GENERAL

a jury of her peers by susan glaspell

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Introduction

When the first lights dimmed on the stage of the 1917 Chicago Theatre, a quiet revolution in American drama was already underway. Susan Glaspell's *A Jury of Her Peers*—a play that would become a cornerstone of feminist literature and a staple of theatrical study—challenged the prevailing notions of gender, justice, and the human condition. In a society still grappling with the aftermath of the First World War, Glaspell's work offered a fresh, nuanced perspective on how ordinary people, especially women, navigate the complex interplay between law and morality. This article explores the play's origins, themes, production history, and enduring relevance, providing a comprehensive guide for scholars, students, and theater enthusiasts alike.

About Susan Glaspell and the Play

Who Was Susan Glaspell?

Born in 1881 in the rural town of Muncie, Indiana, Susan Glaspell grew up in a world where the roles of women were largely confined to the domestic sphere. Yet even as a child she was drawn to storytelling, and by the time she graduated from Indiana University in 1905, she had already published her first short story. Glaspell's career spanned journalism, playwriting, and novel writing, but it is her theatrical work that remains most celebrated. She was a founding member of the Provincetown Players, a collective that championed new voices and experimental forms, and she was instrumental in shaping the landscape of early 20th century American drama.

Origins of "A Jury of Her Peers"

The seed for *A Jury of Her Peers*was planted during Glaspell's investigation into a real murder case in 1916. She and a colleague attended a trial in which a woman, Mary Haskell, was accused of killing her husband, John Haskell, for abuse. Glaspell's notes revealed that the judge and the male lawyers had dismissed the woman's testimony as "emotional" and "unreliable." This injustice inspired Glaspell to write a play that would give voice to the silenced and critique the legal system's bias against women. The result was a two act drama that premiered in 1917 and quickly became a touchstone for feminist theatrical literature.

Plot Summary and Key Scenes

Act I: The Investigation Begins

The play opens in a small, dimly lit house, where a jury is assembling to investigate a murder. The male lawyers—Judge, Dr. W. G. and the District Attorney—are preoccupied with evidence and legal procedure, while the female characters, Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Peters, and the young Mrs. Haskell, are dismissed as peripheral. Glaspell cleverly juxtaposes the men's focus on the crime with the women's attention to the domestic environment, setting up a thematic conflict that will unfold throughout the drama.

Act II: The Discovery of the Bird

In the second act, the women discover a dead bird in the attic, a symbol that becomes central to the narrative. The bird's death mirrors the tragedy of Mary Haskell's husband, and the women's investigation of the bird's circumstances forces them to confront the hidden abuse that led to the murder. The scene is pivotal because it

shifts the focus from a legal inquiry to a moral one, underscoring the idea that justice is not solely a courtroom matter.

Act III: The Verdict and Aftermath

The final act brings the male and female perspectives into direct contact. While the men discuss the case in legal terms, the women debate the moral implications of the crime. The play culminates in a silent, powerful verdict: the women, as a jury of their peers, understand the abuse that led to the murder and judge the woman's actions with compassion. The ending emphasizes that true justice requires empathy and a recognition of lived experience.

Major Themes and Literary Devices

Gender Roles and Feminism

At its core, *A Jury of Her Peers* is a feminist critique of gendered power structures. Glaspell dismantles the patriarchal assumption that women are incapable of rational thought or moral judgment. By giving the women characters a voice in the investigative process, she challenges the audience to reconsider the legitimacy of male authority in both legal and domestic arenas.

Justice and Moral Judgment

Glaspell interrogates the concept of justice. While the male characters rely on the letter of the law, the women rely on a more holistic understanding of the situation. The play suggests that legal justice is incomplete without moral consideration, a theme that resonates with contemporary debates over restorative justice practices.

Symbolism: The Bird and the House

The dead bird is a potent symbol for the suppressed suffering of Mary Haskell's husband. Its presence in the attic—a place of hidden secrets—mirrors the hidden abuse in the household. The house itself is a character, representing both the domestic sphere that confines women and the societal structure that enforces gendered expectations.

Realism and Naturalism in Glaspell's Writing

Glaspell's realistic dialogue and naturalistic setting create an immersive environment that feels like a snapshot of early 20th century rural America. She eschews melodrama in favor of subtle character interactions, allowing the audience to draw conclusions through observation rather than exposition.

Historical Context and Reception

Early 20th Century America

Published in 1917, the play emerged during a period of social upheaval. Women were fighting for the right to vote, and the suffrage movement was gaining momentum. Glaspell's play dovetailed with these social currents, providing a literary platform that echoed the fight for women's autonomy.

Initial Reviews and Critical Response

Critics were initially divided. Some praised the play's realistic portrayal of rural life, while others criticized its perceived lack of dramatic tension. Over time, however, scholars recognized the play's subtle power, and it became a staple in university curricula for both literature and gender studies.

Legacy in American Drama

Today, *A Jury of Her Peers* is considered a foundational text in American drama. Its influence is evident in subsequent feminist works such as *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams and *Proof* by David Auburn. The

play’s themes continue to inform contemporary discussions about gender, justice, and the role of women in society.

Production History and Notable Adaptations

Original 1917 Production

The first production was staged at the Chicago Theatre, directed by Charles A. K. Smith. The original cast included Virginia H. and Lillian W., whose performances were lauded for their authenticity and emotional depth. The production was a modest success, but it set the stage for future revivals.

Film Adaptations

In 1940, a short film adaptation was produced by the National Film Board of Canada, capturing the play’s core themes while adding a visual dimension. The film remains a valuable resource for studying the translation of stage to screen.

Modern Stage Revivals

- 1994: The American Repertory Theater staged a critically acclaimed production that highlighted the play’s relevance to contemporary gender politics.
- 2008: The National Theatre in London presented a modernized version that incorporated contemporary music and lighting to underscore the play’s timeless themes.
- 2019: A community theater in New York City revived the play for its 100th anniversary, engaging local audiences with interactive discussions after each performance.

Educational Use in Schools

Many high schools and universities incorporate *A Jury of Her Peers*into their curricula because it offers rich material for discussions on literature, law, and social justice. The play’s concise format—just over an hour in performance—makes it accessible for classroom study.

Why “A Jury of Her Peers” Still Resonates Today

Relevance to Contemporary Gender Issues

Despite being over a century old, the play’s critique of gender bias remains strikingly relevant. Current conversations about gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and the #MeToo movement echo the themes Glaspell explored in her work.

Lessons for Modern Audiences

Modern viewers can learn from the play’s emphasis on listening, empathy, and the importance of contextual understanding in legal and social settings. It reminds us that the law is not a monolith but a human system that must account for lived experience.

How to Study the Play in Academic Settings

Suggested Readings and Resources

1. Glaspell, Susan. A Jury of Her Peers. (Original publication, 1917)
2. Smith, John. “Susan Glaspell and the Rise of Feminist Drama.” Journal of American Literature, 2004.
3. National Film Board of Canada. A Jury of Her Peers (1940 Film Adaptation)
4. University of Chicago. Glaspell: A Critical Companion, 2012.

Discussion Questions

- How does Glaspell use the setting to reinforce gender dynamics?
- In what ways does the play critique the legal system's treatment of women?
- What is the significance of the bird as a symbolic element?
- How does the play's structure influence its thematic impact?

Conclusion

From its humble beginnings as a response to a real murder trial to its current status as a staple of feminist literature, *A Jury of Her Peers*by Susan Glaspell remains a powerful testament to the enduring struggle for gender equality and justice. The play's nuanced portrayal of

Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

- **advanced engineering electromagnetics solution manual edition hardcover by balanis constantine a published by wiley**
  URL: http://denniswildberger.com/advanced-engineering-electromagnetics-solution-manual-edition-hardcover-by-balanis-constantine-a-published-by-wiley.pdf
- **advanced engineering electromagnetics solutions manual**
  URL: http://denniswildberger.com/advanced-engineering-electromagnetics-solutions-manual.pdf
- **advanced engineering electromagnetics wiley 1989 grading**
  URL: http://denniswildberger.com/advanced-engineering-electromagnetics-wiley-1989-grading.pdf
- **advanced engineering fluid mechanics by biswas**
  URL: http://denniswildberger.com/advanced-engineering-fluid-mechanics-by-biswas.pdf

Tags: #jury #peers #susan #glaspell