the liturgies performed within are elaborations on the central symbol of a cross or a wheel, for example. This sacred geography extends into a cosmography, not only organizing the immediate space of the theatre, but performing a world.

II. Sacred and Theatrical Geographies

The "spatial turn" in theatre studies has enjoyed ongoing productivity since cultural geographers in the 1970s and 80s began to

use “theatre” as a metaphor to discuss the spectacularity of landscape and the dominance of visuality in perceiving/constructing both natural and social spaces.[1] Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs argue that modern drama at the turn of the 20th century created a new relationship with landscape: “landscape for the first time held itself apart from character and became a figure of its own. As the century moved on, landscape would encroach on the traditional dramaturgy of plot and character to become a perspective and a method, linking seemingly unrelated theatrical practices in staging, text, scenography, and spectatorship” (Fuchs and Chaudhuri 2003, 2). Chaudhuri and Fuchs are especially concerned with the unobvious presence of landscape *within* texts, not only as prescribed by them through stage directions, or adjacent to them by way of set design and scenography.

Religious studies can provide an array of tools for the religious and spiritual significance of the relationship between text and spatial practice. The prominent religions of western culture have themselves been forged by and alongside texts (holy scripture), and also mediated through texts as the scripts that perform faith (liturgy). The interpretation and performance of these texts has undeniably shaped the landscape in a wide variety of ways, from the dominance of steeples in the skylines of European towns, to the memorialization of the “Founding Fathers” of the United States indelibly carved into the face of Mount Rushmore, to the affective cultural up-take of certain geological phenomena as expressive of spirituality, such as Uluru in Australia. Additionally, the interpretation and performance of religious texts have molded the field of geography itself, as in the influence on cartography of pilgrimages to sacred Biblical sites or the shrines of saints as documented by medieval travel writers.

Theatre, as an art that lives in the intimate space between text and performance, seems the spiritual kin of religious geography. In Erich Isaac’s now-classic definition, the geography of religion is “the study of the part played by the religious motive in man’s transformation of the landscape. It presumes the existence of a religious impulse in man which leads him to act upon his environment in a manner which responds secondarily, if at all, to any other need” (Isaac 1960, 14). Although Isaac’s presumption of “religious impulse” may read as a bit old-fashioned today, his definition still reverberates with the position of this essay: that religion is not a separate sphere of private concern or contained only within special communities, but a constitutive part of contemporary public life – even, perhaps especially, in what is considered the “secular.”[2] Because both

[1] Best-known is Cosgrove 1997; see also Jackson 1979. Two recent examples of theatre scholars’ use of geography are Sullivan 1998 and Sanders 2011.

[2] Taylor 2007 is the pre-eminent book in the field, but for a discussion of the performative impact of

geography and theatre are situated between text and performance, and because the ritual performance of texts is central to so many religious traditions, both merit religious study.

III. Demarcating Expression in *The Outside*

The Outside is a meditation on what Hélène Cixous would call the "extreme boundary state" of the theatre – between form and fluidity, life and death (Cixous 1998, xii). *The Outside* is named for the beautiful and dangerous location of the play: the outside edge of a natural harbor that protects a New England town. This is Glaspell's own adopted Cape Cod near Provincetown, where she and her husband George Cook took long walks to relieve the stress of their working lives (Ben-Zvi 1995, 191). On one side of this stretch of beach is the comfort and protection of the village, and on the other side, the Outside, are the ever-shifting dunes that threaten the woods, woods whose vines and roots hold fast and protect the town. The line where woods meet dunes functions as a character in the play, calling to Mrs. Patrick, threatening, yet fascinating. This line also visually organizes the set design, because the interior of the life-saving station draws the eye right to its edge through an open sliding door: "*through this open door are seen the sand dunes, and beyond them the woods. At one point the line where woods and dunes meet stands out clearly and there are indicated the rude things, vines, bushes, which form the outer uneven rim of the woods—the only things that grow in the sand. At another point a sand-hill is menacing the woods*" (Glaspell 1998 [1917], 55). How to characterize this line—tectonic forces erupting against one another, in a violent clash? An incision, a wound, where two sundered sides seek healing? How about…a scar? Or perhaps it is none of these things, but the making of them: what Jacques Derrida (2005 [1998], ix) would have called "scarification"?[3] In any case, this rift – a place that is neither/nor as well as both/and – speaks to the unconventional knowledge available to religious believers in those liminal interstices between "everyday" reality and the transcendent, between spiritual ignorance and revelation, or between differing social roles whilst undergoing ceremonial initiation. In another important way, this "line" indicates what is between the said and what cannot be said. The play destabilizes the primacy of language, the authoritative text, while also conserving speech in order to highlight its unique, transformative power.

In *The Outside*, the question of the performative power of texts is a central concern, and takes shape in Mrs Patrick's demand that only what is absolutely necessary should be spoken. Although there are no extant reviews of *The Outside*

religion in public life, see Chambers, Edelman, and DuToit 2013.

[3] If so, it is a scarification that "does not sacrifice" (Derrida 2005 [1998]. ix).

from when it was first performed, subsequent criticism makes much of the dichotomy between the realm of the men and their realistic language, and the realm of the women and their halting, inarticulate language that gropes through the unsaid and unsayable. In terms of plot, not much happens in this brief play. Two lifesavers and the lifesaving captain bring a drowned corpse into the old life-saving station that is now the residence of Mrs. Patrick, a "city woman" who used to summer there near Provincetown with her husband. Through the men's banter, we learn that Mrs. Patrick and her hired woman, Allie Mayo, are both lonesome, manless women who used to be "all right" but through unfortunate circumstances became "queer" and anti-social, even unwomanly. Mrs. Patrick's past remains a mystery, but eventually we learn that Allie Mayo's young husband was lost at sea, after which tragedy she "spoke not a necessary word." The lifesaving station the women now inhabit has nothing of a woman's touch, the men observe: "Things—do not hang on other things."

The men, unable to resuscitate the victim, leave the corpse behind the big barn doors that dominate the set, and through which can be discerned the line where the dunes meet the woods. While waiting for the lifesavers to return, Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo have an inscrutable conversation about this line between the sands and the sanctuary on the little strip of land where the life-saving station lies, itself constantly threatened by the dunes. Allie, up until this point completely silent, stares at the dead body, and suddenly begins to painfully articulate that their isolation and taciturnity "is wrong," and affirms the ability of life to grow up over the suffocating sands. But Mrs. Patrick, eventually reduced to tears by Allie's surprising speech, counters that the sands will continue to overrun it all. The men come back with a stretcher for the corpse, and as they leave again, something happens to Mrs. Patrick just before the curtain falls; but what happens, exactly, is impossible to say.

> MRS. PATRICK: (*bitter, exultant*) Savers of life! (*to ALLIE MAYO*) You savers of life! 'Meeting the Outside!' Meeting—(*but she cannot say it mockingly again; in saying it, something of what it means has broken through, rises. Herself lost, feeling her way into the wonder of life*) Meeting the Outside! (*It grows in her as CURTAIN lowers slowly.*) (Glaspell 1998 [1917], 48)

This "*feeling her way into the wonder of life*" is the climax of what Linda Ben-Zvi summarizes as Glaspell's introduction and then dismissal of the male sphere in order to focus explicitly on the world of the women who succeed in attaining a new dimension of understanding to which the men remain oblivious. "In the process she once more overturns the expected direction of the plot. It is the lifesavers who fail to revive life, while Allie Mayo, moved by the struggle and by the presence of the dead young man, painfully and successfully enacts a lifesaving ritual of her own" (Ben-Zvi 2005, 192). But on the level of language, the women achieve something else: the expression of interior experience through a *relationship* with language (indeed, through

a troubled and painful relationship to the limits of language), rather than the presentation of meaning through the *medium* of language. While the latter is an example of the dominance of the (masculine) idea of text as purveyor of definitive meaning, the former illustrates a religiously-styled encounter with revelation in relationship to a holy text, or a performed devotion through liturgical practice. Allie can only speak through her relationship to the power of speech; the "text" of speech is available to her only in the process of trying to express.

IV. Demarcating Minds and Souls in *The Outside*

Such expression through the inexpressible in language, performed at the "extreme boundary state" of the theatrical landscape, is the first way in which Glaspell creates a sacred geography for the theatre in *The Outside*. A second way is through the metonymical relationship between the imagery of the "outside" and the interior psychological landscape of the two main characters.

In "Reading for Landscape: the Case of American Drama," Elinor Fuchs reminds readers that the psychological depths of modern realism were attended by the "deep landscapes" created in and through the theatre. The play's environment emerged from the text, inhabited the stage, but also seeped into the "spatial surround" that created a scenography for the consciousness and provided a platform for characters that transcended the boards of the stage. "In the symbolic avalanches of Ibsen, the threatened forest of Chekhov, the ecstatically open or pathologically closed worlds of Wedekind, the trembling atmospheres of Maeterlinck, and the *lehr*scapes of late Strindberg one can begin to see landscape itself as independent figure: not simply a support to human action, but entering it in a variety of roles, for instance, as mentor, obstacle, or ironist" (Fuchs 2002, 30). Similarly, Glaspell's sacred geography extends the line between dunes and woods into the hearts and minds of her characters, creating a landscape of the spirit.

Such a landscape is itself the event of revelation. Throughout religious history, spiritual revelation has been inextricably tied to the place where it occurs, so much so that the event and the place are often synonymous – Moses on Mount Sinai, Jesus in the "upper room" or at Golgotha, Siddhartha under his fig tree, or Arjuna in the battlefield. In *The Outside*, the life-saving station slowly reveals itself as the site for the event of revelation. When the men leave with the corpse in disgust (not having received exactly a warm welcome from Mrs. Patrick, who insists "I don't want him here! I must have my house to myself!"), Mrs. Patrick rushes to escape, intending to go sit at the line between woods and dunes and watch how the sand suffocates life. However, Allie stops her with a word: "wait". Not only does Allie reveal herself through her halting speech, but she

becomes the site of reception for Mrs. Patrick's unspoken pain. Allie's subsequent speech is framed by the fact that she "has not spoken an unnecessary word in twenty years," her characteristic silence in contrast to Mrs. Patrick, who, while a recluse, also has a sharp tongue. Allie's monolog, full of whispered repetitions, relates her own painful story of having lost her young husband, a whaler, to the sea. The boy now lying dead behind the door unfixes something in Allie, and she says to Mrs. Patrick,

> "For twenty years, I did what you are doing. And I can tell you—it's not the way. …You're not the only woman in the world whose husband is dead!"
>
> MRS. PATRICK: (*with a cry of the hurt*) Dead? My husband's not dead.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: He's not? (*slowly understands*) Oh. (*The woman in the door is crying. Suddenly picks up her coat which has fallen to the floor and steps outside*.)
>
> ALLIE MAYO: (*almost failing to do it*) Wait.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: Wait? Don't you think you've said enough? They told me you didn't say an unnecessary word!
>
> ALLIE MAYO: I don't.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: And you can see, I should think, that you've bungled into things you know nothing about! (*As she speaks, and crying under her breath, she pushes the sand by the door down on the half buried grass—though not as if she knows what she is doing*.)
>
> ALLIE MAYO: (*slowly)* When you keep still for twenty years you know—things you didn't know you knew. I know why you're doing that (*she looks up at her startled*) Don't bury the only thing that will grow. Let it grow.

In this time out of time, Allie "knows" what Mrs. Patrick doesn't have to say, even if she gets the facts wrong (Mrs. Patrick's husband is not dead). Here, the line between dunes and woods in the "outside" functions as a metonym for the interior landscape of the two main characters' psychological and spiritual struggle to harmonize competing forces within themselves. The stage itself, then, is the event of the revelation of spiritual insight. Allie intuitively and empathetically assesses Mrs. Patrick's state with great accuracy, somewhere between the role of therapist and shamaness.

V. Placing and Displacing Glaspell's Geographies

Linking religion to Glaspell's use of realism and expressionism upsets our ability to place this play easily within a specific theatrical style. *The Outside* is not strictly a realistic, naturalistic, or expressionistic play, but it makes use of conventions from all three. Likewise, religion cannot be equated with "reality," "fate," or human emotion, but these three factors can individually and simultaneously inform religious discourse.

The lyricism of the language between Allie and Mrs. Patrick, and the fact that the plot hinges on the inexpressible, would seem to make expressionism a good candidate for the dominant style of the play. But if expressionism is the dramatic exteriorization of interior psychological

processes, what is unique to Glaspell is that the interior process often *remains* interior rather than finding full expression on the stage; hers is a not-quite expressionism. This is one reason why some critics skeptically question *The Outside*'s success. C.W.E. Bigsby's assessment of the play's opacity is that it leads to a "reductive" ending: "The play's dramatic tensions are discharged in a flood of language whose abstractions diffuse the clarity of the play's own symbolic system as the two characters, at first in contention and then in harmony, substitute words for the actions which had distinguished the life savers at the beginning" (Bigsby 1998, 14). What is far more interesting is to assume that as audience, we do not know and we do not need to know why Mrs. Patrick can suddenly, for little apparent reason, "feel her way into the wonder of life" upon reception of an important interior revelation.

What was that revelation? Even in a play like *Trifles*, which is by far the most theatrically conventional (and realistic) of Glaspell's plays (and perhaps why it is the most often anthologized and recognized), Glaspell assumes no need to explain why or how it is that Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale know that the dead canary is positive evidence of Mrs. Wright's murder of her husband. All Glaspell graces us with is another characteristically opaque stage direction: "*Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror*" (Glaspell 1998 [1916], 43). For the reader, this suffices to communicate that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peter know now with certainty what before they did not know. By extending the theatrical landscape into the interior emotional experience of Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo, Glaspell extends the ability of realism and expressionism to portray human life to their extremes. The "line" is both an expressionistic device and also an emblem for the naturalistic claim that environments shape human subjectivity. But in the act of opening up this intimate interior, Glaspell over-exposes its raw incomprehensibility. By verbally eviscerating her characters, Glaspell's psychological dissection only discovers what cannot be said. This is not strictly realism or expressionism, but an experimental and symbolic sculpting of a sacred geography of the theatre through attention to the "wonder of life."

A sacred landscape is visible to ritual participants, but invisible to the uninitiated. A sacred landscape is often one that is left from or returned to, rather than continuously inhabited or travelled across. As with psychological realism as an acting style, the conventional interior set design of a domestic scene (a living room or hotel room, office, restaurant, etc.) has become so ubiquitous for contemporary film and television that audiences now take it for granted. But when the first realists and naturalists of the early 20th century theatre took the audience into the intimate sphere of the mind, and likewise spatially into the intimate rooms of the home (conversations within which revealed disease and desire to be as common as teatime), they were

considered bold and revolutionary, as well as perverted and obscene.

In this context the artists of the Little Theatre Movement redesigned the playing space itself, staging productions in small venues that shrank the distance between spectators and performers. Such scenes seemed to consume or eject the characters who either haunted or fled from them. Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* portrays a full array of characters' relationships to the domestic space: habitation, homecoming, displacement, exile, and death. One of the key elements of modern drama seems to be that this interior home or home-like space is one that is shaped through acts of displacement. As Una Chaudhuri argues (1995, 11), this is especially true of Chekhov's "stage-home", which is "not a place but a discursive field laid out in such a way as to guarantee its inhabitants a certain psychological homelessness." Significantly, *The Outside* combines the "stage-home" of realism with a specific view of the exterior natural environment, and Glaspell's realism incorporates within it a naturalistic attitude toward a harsh coastal environment that both shapes and reflects the mental dispositions of Allie Mayo and Mrs. Patrick. The space of *The Outside*, however, is not shaped *through* acts of displacement, but, in the same way that religious events often *are* the places where they occur, *is* the displacement itself. In a third way that Glaspell creates a sacred geography for the theatre, she uses the styling of realism to investigate the spiritual significance of displacement.

Where the scene-space of modern drama often depicts the home as cut through, travelled across, or abandoned, *The Outside* presents a home that is actively being swallowed up and displaced by the billowing sand dunes that surround Mrs. Patrick's life-saving station. The home is a synecdoche for the line that is the central symbol of the play. It is the same space of the dualistic push and pull of the tide of life and death. Displacement goes hand in hand with substitution, and substitution is an elemental concept in the study of religious ritual, especially sacrifice.

Joseph Roach's influential theory of surrogation posits that communities must constantly re-create themselves in order to conserve and transmit the roles and practices that define them. "In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitute the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates" (Roach 1996, 2). The non-linearity of Roach's model is what interests me here. Displacement would seem to imply a process of substitution that is linear-progressive, marching ahead in time, but this is not necessarily so. The idea of a pure succession or a neatly linear chronology "is no more plausible a fiction than that of the steward who never dies, or it might be added, that of the purportedly foolproof lineages of European dynasties" (25).

Glaspell's dialog rocks like the fishing boats pumped up and down by the endless waves, slipping back and forth with rhythms that verbally manifest the undulating sands and growing things that populate the play's imagery. The rhythm's sway mirrors the content of the dialog, which is always about a both-and, not a successive process. The arm of land that is Cape Cod is both a harbor that protects a town and the treacherous "outside." The sea is both the giver and taker of life. The line between woods and dunes is not the battle-site where one will win out over the other, but a continuous slippage between give and take, a site of reception for both giver and receiver. At points the writing style itself slips from realistic dialog into something more like prose poetry:

> MRS. PATRICK: I've watched the sand slip down on the vines that reach out farthest.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Another vine will reach that spot. (*under her breath, tenderly*) Strange little things that reach out farthest!
>
> MRS. PATRICK: And will be buried soonest!
>
> ALLIE MAYO: And hold the sand for things behind them. They save a wood that guards a town....
>
> ALLIE MAYO: I found—what I find now I know. The edge of life—to hold life behind me— (*A slight gesture toward* MRS. PATRICK.)
>
> MRS. PATRICK: (*stepping back*) You call what you are life? (*laughs*) Bleak as those ugly things that grow in the sand.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: (*under her breath, as one who speaks tenderly of beauty)* Ugly!
>
> MRS. PATRICK: (*passionately*) I have known life. I have known life. You're like this Cape. A line of land way out to sea—land not life.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: A harbor far at sea. (*raises her arm, curves it in as if around something she loves*) Land that encloses and gives shelter from storm.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: (*facing the sea, as if affirming what will hold all else out*) Outside sea. Outer shore. Dunes—land not life.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Outside sea—outer shore, dark with the wood that once was ships—dunes, strange land not life—woods, town, and harbor. The line! Stunted straggly line that meets the Outside face to face—and fights for what itself can never be. Lonely line. Brave growing.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: It loses.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: It wins.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: The farthest life is buried.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: And life grows over buried life! *(lifted into that; then, as one who states a simple truth with feeling*) It will. And Springs will come when you will want to know that it is Spring. (54)

Mrs. Patrick is bitter while Allie exultant. One has absorbed her loss; the other holds it at bay. At this point, the lifesavers reappear, triggering Mrs. Patrick's outburst and transformation. I quote the passages at length to illustrate how the give-and-take of the dialog enacts the same process of displacement and succession that characterizes the central image of the line between dunes and woods. The play is a series of nested images that harmonize in the key of both-and displacement: not only is the line where dunes meet woods "the outside", the Cape and the harbor itself is "the outside"; the house on the verge of being swallowed by the dunes is "the outside"; the social relationships between the women and the (male) villagers is "the outside"; the relationship between Allie

Mayo and Mrs. Patrick is “the outside”; finally, the push and pull of competing emotions and convictions within each character is also “the outside”. The play is the very scene of displacement that it discusses.

VI. A Unitary Space

One religious interpretation of this play might look at the dualistic nature of “the outside” as an illustration of the mutual ritual constitution of the sacred and profane. Micea Eliade’s classic formulation is that sacred space is necessary for human habitation of the world; sacred space serves as a navigational aid by which human societies orient themselves—it is the *axis mundi*, the center of the world. “Revelation of a sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to ‘found the world’ and to live in a real sense. The profane experience, on the contrary, maintains the homogeneity and hence the relativity of space. No true orientation is now possible, for the fixed point no longer enjoys a unique ontological status […]. Properly speaking, there is no longer any world, there are only fragments of a shattered universe” (Eliade 1987 [1959], 23-24). Sacred space is more than just a landmark, however. “[T]he sacred is pre-eminently the *real*, at once power, efficacity, the source of life and fecundity. Religious man’s desire to live *in the sacred* is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralyzed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion” (28). Without the orientation of sacred space, Eliade argues, we are lost, because we have no way to relate. Even those who claim to live without religion, in Eliade’s view, when they strive to orient themselves according a “sacred” center (perhaps an ethical concern or personal conviction), perform religiously. The sacred/profane and order/chaos dichotomies that structure *The Outside* can be shown to use one another to orient the play toward its sacred center: the line between trees and dunes.

The stage directions describe a space that creates an inner sanctum. The set is “*one end of what was the big boat room and at the ceiling is seen a part of the frame work from which the boat once swung. About two thirds of the back wall is open, because of the big sliding door, of the type of barn door, and through this open door are seen the sand dunes, and beyond them the woods*.” The set is designed as series of nested spaces, into the most inner of which the lifesavers bring a dead body. If this inner room symbolizes Mrs. Patrick’s own private and personal space, the intrusion of the men must bring to mind the polluting potential of the dead body, which traditionally would result in religious contamination. As the play continues, the separation of insiders and outsiders strengthens. The public (the men) have intruded into the sanctuary of the

priestesses. Or, have they brought the offering of the sacrificial victim? In either case, the men are profane because they are completely separated from the task of orientation according to the "line where woods and dunes meet". Significantly, the drowned man is already dead—there is no competition of forces within him, which means that he cannot be the orienting axis. The men try and fail to revive him. The lifesaving captain insists on "working" on the body even after the other lifesavers have given up. This image of futility stands in stark contrast to Mrs. Patrick's *gestus* of covering the beach grass with sand as she listens to Allie Mayo; in this action, she re-creates, in microcosm, the orienting axis of the line where woods and dunes meet. Through this orientation, Mrs. Patrick discovers her new beginning, while in contrast the men trudge away with the corpse, presumably to repeat the lifestyle that will inevitably result in yet another drowning.

The imagery in *The Outside* seduces readers into a simple dualism of competing forces, but then reveals the site of the struggle as the axis itself. For Mary E. Papke, the limitations of a binarized reading of Glaspell's work expose a productive tension "between *capitulation and transcendence*, between *suffering* material circumstances beyond one's control and celebrating the *immediacy* of 'newly discovered truth' in each particular experience..." (Papke 1993, 26). In my view, the "outside" as *axis mundi* disturbs the idea of either noble transcendence or humiliating capitulation, to show that both involve an element of self-destruction. The lure of binarization in criticizing Glaspell's work is seductive, but she never allows such a rigid form to fully take shape. The fluid poetics of her language do not allow for such symmetry. One can search for the full satiation of an Apollonian/Dionysian or transcendent/capitulatory binary, only to be left with a frustration of stops and starts, incomplete sentences—fragments that gesture toward something beyond the immediacy of plurality toward a larger whole.

While the sacred/profane reading is as compelling as a "continuing tension" between two poles, it reiterates dualism, and Glaspell's own rejection of Christian dualism must be kept in mind. Rather than a simple dualism of life/death or in/out, Glaspell constructs a complex scene where the event of displacement reveals not only the hither side of the displaced, but the very fabric across and through which relationships are constructed. The ritual of displacement frames the event of revelation. As the play proceeds, the push and pull of the dialog resolves in the unification of the scene with Mrs. Patrick's transformation. That is, the plural becomes the one.

This is unsurprising given Glaspell's long interest in philosophies of Monism, and her participation in the Monist Society in her hometown of Davenport, Iowa around 1907, which was led by her eventual husband George Cram Cook. There are different types of Monism, but they all concern how many and what kinds of substances exist. Each Monism asserts a kind of oneness,

but targets and counts substances in different ways. In a more popular sense, Monism theorizes that reality consists of one basic substance and/or is governed by one basic rule.[4] For the young Glaspell, discussions about such philosophies were an exhilarating break from her conservative, traditional Christian upbringing:

> Never had it happened in church. There the forms were of little use to me, for my heart had not enough to flood them; but now, the worm, the fish, the ape, and on and on until, as the crashing chords of an orchestra that is mountains, torrents and great trees—'And thine shall be the power, and the kingdom, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen!' So sang one heart, lifting to the courage of life and glory of the world, down a side street in a bare room over a saloon, in Davenport on the Mississippi, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and seven (Glaspell 2005 [1927], 199).

The Monist Society provided "the congenial companionship of those other 'queer fish' who, once a week in a small room in Turner Hall could talk about socialism, anarchy, monism, Nietzsche, literature, evolution, and sex and still return home for supper to families only partially aware of the 'heresies' occurring in their midst" (Ben-Zvi 2005, 82). This kind of community was probably something the sensitive and deep-thinking Glaspell needed while living in small-town Midwest. Her description of the Society's spiritual thrill cannot be ignored. The humdrum town becomes the event/site of the most personal spiritual discoveries. If Glaspell found spiritual succor in the Monistic principle that there exists one basic concrete object – the world, with all its derivative and interconnected parts – then *The Outside* sculpts the landscape of that world as one whose seemingly contradictory movements (dunes versus woods) harmonize as one ("the wonder of life").

VII. Mapping the Liturgical Space

A final way in which Glaspell creates a sacred geography for the theatre is in offering her drama as a site of reception rather than presentation. If theatre scholars are going to understand the relationship between geography and modern drama, then we also need to understand the relationship between liturgy and sacred space.

J. Ellen Gainor asks of Glaspell's work, "Might not the struggle to find the right language, or the outpouring of language in the urgency of expression, accompany the compulsion to represent what had not been represented—to dare to say what was elsewhere being either politically or institutionally suppressed?" (Gainor 2001, 263). To speak politically is also very often to speak religiously, and vice versa. Glaspell's plays (see especially *Inheritors*) can be read as documentation of her search for the spiritual companion to politics.

[4] For a precise definition, see Hamlyn 1995.

Keenly aware of the correspondence between political status and place, Glaspell's sacred geography of the theatre liturgically maps worlds in which self and other (in *The Outside,* represented by Allie Mayo and Mrs. Patrick, who are also the forces of dunes and woods) meet in order to receive the gift of difference. Chaudhuri concisely connects political status to place in this way: "the construction of cultural otherness is also a mapping of the world, a fact that contributes powerfully to the literalization of accounts of ethnic difference" (Chaudhuri 1995, 3). Religious liturgy does precisely this: it maps the world; it constructs a cosmos. Indeed, we might say that every liturgy performs a liturgical cosmology, "the experience of the assembly itself being gifted with a sense of 'world' as that assembly engages in the interactions of the liturgy. The assembly's liturgy thus provides the 'account'—the 'logos'—that holds us into 'cosmos', in all its meanings" (Lathrop 2009 [2003], 20). While liturgy needs serious consideration as a performative hermeneutic for modern drama, religious worlds cannot be held apart from the communities, publics, and nations that contain them, but *constitute*, whether in part or in the whole, such spheres of human relation. This seems especially true of the Christian social-cultural influence on modern drama.

"Liturgy" is both the text for and the performance of rituals in praise and worship of the divine. While this term is most commonly used among Roman Catholics and Protestant denominations that practice sacramental theology, notably Lutherans, Anglicans and Episcopalians, I would like to broaden the term to include any religious performance that creates a world through a ritual act that corresponds to a text, where that "text" can be anything from a written document to an oral tradition. Furthermore, like theatre, liturgy is *public* performance, by and for a specific community. The word "liturgy" comes from the Greek *leitourgia* – "public service," or, perhaps more accurately, "the work of the people." Bruce T. Morrill, a Catholic liturgical theologian, emphasizes the revelatory nature of liturgical participation:

> Liturgy is the symbolic, ritual activity of the assembled church. It gives believers an explicit sense, a tangible presence, of the God hidden in their daily lives, as well as something of the specific content through proclaiming and responding to Sacred Scripture, of what this ongoing human encounter with the divine is like. In the church's liturgy believers glorify God by participating more deeply in God's vision for the world and their place in it through word and sacrament (Morrill 2009, 6)

For the Lutheran liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop, the "work" of liturgical participation brings together the universal *ordo* or order of worship and the local needs of a community, always seeking renewal and healing, which enables *koinonia* (mutual participation; communion) through the sharing of *koina* (shared things) (Lathrop 2009 [2003], 114; cf. Lathrop 2005 [1998]).

Ideally, while seeking the presence of God, an assembly is also keenly aware of its own responsibility to the earth and to human community, and the wounds that need healing. The liturgy's constant striving for renewal reveals that "In the Christian liturgy it is the assembly itself, encountering Christ in Word and Sacrament, that becomes a hole in the fabric of things, through which life-giving power flows into the world. But this hole is in this world and for this world" (Lathrop 1998 [1993], 212). Through liturgy, participants become the wound, or "hole", through which and by which renewal can take place. This is why, for Lathrop, liturgies are also "anti-liturgies"; they are enacted at the very limits of their own efficacy; they are enacted in order to discover not only the nearness of God's grace but also the lack of human compassion for the world. This is why a sacramental action (such as the Eucharist) is "a repeated experience of concrete limits—like the limits of our own locality or of the length of our life or of the remarkable bounty of the earth or of the very earth itself—becoming the place of both praise and compassion" (216). The actions, objects, and language of liturgy are symbols that are both "strong and broken," and, for many Christian theologians, strong by virtue of their brokenness. What both Merrill and Lathrop take pains to elaborate is that liturgy is participation in the Kingdom of Heaven, which *is* the world here and now. To participate in liturgy is not to "bring into being" an alternative world or to conjure up God's presence, but to firm one's position in reality, to more accurately understand one's responsibility to the world. This is another way in which we can elucidate Eliade's assertion that the sacred is the real.

If, for a moment, we sidestep the specific Christian theology of the liturgical paradigm, we can look at the form and function of Christian liturgy and recognize within it the fascination with the spirituality of theatre that has informed some of the most influential and widely adapted work by modern theatre artists and theorists such as Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brook, to name the three perhaps best known. What is the relationship between liturgical theology and theatre theory? Such a question deserves a discussion in its own right, but here, briefly, I can point out at least one confluence: both liturgy and theatre are performances that that reflect upon themselves by means of those very performances. This is not to say that they remain entirely self-contained, but that both liturgy and theatre make for themselves the means of their own self-analysis; that is, they *are* the theory/theology they perform. Lathrop (2013) offers this definition: "Liturgical theology is *a way of thinking of God and before God that arises from the liturgy itself*, is found first in the liturgy, and yet outside of the liturgy can also form ways that are used to elucidate the meaning of our liturgical practice. Explicitly, liturgical theology seeks to speak about who God is as this God is encountered in liturgy." Who or what is the "god" that each theatrical performance seeks to speak about, and how does encountering that "god" in the

midst of performance enable understanding? To liturgically map the cosmos is to create sacred space, but it is also to perform the world as lived by communities on a daily basis.

VIII. Liturgical Space in *The Outsider*

"You have no right to be here. This isn't a life-saving station any more", says Mrs. Patrick to the Captain when the men take over her personal space. As Bradford, one of the lifesavers, describes it, the life-saving station is "an empty house, a buried house, you might say, off here on the outside shore—way across the sand from man or beast" (Glaspell 1998, 51). Isolated, the house also symbolizes Mrs. Patrick herself, whom Glaspell describes as "unlike the old life as the dunes are unlike a meadow" (49). Allie Mayo, on the other hand, has the "peculiar intensity of twisted things which grow in unfavoring places" (50). But at the play proceeds, the gray house threatened by the overbearing dunes emerges as a life-saving station once again, and the "line where dunes meet woods" blurs when Mrs. Patrick takes on some of Allie's "peculiar intensity" and silent Allie speaks with some of the vinegar characteristic to Mrs. Patrick. The renewal of the life-saving station takes place through what we could now call a liturgical performance of sacred space.

This "liturgical theatre" begins with the confession of Mrs. Patrick, proceeds through discussion (homily), and ends with absolution and an injunction:

> MRS. PATRICK: This is the Outside. Sand (*picking some of it up in her hand and letting it fall on the beach grass*) Sand that *covers* – hills of sand that move and cover.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Woods. Woods to hold the moving hills from Provincetown. Provincetown—where they turn when boats can't live at sea. Did you ever see the sails come round here when the sky is dark? A line of them—swift to the harbor—where their children live. Go back! (*pointing*) Back to your edge of the woods that's the *edge of the dunes*.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: The edge of life. Where life trails off to dwarfed things not worth a name (*Suddenly sits down in the doorway*.)
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Not worth a name. And – meeting the Outside! (*Big with the sense of the wonder of life*.)
>
> MRS. PATRICK: (*lifting sand and letting it drift through her hand*.) They're what the sand will let them be. They take strange shapes like shapes of blown sand.
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Meeting the Outside. (*moving nearer; speaking more personally*) I know why you came here. To this house that had been given up; on this shore where only savers of life try to live. I know what holds you on these dunes, and draws you over there. But other things are true beside the things you want to see.
>
> MRS. PATRICK: How do you know they are? Where have you been for twenty years?
>
> ALLIE MAYO: Outside. Twenty years. That's why I know how brave they are (*indicating the edge of the woods. Suddenly different*) You'll not find peace there again! Go back and watch them *fight*! (54)

Liturgy is about the giving and receiving of gifts; often these are sacrifices made in

honor of a god whose own sacrifice is understood to sustain life. Liturgies are about reception, not presentation. They create sacred space that harmonizes with the sacred landscape of the world beyond the walls of a church—the sacred space of the liturgy *is* the geography of the cosmos. In *The Outside*, Glaspell likewise constructs sacred space. In this passage, Mrs. Patrick brings the line between woods and dunes into close proximity by lifting sand onto the beach grass, creating in miniature the sacred landscape that organizes the "spatial surround" of the play. As the discussion between Mrs. Patrick and Allie Mayo ensues, that "line" takes on differing meanings, with either the sands or the "dwarfed things" exerting their triumph over the other. The consummation of these counter-movements is in struggle itself: "watch them *fight*!" commands Allie. The violence of the imagery resounds with the liturgical theologian's call for liturgy not to resolve into the repetition of comfortable and uncritical ideology, blind to the needs of the world, but to constantly strive for the renewal of the church, to live as, and to live within, Lathrop's "hole in the order of things." The entire liturgical space, the sacred space of the theatre, is a symbol that is strong in its brokenness, in this way, just as the sacred geography of the line between woods and dunes is the place where one "meets the Outside"—"the sense of the wonder of life."

By encountering Glaspell's drama through the paradigm of liturgical theology, we can now explore the neglected relationship between modern drama's "spatial turn" and the many productive aspects of religious geography, which can include sacred landscapes and the construction of sacred spaces. *The Outside*'s sacred geography for the theatre is that of a "heterotopias," a place that contains many different and even incompatible spaces (Foucault 1986 [1984, 1967], 46-49). In mapping this sacred space, this cosmos, resolution of difference is not the goal, but instead receiving the gift of difference in an ongoing process of renewal—a process that might even look like a "fight." This is the gift that Mrs. Patrick receives as she stands on the edge of the dunes to meet the Outside. She embraces the struggle, much as Glaspell the playwright, or much as a liturgical theologian, embraces the struggle for continuing renewal, ever aware that complacency will mean distance from the sacred, or a loss of orientation in relation to the real.

The Outside is a liturgical encounter with that struggle. In her use of language as a process of revelation through the encounter with the power of the text, by linking the outer sacred landscape to the spiritual interior of her characters, and exploring the theme of "displacement" and its significance in the realistic theatres of her day, Glaspell gifts her audience with a theatre that is a site of reception rather than presentation – a liturgy of renewal that maps the sacred space where one may receive the gift of "meeting the Outside."

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