THE INFLUENCE OF SOPHIE TREADWELL’S JOURNALISM CAREER ON HER
DRAMATIC WORKS

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ABSTRACT

Best known as the author of 1928's expressionistic drama *Machinal*, Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970) often finds herself filed away in today's theatre history books as something of a "one hit wonder" playwright. However, this trite categorization is not only untrue with regards to her career as a playwright, but it also ignores her career as a successful, well-known journalist. This study focuses on the first thirty years of the nineteen hundreds, as those were Treadwell's formative career years. This time became her most prolific period as a journalist, as well as seeing more of her plays produced than at any other time in her life. Before now, Treadwell's journalism has largely been ignored as insignificant and unrelated to her playwriting. However, this thesis proves that her research and writing for newspapers directly impacted her theatrical interests and career.

At issue here is Treadwell's career as a journalist and the constant relationship between her reporting and playwriting. The thesis begins by describing how trends and activities in early twentieth century journalism eventually influenced Treadwell. Next, Treadwell's own beginnings in journalism, her interest in Mexico, and her reports on murder trials such as the one that inspired her to write *Machinal* are addressed. The thesis does not analyze the whole of Treadwell's dramatic works, but focuses on *Gringo* and *Machinal* as key examples of Treadwell's plays that flowed out of her journalism.
Dedicated to my parents, who have encouraged me since childhood to get my Master’s degree, and to Brian, whose patience, love, and constant nagging carried me through the last few months.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Best known as the author of 1928’s expressionistic drama *Machinal*, Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970) often finds herself filed away in today’s theatre history books as something of a “one hit wonder” playwright. However, this trite categorization is not only untrue with regards to her career as a playwright, but it also ignores her career as a successful, well-known journalist. This study focuses on the first thirty years of the nineteen hundreds, as those were Treadwell’s formative career years. This time became her most prolific period as a journalist, as well as seeing more of her plays produced than at any other time in her life. Before now, Treadwell’s journalism has largely been ignored as insignificant and unrelated to her playwriting. However, this thesis proves that her research and writing for newspapers directly impacted her theatrical interests and career.

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1. Previous Research on Treadwell

Major research on Sophie Treadwell and her works is relatively limited. However, the number of scholarly articles has slowly increased since her death in 1970 and subsequent bequest of her archives to the University of Arizona Library of Special Collections (UALSC) in 1975. Louise Heck-Rabi completed the first dissertation with Treadwell's dramatic career in 1976, followed by a more biographical study by Nancy Wynn in 1982. Finally, in 1997, Jerry Dickey published a complete sourcebook of Treadwell's works based on the holdings of the UALSC archive. These studies deal primarily with biographical information and historical documentation of Treadwell's playwriting.

Following Treadwell's death in Tucson in 1970 and throughout the subsequent cataloguing of her archives at the University of Arizona in Tucson, a fairly significant recuperative effort on behalf of Treadwell occurred by feminist and theatre scholars as well as theatre practitioners. These efforts began with a rediscovery of *Machinal*. One of the earliest of these studies emerged as a reconstructive article by Jennifer Parent in the Spring 1982 volume of *The Drama Review*. In it, Parent described the original Arthur Hopkins production of *Machinal* in painstaking detail, carefully delineating each episode. A number of universities began staging it again, and significant revivals of the play were produced in New York and London in 1991 and 1993, respectively. Interestingly, just as
Janet Achurch and Elizabeth Robins pushed for productions of Ibsen’s cutting-edge productions with female leads in the nineteenth century, women were also the main promoters of the *Machinal* revivals. Jodie Markell convinced Joseph Papp to produce the play at his New York Shakespeare Festival (*Playbill* 1990). She starred in that production and then, as Sophie Treadwell’s Literary Executor, aided in the research for the London revival by the Royal National Theatre.

The publication of a number of articles dealing with *Machinal* soon followed. These were sometimes brief mentions of the play to prove a point, as in Thomas Greenfield’s *Work and the Work Ethic in American Drama: 1920-1970*, for which he cites the play as one that provides a “profound [depiction] of working life . . . while maintaining [its] primary function as entertainment” (58-59). W. David Sievers’ book *Freud on Broadway* constitutes another example, arguing that Treadwell combined expressionism with Freudianism:

> Miss Treadwell’s portrait of an emotionally starved woman driven to murder by her fixated loathing of sex is a full-blown psychological study. . . . *Machinal* shows the origins of frigidity in the mother’s own disgust with her marriage which she conveys to the daughter. (91)

Finally, scholars began bringing some of Treadwell’s other works to the public’s eyes, usually in the form of individual chapters within books of a broader scope. In 1995, Richard Wattenberg compared Treadwell’s use of western motifs in *Machinal* and *Hope for a Harvest* for the cultural pluralism volume of the Theatre Arts series. Jerry Dickey soon followed with his sourcebook on Treadwell and two articles dealing with, among other things, the use of expressionism in both *Machinal* and *For Saxophone*.
With these and other such writings, scholars created a momentum to include Treadwell's works in anthologies and journals. Although *Machinal* tended to be most publishers' play of choice by Treadwell, the frequent republication of that play incited interest in works that preceded *Machinal* as well. Jerry Dickey of the University of Arizona was one such scholar. He began re-exploring Treadwell's archives to further publicize the whole of her dramatic works, while also extensively documenting Treadwell's catalogued journalism. The ultimate result of this project was Dickey's *Sophie Treadwell: A Research and Production Sourcebook*.

Critical analyses of Treadwell have been written, but usually exist as brief inclusions in examinations of other topics. In most cases, references to Treadwell span merely a few pages of larger studies, which usually deal with feminism and use *Machinal* as the only example from the body of Treadwell's works. Ann Douglas' *Terrible Honesty* offers one such example, as she includes four pages on how Treadwell depicted metaphorical matricide in *Machinal*:

> [The Young Woman's] tragedy is that the person she murders is not her real, her worst enemy. In the last scene, as she begs her mother to "let [my daughter] live!," there is no escaping, I think, the sense that the wrong woman is going to the chair, that the patricidal deed was in part the deflected but justified matricidal wish. (Douglas 252)

In other words, Douglas argues that the Mother should be served corporal punishment rather than the Young Woman, for it was the Mother who refused to let her daughter live freely. Instead, the Young Woman had to repress her desires and submit her will to that of her mother. Despite efforts by the few scholars mentioned above, virtually all of
Treadwell’s plays aside from *Machinal* have been forgotten, for, according to the many published reviews of her plays, they were neither critical successes nor directorial breakthroughs (Bordman 452).

The decision to discuss Treadwell’s works from the perspective of her journalism career, as opposed to focusing on her plays alone, stems primarily from the lack of detailed information on this aspect of Treadwell’s life in the previously described studies. The most complete collection of Treadwell’s articles is held at the UALSC, also possessing some editorials and critics’ responses to her serials, particularly those published in the *Bulletin*. In light of those studies and the current accessibility of Treadwell’s work as both a playwright and a journalist, it is now possible to undertake a more intensive exploration of her career in journalism as it relates to her playwriting. This perspective of Treadwell has not yet been well documented.

2. **Treadwell’s Playwriting Career in Brief**

Although Treadwell was one of a minority as a female playwright, she certainly held her own as an individual artist. Even though her approaches to theatre were standard, she had unique experiences that set her apart from the majority of her theatrical peers. For example, she never affiliated herself with any major dramatic group of the time such as the Provincetown Players. Instead, she chose to work alone, sending finished drafts to potential producers and refusing to change her works to any great extent. Treadwell strove to write her plays and articles about topics which she deemed important whenever possible. All this was done despite the lack of social acceptance and popularity such topics often carried with them. In short, a multi-disciplinary approach to studying Treadwell’s works is necessary because she herself never limited her options to
one particular way of doing things. Journalism is the primary avenue of understanding chosen here with which to address Treadwell’s dramatic works. Treadwell maintained her job as a journalist throughout the entire time she wrote plays. This duality of writing is essential to understanding the full depth of her works.

Treadwell first showed an interest in theatre while attending college at the University of California at Berkeley from 1902 to 1906. She continued performing in plays and vaudeville, as well as writing her own plays over the next several years. In 1907, the actress Helena Modjeska hired Treadwell to type her memoirs at the actress’s home in Tustin, California. With encouragement from Modjeska, Treadwell marketed her play, The Right Man, to theatrical producers in New York. One producer felt particularly interested in the play, but he would have required some changes be made to the script. Upon hearing that, Modjeska firmly counseled the young playwright to never compromise her work for the sake of someone else’s opinion. That bit of advice had a powerful impact on Treadwell, shaping the way she approached work the rest of her life, both in journalism as well as theatre.

In 1908, Treadwell was hired as a journalist for the San Francisco Bulletin. Over the course of her time there she wrote a number of serials. She adapted one of her most popular serials into a one-act play entitled Sympathy, which proved to be enormously successful. The Bulletin later sent her to France as a war correspondent, and upon her return to the U.S., the New York American hired her. Treadwell continued writing plays in her spare time, but she soon recalled Madame Modjeska’s advice and realized that freelance journalism was the more suitable method to express her thoughts without compromising.
As a freelancer, Treadwell was hired by the New York Tribune to cover the Carranza Revolution, from which stemmed an exclusive interview with Pancho Villa. Upon her return home she wrote Gringo, and Guthrie McClintic produced it as Treadwell’s Broadway debut. Villa served as a basis for the character of the gentlemanly bandit both in Gringo as well as Treadwell’s later novel, Lusita. Although Treadwell did not completely abandon journalism following the production of Gringo, for the next twenty years Treadwell placed a greater emphasis on her work as a playwright. Other plays that discussed Mexican culture or carried Mexican themes included The Right Man (1908), Andrew Wells’ Lady (1913), La Cachucha (1918), Machinal (1928), The Last Border (1944), Judgement in the Morning (1952), and Garry (1954). Although these plays may not have been directly set in Mexico like Gringo, they incorporated Mexican references, traditions, stories, or folklore, as in Machinal.

Over the years, Treadwell also excelled at her coverage of murder trials, especially those with female defendants. After covering two such trials, Treadwell focused on several questions about the personal background of the defendants. When courtroom proceedings of the highly publicized Ruth Snyder-Judd Gray case commenced, Treadwell decided to attend the complete courtroom proceedings. However, she was not attending this trial as a journalist as she had in the past. Instead, she attended purely as a spectator. This case and the stories that unfolded around it immediately became the starting point for Treadwell’s most memorable play, Machinal, which was first produced in 1928.

The theme of women’s issues was especially important to Treadwell, and she wrote about these issues often. In almost every one of her plays, as well as her fiction.
there exists a strong woman who is fighting for self-determination and control over her world. This is particularly true in her plays *The Answer* (c. 1918), *Constance Darrow* (c. 1908-09), *For Saxophone* (1934), *Le Grand Prix* (c. 1906-07), *Ladies Leave* (1929), *A Man's Own* (c. 1905), *O Nightingale* (1925), *Rights* (1921), *The Settlement* (1911), *A String of Pearls* (1950), *Sympathy* (1915), *Three* (1936), and *To Him Who Waits* (c. 1915-18). With its popular, Everywoman-type character, however, *Machinal* stands above them all.

Although Treadwell continued writing both as a journalist and as a playwright, her level of success peaked in the 1920s. While she traveled extensively and wrote other newspaper stories, her articles did not have the attention-grabbing effect that they had in her early years with the *Bulletin*. Similarly, her playwriting suffered after *Machinal*. Though she wrote a number of plays throughout the rest of her life, her last show to be performed on Broadway was *Hope for a Harvest*. She wrote it first as a novel of the same title during the years 1938 and 1939. This work was instigated by her interest in the effects of the Depression on Californian farmers after her return from a steamer trip around the world in 1937. Treadwell studied the reports of other journalists, as well as noting the changes in the ranches surrounding her own Old Trees ranch in Stockton, California. When the Theatre Guild approached Treadwell, looking for a new vehicle for Frederic March and his wife, Florence Eldridge, Treadwell rewrote her unpublished novel into a three-act play, which the Guild produced in 1941. Although critics who viewed the out-of-town tryouts lavished compliments, New York critics generally disliked the play for issues ranging from structure and content to casting.
The Broadway production of *Hope for a Harvest* caused great bitterness for Treadwell, and its closing marked the beginning of her downward spiral. As Dickey points out, Treadwell began travelling more and writing less after that severe disappointment. Instead, she focused on rewriting her old plays and creating fictional accounts (Dickey 12). She and her adopted son, William, lived for a time in Torremolinos, Spain, but by 1965, she decided to move to Tucson, Arizona, because of her ailing health. While there, she worked on *Woman with Lilies*, a play she had started at the end of World War I. This play was produced at the University of Arizona under a new title, *Now He Doesn't Want to Play*, late in the summer of 1967. Local critics dismissed the play as a simplistic story line with underdeveloped, stereotypical characters (Wynn 236). It was the last of her plays Treadwell would see performed. She died in Tucson in 1970.

3. **Key Journalistic Terms of the Era**

This thesis will not attempt to present a complete recapitulation of journalism in the early nineteen hundreds. However, key terms and aspects of the trade prove significant for this project. These include understanding how a feature writer functioned in papers at the time, why and how serials drew such consistently high readership, and the distinct roles women were playing as sought-after serial writers, adventurers, hobbyists, and society page reporters. By understanding these background concepts, it is possible to identify how Sophie Treadwell existed within the overall framework of newspapers for which she worked.

In Treadwell’s early years as a reporter, the majority of newswomen were still relegated to the society pages, women’s club news, or serials. Serials were particularly
popular, as they had continuing story lines, usually with daily installments. In the 1900s and 1910s, “sob sisters” became prevalent in the newspapers. This nickname was given to female reporters who specialized in emotional accounts of trials or exposés. Often, the sob sisters would dress in costumes and assume various roles or identities in order to get a story (Beasley 118).

Suffrage battles became daily news as the passing of the nineteenth amendment and the 1920 granting of women’s suffrage drew nearer. With so many changes underfoot, publishers tired of adventurers and contrived news stories. Women found more and more desks in the nation’s city rooms, “strung with wires, desks jammed together, the air vibrant with excitement, to write fast copy to catch an edition” (Ross 125). Despite that increase in female reporters, very few of these women wrote articles for the front page or sported the coveted title “front page girls.” Those were the women who had been tested and proven equal to the tasks of tight deadlines and unwelcoming reception by their male counterparts. Sophie Treadwell found herself in the midst of these great trends of the time, and, with the help of her relatively open-minded editors, she had opportunities to compete for many consequential stories. Gradually, however, she developed a style of her own and claimed it as such, applying it to both her journalism and playwriting. That style was the documentary. Developing that style, Treadwell gleaned from her experiences as a sob sister the need to add an emotional appeal alongside real events.

4. Treadwell in the Footsteps of Other Women Journalists

Women reporters had been around since before the Civil War, but they were the exception rather than the norm. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women
journalists were slowly beginning to infiltrate news agencies across the country. In her 1936 book, *Ladies of the Press*, Ishbel Ross declared that there were nearly twelve thousand female editors, feature writers, and reporters at that time. However, Ross also notes that few of these women were writing for the front page, "which is still the critical test" (Ross 2). Seldom did they find themselves in the city room where the action was and where front-page stories were written. Instead, the woman's page, clubs, and social news provided a large portion of their work.

Treadwell received similar assignments at the beginning of her journalistic career. However, she was fortunate to have an editor at the *San Francisco Bulletin* who believed in developing talented young women into successful reporters. Under him, she covered a wide variety of topics from theatre to sports. Then, as she gained experience, she moved on to bigger, more important articles. She soon began interviewing celebrities, covering murder trials, and writing serials. Treadwell also excelled at writing feature articles. As women journalists gained ground in the newsrooms at the turn of the century, they were soon found to be particularly adept at such writing. Ross explains why:

But in the feature field they are hard to beat. They cover the town. They write with an interpretative touch. They put more emotion, more color, more animation into their work than the first-string girls. This is the special field for women. They get opportunities and they do it well.... They rarely have to bother with trivial events, but go from one major assignment to another. (Ross 4)
In short, feature writing and serials soon became recognized as the primary moneymaking opportunities for women. It was there, and not the front page, where the names of women reporters became familiar to the public.

5. Overview

Journalism played an integral role in Treadwell’s development as an artist. As a journalist she usually needed to concentrate on presenting the facts of stories according to the expectations of her editors, rather than as she wished. However, as an artist she controlled the manner in which she “reported” on her subjects. Through her concurrent practice of journalism and playwriting, Treadwell was able to achieve a unique balance. Her writing as a journalist taught her a new way to look at the world, and her dramatic writing allowed her the freedom to apply those principles to situations of her own design. To examine this aspect of Treadwell’s accomplishments, the thesis provides an overview of Treadwell’s career in journalism and separate analyses of *Gringo* and *Machinal*.

The first chapter focuses on Treadwell’s career in journalism, for it exists as the primary avenue of understanding into Treadwell’s dramatic works. Since she maintained her job as a journalist throughout the entire time she wrote plays, the two media naturally overlapped. This duality of writing is essential to understanding the full depth of her works. Her journalistic career influenced her plays and shaped them into commentaries for the times. Most often, her plays functioned retrospectively, offering observations on various social issues and events, without ever really contributing analyses. This chapter covers Treadwell’s beginnings in journalism that lead to her plays, followed by a more in-depth examination of her writings at the peak of her career. In particular, her reports
as a “sob sister” and war correspondent are described, as well as her coverage of murder trials and her most notable experiences in Mexico.

Chapter two uses Gringo as the primary focal point while discussing Treadwell’s coverage of Mexico. In 1920, she covered the Carranza Revolution in Mexico, followed by an interview with the newly elected president, Alvaro Obregon. She then went a step further by obtaining an exclusive interview with Pancho Villa, a leader of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. This experience inspired her to write the play Gringo, which was her first play produced in New York. This second chapter looks at Treadwell’s personal background with Mexico, followed by a detailed look at her major experiences as a journalist there. The bulk of the chapter then discusses Gringo, first from a dramaturgical perspective, and then in relation to the key issues Treadwell covered in her articles on Mexico. Finally, Treadwell’s continued interest in Mexico is presented.

Chapter three focuses on Machinal as an example of Treadwell’s application of stories usually covered by journalists to a play form. Treadwell had partially based the play on a number of trials and life stories that she had reported on as a reporter in New York. Machinal had undeniable timeliness for the American people in 1928, as they had recently been besieged with tabloid-like information on the Snyder case. Aside from serving as a touchstone to Treadwell’s journalism of the day, Machinal also pitted Victorian feminism against the “new” feminist agenda of the Jazz Age, thus serving as a strong commentary against the “old” feminism of a previous generation.

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In the past scholars have refrained from exploring Treadwell’s journalism to any large degree so they could focus on her playwriting. Since her dramatic works were what
set her apart from the majority of reporters, such choices were understandable and, in fact, quite necessary. However, since Treadwell is now becoming a recognizable name in the field of theatre history, the time has arrived when her career as a journalist can be further explored and brought to light. This thesis, while by no means an exhaustive study of Treadwell's journalism, proves that her research and writing for newspapers directly impacted her theatrical interests and career.
As a female journalist in the 1920s, Sophie Treadwell was certainly one of a new breed of reporters, both in her gender and reporting style. With an increasing number of women reading the newspaper, editors began shifting their coverage to appeal to women and to be written by women. While working for London’s Daily Mail in 1922, Tom Clark quoted the paper’s proprietor, Alfred Harmsworth, also known as Lord Northcliffe, regarding the reasons behind the success of his papers:

The old-fashioned stodgy papers were for men only. They ignored news of interest to women. Now we look out specially [sic] for it. Women are the greatest newspaper readers…. Don’t forget the women when you are framing your daily schedule. And don’t forget that they read every scrap of social news you can get, especially the names. They read serials too. Don’t be bluffed by journalists with only a man’s outlook. Read the woman’s page every day. (Clarke 274)
From Northcliffe's comments, today's readers can form a clearer picture of newspaper reporting of the time. More importantly for purposes of this paper, Northcliffe specified topics about which women reporters generally wrote: society news and serials.

Treadwell was no exception to this generalization at the beginning of her journalistic career. However, as her reputation grew, the depth and importance of her articles increased. Journalism shifted from being a job to sustain her as she wrote plays, to being a passion that ebbed and flowed alongside her playwriting. Thus, it soon became an important touchstone to Treadwell's dramatic works. As a journalist she had to report on the world in whatever ways her editors demanded. However, as an artist she had opportunities to "report" her subjects as she willed. It was through the cultivation of both types of interests that Treadwell was able to achieve a balance. Her reporting introduced her to new ways of looking at the world, and her playwriting allowed her to apply those principles to certain situations of her own design in order to achieve the greatest emotional and mental impact on the audience. By examining Treadwell's biographical and employment backgrounds and integrating that information with the previously discussed historical background of journalism in the 1910s and 1920s, the full impact that Treadwell had on the fields of theatre and journalism can be understood.

This chapter first describes Treadwell's early years, including her beginnings in journalism. Next, it investigates Treadwell's role as a "sob sister" including a definition and history of the term. It then examines Treadwell's two serials that best represent her sob sister reporting, "An Outcast at the Christian Door" and "The Story of Jean Traig: How I Got My Husband, and How I Lost Him." The third section elaborates upon her time as a war correspondent in Paris during World War I. After briefly discussing other
female war correspondents of the time such as Rheta Childe Dorr, that section focuses on Treadwell's trials and achievements. The chapter then explores the way in which Treadwell intertwined journalism and theatre, which resulted in a documentary style in her playwriting, foreshadowing the work of other artists such as John Steinbeck in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Finally, this chapter discusses the highpoint of Treadwell's journalism career upon her move to New York. This includes her coverage of murder trials as well as "scoops" in Mexico regarding the Obregonist revolution and an exclusive interview with the infamous bandit, Pancho Villa. In summary, this chapter examines Treadwell's reporting in light of contemporaneous journalistic trends and ties those journalistic interests to her playwriting.

1. The Early Years

Sophie Anita Treadwell, daughter of Alfred Benjamin and Nettie Fairchild Treadwell, was born October 3, 1885, in Stockton, California. After her parents separated when she was five, Treadwell primarily lived with her mother, staying with her father in San Francisco for only occasional periods of time. During one such time, her father took Treadwell to see the famed Polish actress, Helena Modjeska. Modjeska later became important to Treadwell's literary career as well as serving as the foundation for some of her plays' characters. Treadwell had a natural propensity for the arts and letters, making her first foray into theatre by acting in the 1901 senior class play, *The Chaperone*, at Girls' High School in San Francisco (Wynn 7). From that point on, theatre always played a primary role in her life, even though Treadwell also established a very successful career in journalism.
Throughout her years at the University of California at Berkeley, Treadwell participated in various amateur productions of plays as well as co-editing the women’s edition of *The Pelican*, the university’s humor magazine. She also served as the campus correspondent for the *San Francisco Examiner*. In addition to the already hectic schedule such activities demanded, Treadwell worked nights in the circulation department of the San Francisco *Call* during her senior year to help finance her education. The stress of all these commitments affected her health to the point that she wanted to drop out of college (Wynn 10). Despite difficulties, however, Treadwell did not drop out. Working at the *Examiner* and the *Call* provided interesting opportunities for Treadwell. San Francisco was a virtual hub of information, serving as the primary news source in the west and boasting six major newspapers. For Treadwell to take active, though relatively small, roles with two prominent publications was quite an accomplishment for a young woman in 1906.¹

Two one-act plays from her college years remain in her papers. In one of these, *A Man’s Own*, Treadwell created a character similar to herself—a young woman who strove to fulfill both her artistic leanings and her societal expectation to get married. Wynn comments that Treadwell “clearly yearned for a stage career but had trained herself for journalism” (15). However, since neither Treadwell’s high school nor college offered journalism or theatre classes, Wynn could only have been referring to Treadwell’s informal training she received while working at the *Examiner* and the *Call*.

¹ At that time, the role of newspaper journalism was shifting from being purely an information medium to a combination of that as well as a literary genre in the new, industrial society (Sims 4). That shift resulted in a shift in staffing as well. The Pacific Coast Women’s Press Association had been formed in San Francisco just the previous decade “to provide sorority for writers throughout the Pacific Coast states, as well as support for the advancement of women in journalism” (Yamane 189).
One reviewer of Treadwell's sophomore show at Berkeley made the following comment: “Though dramatic art has no place in the university curriculum, it can be seen that it has a warm place in the heart of the college student” (Overland Monthly 212). For whatever reasons, she graduated with a Bachelor of Letters degree with an emphasis in French.

After her entire class graduated in absentia due to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, Treadwell spent time as a teacher and governess in various areas of California, all the while writing plays and trying to break into theatre. She and her mother moved to Los Angeles, and after many auditions she finally got a job as a character singer. That job only lasted one week, however, before Treadwell was overcome by the conditions in which she was performing. Thus ended Treadwell’s dream of a life on the stage. However, her desire to become a playwright was still shaping her future.

While Treadwell had been auditioning, she was also sending copies of Le Grand Prix to theatre managers in hopes of it getting produced. One of these copies happened to be read by Constance Skinner, a former theatre critic who was then helping Helena Modjeska to write her memoirs at Modjeska’s home in Tustin, Orange County, California. Impressed with Treadwell’s work, Skinner hired her as her personal typist. When Skinner left California for a job in Chicago, she persuaded Modjeska to hire Treadwell as her typist. This proved to be an extremely important turning point in Treadwell’s life, for her relationship with Modjeska affected her approach to producers for the rest of her career. Though Modjeska encouraged her to send scripts to managers in New York, she advised the young playwright to never compromise her artistic integrity by making changes in her writing. Also, it was Modjeska who first encouraged
Treadwell to use a male pseudonym, as Modjeska felt that was the only way to garner the respect a playwright deserved. Treadwell also used pseudonyms as an actress and a journalist as well. Some of her names included Miss Stepgood, Mary West, Marion Stevens, Willia [sic] Williams, Millie Williams, Constance Eliot, and Alexander West (Wynn 25).

In July 1907, Treadwell left Modjeska’s home in Tustin and moved back to San Francisco to care for her ailing mother. For several months she continued working on her latest play, Constance Darrow, eventually beginning work as a free-lance theatre critic for the San Francisco Bulletin. She reviewed her first play on September 20, 1908, and a month later reviewed another play at the same theatre where, while sitting in a box with a number of other reporters, she met the man who would one day become her husband, William McGeehan.

Treadwell’s work load at the Bulletin soon increased, and she was hired full-time at the end of October 1908. Treadwell’s first assignment was a witty story about the abbreviations used in the new telephone directories, entitled “Hel=locoed [sic] Spelling in New Phone Book Will Set Your Buzzer Goin’[sic].” Although the story did not include her byline, she noted in a scrapbook next to it, “I got a regular job. My first story” (Treadwell “Hel=locoed”).

That article was then followed by a briefly-held responsibility for Treadwell to cover baseball games. Treadwell apparently did not feel she was quite qualified for such a job, as she kept this notation of commentator lingo, marked in her scrapbooks as “Sent to cover baseball—Alice helps out with a few ‘terms’”:
When batter is struck out: he wiffed. He found his way to the bench. He hit the ozone three times. He retired to the bench on strikes. He fanned. When batter is walked: he was ticketed to the initial sack. He was issued a free pass. He was given his base on balls. Second base is called the keystone sack. When they refer to third base they usually say that he will cavort around the difficult corner. Outfielders are usually called fly chasers. Pitchers are referred to in the following manner: Griffin will officiate for the Seals today. Griffin was on the mound. Griffin will do slab duty for the Seals today. (Misc. clipping from UALSC, MS 318, Box 7)

Treadwell’s first assignments included a wide variety of topics and angles. Though she started as a theatre critic, she quickly moved to the local room and the miscellaneous articles that assignment entailed, from humorous short articles to sports coverage.

2. Women Reading—Sob Sister Writing

Treadwell’s journalistic work soon increased in popularity and ability. She received assignments to write feature, or front-page, articles, as well as a few celebrity interviews. Judging from a number of letters to the editor regarding her work, the public enjoyed Treadwell’s writing for the Bulletin. However, after nine months there, she quit the Bulletin and began writing for the Daily News (Wynn 33). That position lasted only two months, being cut short by one of many nervous breakdowns for Treadwell. She had been plagued with similar health problems for years before, and such breakdowns continued for most of her life. In January of 1910, Treadwell married McGeehan, and
June and July of that same year she stayed in St. Helena Sanitarium to recover from another breakdown.

Health problems proved themselves common among early female reporters. When Fremont Older hired Virginia Brastow to be the Bulletin’s city editor, the men complained at first, “but such was their passion for Mr. Older that they were completely loyal to him on every point, even to accepting a woman city editor” (Ross 583). Older recognized the experimental nature of this new hire, especially since the Bulletin seemed to involve itself in every dispute and debate in San Francisco. Brastow persevered, but eventually her health collapsed from the stress, and she had to resign.

Concepts such as appointing a female city editor or writing sympathetic articles on the living conditions of prostitutes gave Older a reputation for supporting women’s rights. Indeed, Older spent much of his energy “discovering” new female reporters whom he felt had great futures ahead of them. He numbered Treadwell among his prodigies, thus joining her with the likes of Bessie Beatty, one of Older’s long-time reporters. Beatty led Older’s written campaign for prostitutes when police closed the red light district and later traveled to Russia to cover the Revolution. In Ishbel Ross’ 1936 book, Ladies of the Press, she described Older’s opinions of female reporters in general:

Mr. Older believed in women reporters to the last ditch. He thought they had more facility of expression than men, were diligent workers, could get anything they wanted. He deplored only one thing about them—that love sooner or later messed up their careers. (580)
As he did with Beatty, Older encouraged Treadwell to write on issues and events about which she felt passionately. This impacted not only her journalism but her playwriting and personal life as well.

Growing up watching her mother struggle to support the two of them after separating from Treadwell’s wealthy father resulted in Treadwell focusing on women’s rights. Two of Treadwell’s early plays dealt with grown daughters confronting their fathers who had abandoned them or ignored their existence. In 1914, she became a charter member of the Lucy Stone League, one of the leading groups of the suffragette movement. She completed a 150-mile march from New York City to the state legislature in Albany to deliver a petition for women’s right to vote. During her first year at the New York American, she had the opportunity to demonstrate her feminist point of view by writing reform articles. In these stories she sought for underprivileged groups such as abandoned children and prostitutes, drawing a great deal from her experience as a writer for the Bulletin to expose injustice.

Eventually, Treadwell started back at the Bulletin, writing weekly book reviews and occasionally reviewing plays for approximately two years. In 1913-14, Treadwell attained distinction for her celebrity interviews, including a very highly regarded piece on Jack London. Simultaneously, she covered her first of many murder trials. Treadwell was soon labeled a “sob sister” by her fellow journalists for her sentimental writing style about the cases. This was a title given to many female journalists of the time who specialized in emotional accounts of outrageous events:

[They] dressed up like beggars and waifs, feigned madness, and posed as servants in the homes of society figures to pursue exciting and scandalous
tidbits for their readers” (Beasley 111).

Such stunts likely explain why female reporters of the time have been described as “articulate, self-sufficient and committed, occasionally slightly eccentric, but very rarely dull” (Bennion 7).

Although Treadwell used the sob sister idea, she was not content to be solely held to this category. She wanted real information to truly report on each story completely. Professionally, Treadwell was promoted from one of a sea of low-level, local reporters to a serial writer. With a newspaper readership that consisted primarily of women, serials were becoming one of the most popular forms of stories. The serials had continuing story lines, usually with daily installments. Bulletin editor Older had recently enjoyed great successes with this increasingly popular style, particularly with the serial previously mentioned about the life of a prostitute. Before publishing this story, Older solicited the approval of the most influential women in San Francisco by approaching their social club. In doing so he thereby secured these women’s sympathy and the Bulletin’s success in the face of men’s outrage at what they considered scandalous reporting (Wells 259-260).

When Older later heard of a raid on a prostitution house which resulted in the women being taken to jail, fined, and then sent out on their own again, he wondered who would help them. He called in Treadwell, who had yet to write a long story, and commanded her to disguise herself as “a prostitute trying to escape the life. Go out, find help, get yourself saved!” (Wells 269). Though hesitant and extremely nervous, she did as Older instructed. As Evelyn Wells notes,

Sophie Treadwell went day after day to Christian homes, Christian
churches, Christian organizations, and Christian institutions. She was given a meal, advice, prayer, condemning looks, requests to depart—everything but a chance to make a living. (Wells 270)

Treadwell compiled her experiences and wrote “An Outcast at the Christian Door,” which proved enormously successful as a “sweeping expose of the hypocrisy in an allegedly Christian city” (Wells 271). The book editor for the Bulletin, Herbert Bashford, quickly turned the serial into a successful play (Wells 271). Treadwell later followed Bashford’s lead and turned her next serial into a one-act play. Outcast, therefore, not only launched Treadwell’s career as a journalist, but it also showed her the dramatic possibilities that existed in her work.

Following up on a hit like “Outcast” was no small task. Her next piece was “How I Got My Husband and How I Lost Him: The Story of Jean Traig.” Treadwell created the series based largely on her own experiences as a child and hopeful performer. Though Jean Traig was a fictitious character, the public was not aware of that at the time. Treadwell wrote a series of fifty-four articles, each often covering a full page, devoted to the story of Traig, a twenty-four-year-old woman alone in San Francisco. Treadwell’s premise was that one day, a stranger named Jean Traig had approached her, wanting to share her bizarre life story with the public through Treadwell. The Traig series traced the character from her arrival in the city to her marriage, divorce, stage career, and her final happy marriage. The series began November 28, 1914, and quickly became a popular favorite, running daily for two months.

When some members of the public began questioning the plausibility of the story, the Bulletin hired an actress to pose as Jean Traig for a photo shoot. Soon after the end of
the serial, Treadwell staged a one-act dramatization of the story. It was the first of Treadwell’s plays to be produced, and it starred the actress who had appeared in the publicity photos, listed in the program as “Jean Traig as Herself” (*Sympathy* program). Treadwell titled the one-act melodrama *Sympathy: The Unwritten Chapter*. It opened January 31, 1915, at the Pantages Theatre in San Francisco and ran for one week to capacity houses (Wynn 44). With *Sympathy*, Treadwell first recognized her ability to translate her own journalism reports to the stage. This experience planted a seed in Treadwell’s mind that continued to grow and develop over the years, most notably as a war correspondent in France.

3. At War

Treadwell’s reputation and following had grown so quickly with her serials that she easily convinced the *Bulletin* and *Harper’s Weekly* to send her to France to make serialized reports from the front lines of World War I (Wynn 44). Soon after her departure, Older wrote Treadwell to reiterate his confidence in her work, saying, “I don’t believe that there is an editor in America who would dare turn down anything that you write...” (Older letter). Women reporting on the war were few, which put Treadwell on par with the likes of Rheta Childe Dorr, who was the first female journalist officially accredited by the War Department as well as arguably holding the title of the “best-known World War I correspondent” (Beasley 140).

As one of an overwhelming gender minority, Treadwell discovered upon her arrival that women were not permitted near the action. Her male colleagues from other papers wrote letters to change the rule, and Treadwell acquired a safe-conduct pass which did not specify her profession, so she could travel freely “on personal business” and
continue writing articles to send back to the States (Wynn 45). In this, Treadwell’s access to stories surpassed even Dorr’s capabilities. However, even with the pass, she could not see the things she felt she needed to see to write. Ishbel Ross gave the impression that, discouraged, Treadwell turned to nursing for the remainder of her stay in France. However, it should be noted that Treadwell possibly began volunteering as a nurse to get closer to the action and for some reason chose not to report on her experiences.

Although Treadwell’s time in France was not the turning point of her career that she had hoped it would be, she did make important discoveries about the way she approached her career and writing in general. Her letters back to Older exemplify her constant comparison of journalism to theatre:

Then there is something else. As I go on living here day after day behind scenes in this big war theatre, a new point of view of war is beginning to grow in my mind. And it is a point of view with which I am afraid you hold little sympathy. . . .It is something like ‘the worthwhileness of war.’ . . .Of course I know enough to know about war’s savagery, its brutality, its devastation, its waste, its final futility. ---But there is something else, something that seems to awaken in the human heart, something tremendously strengthening and fine—something made up of devotion and sacrifice and endurance, courage and grit and acceptance, all raised to the highest power of emotional intensity.... (Letter from Treadwell to Older, 21 May 1915; Paris, France. MS 318 Box 10)
As Jerry Dickey points out, Treadwell consistently exhibited “a reciprocal relationship between theatre and journalism” (Dickey interview, 10 Jan 2001). She wanted to incorporate the theatricality of the events she was witnessing into her articles for the Bulletin. However, Treadwell knew her editor and his opinions well. She braced herself for Older’s response. Indeed, whether Older agreed with her viewpoint in theory or not, he did not waste any time before clearly demanding a quick change in her approach:

Dear Sophie:

Your stuff thus far has failed completely. I am sorry to say this so plainly to you. But no matter how much I might try to soften it, and explain it by indirection, it would come to that in the end...

...I received your personal letter, outlining your idea of the worthwhileness of war. Don’t undertake to develop that idea. There is nothing in it. It is the merest rubbish. Now, be your old self, and imagine you sit here in the local room, and imagine you are writing a story for today’s Bulletin, and cut out all irrelevant, inconsequential stuff, and write about the interesting things that you must be in the midst of. (Letter from Older to Treadwell, 5 June 1915. MS 318 Box 10)

She complied, and stayed in Paris for a total of four months. Although Treadwell’s work in France was far from renowned, it did provide background for several of her later plays.

4. Documentary, One Way or the Other

In both her playwriting and journalism, particularly her sob sister work, Treadwell applied a documentary style. This was a new approach during the 1910s, but it quickly garnered popularity through the 1920s and culminated in the 1930s. John Steinbeck
offered interesting journalistic parallels to Treadwell, particularly through his Depression-era novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*. William Howarth, in his article entitled “The Mother of Literature: Journalism and *The Grapes of Wrath,*” questioned why Steinbeck chose to write the story as a novel. In the 1930s, Steinbeck had gathered a vast amount of journalistic material in preparation to write a text-and-picture book about the migrant farmers of California with photographer, Horace Bristol. He could have written an important documentary or scholarly article on the plight of the “Okies,” but instead, he wrote a piece of fiction.

After providing an historical background of Steinbeck’s interactions with the migrant families of the Depression, Howarth came to an interesting conclusion. He argued that, like Treadwell, Steinbeck realized that he could not tell the full story he wanted to tell with the same impact and effect in an expository book as he could with a novel. Nevertheless, both Treadwell and Steinbeck used a documentary style to reach their audiences through their creative writing. Howarth defines the “documentary”:

*Documentary* is a term used since the 1920s to denote the wedding of reportage, the investigative methods of journalism and sociology, to new forms of mass-media imagery, especially photography.... The style tends to flourish in periods of grave social crisis, traumas that fracture public trust and arouse a clamor for indisputable facts. (55)

Howarth’s definition perfectly applies both to the works of Steinbeck during the Depression and Treadwell during the time of World War I. Both writers used investigative reporting styles to develop their stories; then they reformatted those tales
from the straight reports they had initially intended to more subjective accounts in novel and play forms, respectively.

This journalistic trend in documentary art overlapped expressionistic presentations of plays such as Treadwell’s *Machinal* and Elmer Rice’s *The Adding Machine*. Treadwell’s play *Machinal* is a prime example of the classic documentary style in both its conception and presentation. Though never confirmed, critics generally assume that Treadwell based the play upon the highly publicized Snyder-Gray murder case of 1927. Although Treadwell did not cover the story professionally, the murder and the historical background of its defendants fascinated her. Treadwell decided to write the play, emphasizing strong visual images created by the actors and technical elements, as commonly seen in documentaries of the day. Indeed, Treadwell applied the basic definition of documentary, “authenticity heightened by emotional appeal” to appeal to audiences of the day (Howarth 62).

5. At the Top of her Game

Upon her return to America in late August of 1915, the *New York American* hired Treadwell to write human interest stories. Her husband, William McGeehan, had been working in New York for *The Evening Journal* since January of that year, and Treadwell had made the difficult journey across the country several times to visit him before her trip to France. Interestingly, Treadwell and McGeehan continued to keep separate homes even after Treadwell relocated to New York.

She soon capitalized on her old label from San Francisco as she began covering murder trials under the title the “Sob Sister Series” (Wynn 47). Doing so, she went in-depth, covering not only the events of the trial itself, but also interviewing relatives and
giving historical background on the case, descriptions of the home, and stories on members of the jury (Wynn 47). Her editor, R. C. McCabe, wrote her, commenting on her coverage of the Mohr murder trial in Providence, Rhode Island: “Your stories have been uniformly excellent. They have attracted considerable attention in the office, and beyond doubt are the best stories printed in New York” (McCabe, Letter to Treadwell, 13 Jan 1916). Treadwell’s approach to murder coverage would aid her later, as she sat in on the proceedings of the 1927 Snyder-Gray case which spurred her to writer her greatest accomplishment as a playwright, Machinal.

At the end of that year with the American, the paper offered her a five-year contract. However, Treadwell wanted to focus more on her playwriting, so she left the American in 1916 and continued working as a free-lance journalist. Her diligence paid off in May of 1920, when she was granted interviews in Mexico with the newly elected President Obregon as well as the notorious yet private leader of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa. Upon her return home Treadwell wrote her play, Gringo, incorporating some of her experiences from Mexico and basing the character of Tito, the bandit chieftain, on Villa. Years later, in 1931, she used Villa for a similar character in her novel, Lusita. Treadwell’s experiences provided her with expert status on Mexico and led to various feature articles on the country throughout her life.

In his summary of Steinbeck’s masterpiece, Howarth concludes that The Grapes of Wrath “melded idea and fact, invention and reporting...[and] endures as literature because it sprang from journalism, a strong and vibrant mother” (78-79). The same could be said for Treadwell’s works. Her journalism was an integral part of her playwriting. Treadwell was a self-made playwright—writing, rewriting, and polishing her scripts in
preparation for production. Since the days when journalists like Jack Reed cavorted with Eugene O’Neill and the Provincetown Players, the connections between fiction and playwriting have seemed obvious. However, Treadwell unwittingly placed herself at the cutting edge of the reality-based fiction trend of the time, joining Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell as one of a new breed of journalists to actually write plays for Broadway as well.
CHAPTER 3

GRINGO

Mexico's history and culture played integral roles in shaping Sophie Treadwell's careers as a journalist and playwright. As a popular young journalist, Treadwell was chosen to travel to Mexico to cover the escape and subsequent assassination of President Venustiano Carranza from an uprising led by one of his own generals, Alvaro Obregon. Her coverage proved so descriptive and accurate that even the Mexican reporters looked to her work for guidance and cited her reports. After playing such an integral role in chronicling that significant event in their country, the Mexican government offered Treadwell an exclusive interview with the newly instated President Obregon, thus scooping all of her fellow journalists—Mexican and American, male and female.

Approximately a year later, after much effort on her part, Treadwell landed an interview with someone that overshadowed everything she had covered to that point: Pancho Villa, the legendary Mexican "bandit" and folk hero. Her interview with Villa impacted her strongly, and she began writing Gringo soon after she returned home.
Gringo became her first play produced on Broadway. She based the character of Tito el Tuerto on her sense of Villa’s persona as the “gentlemanly bandit.”

This chapter presents Treadwell’s personal background with Mexico, including her genealogy and Spanish linguistic talents. The second part describes Treadwell’s experiences in Mexico in reference to their effect on her journalism. The section then examines Treadwell’s coverage of Carranza’s flight, how other journalists gleaned information from Treadwell, and how this story led to her well-acclaimed series of articles on Mexican culture and history. Finally, the circumstances behind Treadwell’s interviews with Obregón and Villa are discussed.

The third section focuses on Gringo. First, a dramaturgical look at the production history, including brief summaries of the plot, character, and critical reaction is provided. Then the main points of the play are related to Treadwell’s articles and series. This entails focusing on the primary issues of Mexican life and culture after the Carranza Revolution, the institution of marriage in Mexico at the time, and the shifting roles of women in the 1920s. Finally, a brief synopsis of Treadwell’s continued interest in Mexico after the production of Gringo is presented.

1. Raised with Mexico

Discussion of Treadwell’s background with Mexico actually starts with her father. After he was orphaned at age four, Sophie Treadwell’s father, Alfred, continued living in his parents’ California home under the care of his grandmother, Dona Viviana Evara of Mexico. She died four years later, when he was eight, and Alfred was taken to Mexico, where he was raised and educated, studying primarily romance languages and English in college. Upon graduation he taught at a college in Culiacan, Mexico, for two years
before returning to San Francisco in 1876, where he opened a language school and
founded La Republica, a newspaper that he eventually sold to the Mexican consul.

Alfred Treadwell married Nettie Fairchild in 1884, and their daughter Sophie was
born the following year. Although Alfred Treadwell never constituted much of a
presence in his daughter’s life, both his ancestral line and propensity for languages made
a strong impact on Sophie Treadwell. Her studies at Berkeley greatly resembled her
father’s course of language study, focusing on French, Italian, German, and what soon
became most important: Spanish.

In 1920, Treadwell was working for The New York Herald Tribune as a free-lance
war correspondent, a title she retained from her work in France during World War I.

Having grown up on a ranch in Southern California, in addition to being the great-
granddaughter of a Mexican woman, Treadwell had long been interested in Mexico and
its culture. So, when news broke of the Obregonist uprising in Mexico and the
mysterious flight of President Don Venustiano Carranza, Treadwell was the obvious
choice for the position of special correspondent. Her editor assigned her to write a
feature, or front-page report on what became known as the Carranza Revolution.

Treadwell agreed to send her long, detailed articles back to the paper whenever possible,
and as communications between America and Mexico were blocked for the time, the
assignment was no small task. However, Treadwell was able to send her stories with a

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1 In an autobiographical article Treadwell once commented, “The first thing I remember of my father is that he wasn’t there” (Treadwell, The Story, n.p.). Alfred Treadwell was rarely home, and by the time Sophie was in fifth grade, her parents had separated. Though they intended to divorce, Nettie Treadwell could not go through with it. Alfred agreed to provide financial support, but that soon waned over the years, despite his own continual increase in financial stability as he held a variety of legal positions on both the city and state levels. His contact with his daughter was sporadic, at best, and although some of her early plays dealt with daughters forcefully confronting negligent fathers, the bitterness that she held towards him in her youth seemed to lessen over the years.
female friend of hers who was returning to the United States. She had instructions to mail it by special delivery to Treadwell’s husband, William McGeehan, and the result was “a beat to which McGeehan still refers with pride” (Unsourced UALSC).

On the morning of May 7, 1920, twenty-six trains composed of approximately four hundred railway cars and stretching over three miles slowly moved out of Mexico City towards Vera Cruz. Mexican President Don Venustiano Carranza and the rest of his government officials and their families—as well as all the government’s gold, silver, and copper coins and bars, all of its postage stamps, and equipment for printing the nation’s money—was aboard those trains. There were also over eight thousand soldiers and their wives and children, as well as a car for ladies of pleasure (“Carranza’s Weird Flight…” 51). They were attempting to flee from Mexican revolutionaries who were preparing to invade the capital as the trains pulled away. General Alvaro Obregon, former member of Carranza’s government, led the revolutionists.

Two days after the government had deserted Mexico City, Obregon triumphantly marched into the capital. The trains were still slowly moving farther away, reportedly suffering not only from Obregonist attacks but lack of water, broken brake lines on the trains, and black pepper instead of black powder for their guns. The chase went on for an exhausting week, during which time reporters repeatedly noted Carranza’s impenetrable calm. The escape ended with the murder of President Carranza, though no one ever determined the culprit. Obregon was declared to be the new president and continued in that capacity for four years.
Other papers and newsagents reporting on these events often quoted Treadwell in their reports. For instance, *The Literary Digest* offered Treadwell's account of the scene in its coverage:

Almost sixteen thousand persons finally entered those trains, and of the sixteen thousand all were uneasy, wondering whether or not they should have set forth, asking themselves if the 'old man' [Carranza] was going to make it this time as he did once before. ("Carranza's Weird Flight..." 51)

In a letter to Treadwell dated January 4, 1921, a Mexican acquaintance of Treadwell's who signed his correspondence simply as Mario T., commented on the way other American reporters covered the revolution, saying that their work was limited to simply copying the hastily written articles from the Mexican press. He then reminded Treadwell that her colleagues from other papers in Mexico came to her "an infinite number of times to obtain reports to transmit to their newspapers" (T., Mario 2).

Government officials soon granted Treadwell an exclusive interview with President Obregón. This was his first private interview since his ascension as Mexico's leader, thus providing Treadwell with her first scoop on not only the local and national reporters, but the international press as well. Most significantly, Obregón outlined his opinions and policies on relations between Mexico and the United States, as well as his plans to develop those ties over the coming years.

The exact reason behind Obregón choosing Treadwell is not known, but there are a few main possibilities. First, Treadwell proved herself reliable and trustworthy to the government officials through her desire to accurately depict the state of affairs during that tenuous time of political unrest. Also, her family ties to and obvious affinity for Mexican
culture in general was obvious. However, the most probable and generally accepted reason was that Obregon simply did not trust newspapermen, but in the days before professional women were widely respected, he deemed her harmless.

2. An Interview with Villa

When Treadwell returned to New York, the Tribune reassigned her almost immediately to return to Mexico. This time, however, she was not to report on political uprising or new governmental officials. Instead, she was assigned to obtain what no one else could, an interview with the infamous revolutionary, Francisco “Pancho” Villa:

This first authentic interview with Francisco Villa was obtained by ST, the Tribune correspondent who sent out from Mexico the first story of the flight of Carranza... This story of Villa, the most picturesque figure of modern Mexico, reveals a Villa hitherto a stranger to the American press. The author’s acknowledgment is due to Eduardo John Wedemeyer, of Monterey, Mexico, the friend ‘de confianza’ of Villa, who made this long-desired interview a reality. (Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”)

The Obregon government had arranged for Villa to retire to a secluded area of Chihuahua, so remote that no other reporters could find him. Even the American General John Pershing, who had led a punitive expedition to Mexico against Villa the year before Pershing was appointed commander of the American Expeditionary Force in WWI Europe, could not locate the former revolutionary. However, Treadwell finally managed to trump all those who had tried before her, and she was granted an exclusive interview with Villa.
Villa’s ranch was called Canutillo, and Treadwell described its location as “far off in the hills of Durango,” in Chihuahua (Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”). Villa allowed Treadwell to stay on his ranch for four days, talking with her and showing her around his homestead. When the time came for Treadwell to write her story, she approached it as she did with most of her feature stories, carefully describing Villa’s appearance and demeanor before anything else:

He says even the simple phrases of everyday politeness in a strange, resonant voice of heavy timbre, but placed high in his head. It is difficult to describe Villa’s voice. It has an even, singing quality and seems to come from far off, to be detached; something like Ethel Barrymore’s—only booming and powerful.

He sighed. And here I got my next impression of Villa, the one that was to grow stronger, the impression of great, of profound sadness. (Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”)

Basically, Treadwell related her experience in a simple manner, as she would have recorded detailed journal entries, expressing her opinions and feelings while trying to describe others’ as well. Moreover, she did this while expounding on how her new, first-hand relationship with Villa compared with pictures of him she had seen in the past, as well as her knowledge of his reputation in general. By sharing this process of correcting previous misjudgments, Treadwell hoped to lead by example, better informing American readers about Mexicans and breaking down stereotypes.

During their time together Villa seemed to enchant Treadwell with his intriguing blend of danger and gallantry. During her time with Villa, he proved himself to be the
consummate gentleman, although she was continuously reminded that he was still to be remembered as “Villa the terrible” (Wynn 73). Treadwell made no secret in her writing of her positive impression of the man to whom most people commonly referred as a “bandit.” She wrote of Villa’s patriotism for Mexico and his desire to live on his ranch and work the land, rather than “squander the profits of former power” (Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”):

And I, for one, feel that his talents are being wasted. I, for one, feel that in spite of his ignorance, his profound ignorance, he has great gifts, extraordinary gifts, gifts amounting to genius—for organization, for order, for command. This and a supreme instinct for handling common men.

I can see him at the head of a national organization of rurales, or mounted police, making Mexico to its furthest sierra safer to travel in than Central Park at noonday—yes—by a whole lot.

I, for one, know of no man to whose integrity to protect and to whose power to defend I would more confidently entrust either my money or my life.

Viva Villa! (Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”)

Indeed, Treadwell’s outspokenness on her impressions of Villa left no question in readers’ minds as to her opinion of this infamous leader. In four days Treadwell had become Villa’s greatest advocate. In a letter dated November 25, 1921, Villa gratefully acknowledged Treadwell for the “very fine attention” that she paid him on their visit (Villa, UALSC, MS 318, Box 6). In that letter he also thanked her for the seeds and Colt
.45 pistol she sent him after her return to America, for which Villa had written to arrange payment. Not long after Treadwell’s receipt of that letter, Villa served as a basis for the character of the gentlemanly bandit in *Gringo*.

3. From Villa to *Gringo*

After Treadwell’s extraordinary experiences reporting from Mexico, she felt impressed to further explore the rich cultural history of Mexico in the form of a play. More specifically, Treadwell addressed the issue of American-Mexican relations against the backdrop of an American prospector’s mine in Mexico. With such a setting, Treadwell also took the opportunity to discuss other timely issues that were of a personal interest to her, such as the differing concepts of marriage in Mexico and America and the roles of women in both countries. Treadwell’s depiction of stereotypes held by Mexicans for Americans and vice-versa also aided her in exposing what she deemed to be unjust opinions on both sides.

*Gringo* opens with the miner’s half-breed daughter, Besita Chivers, telling Leonard Light how General Guitierrez, the chief of arms, was killed the previous night in a fight over a girl. Bessie leaves, and Len, the American draft-dodger, starts explaining the concept of socialism to the young native boy, Paco, who hangs on his every word. As the play continues, the characters’ goals, ideals, and relationships unfold to reveal a group of people trying to determine who they are and who they want to become in the context of their changing and overlapping worlds.

Light is a former journalist who moved to Mexico with his wife, Myra, to avoid the draft into World War I. Although he quickly gained work at Chivers’ ore mine, he refuses to work because he considers it too “bourgeois” for him and his socialist views
(Treadwell *Gringo* 1:5). Instead, he spends his time reading and quoting from the books he and Myra brought with them. Myra, on the other hand, is a strong, independent woman who is frustrated with her husband’s placement of philosophizing ahead of working. When Steve Trent, an American assayer, comes to town to affirm the presence of gold in Chivers’ ore mine and determine its worth, he and Myra fall in love. This situation eventually forces Myra to choose between a previous commitment and true love.² Love wins out, and Myra leaves her husband to start a new life with Steve.

Other main characters include Don Juan Chivers, an American who had owned the mine in Guerrero for the past twenty years. He had a child named Bessie with a Mexican woman about four years into his tenure there. Bessie, age sixteen at the time of the play, is torn within herself between her father’s desire for her to go to Bryn Mawr in America and stay in Mexico and be with those whom she loves and considered family. The character most recognizable to the American people was Tito el Tuerto; the gentlemanly bandit played by Jose Ruben.

As previously mentioned, Treadwell clearly based the character of Tito on her impressions of Villa. Tito is the older brother of Paco, Leonard’s young disciple. He is also the true husband of Concha, Chivers’ common law Mexican wife. Upon Tito’s entrance, we learn that it was he who killed General Gutiérrez the night before. He needs to escape, and he wants 1,000 pesos from Chivers in return for his leaving and never attempting to take Concha away again.

² Myra made her choice in the original version of the play, as seen on opening night. As will be discussed later, this ending was cut due to critical reaction. The play then ended with Bessie leaving Chivers and following Tito into the mountains.
Although Villa probably never experienced such a situation, Tito’s mannerisms, sense of honor, and his words determine the parallels to the infamous villain. Like Villa, Tito believed that the “formalities must be fulfilled in all things!” (Treadwell *Gringo* III:13). So, after Steve gives Tito his requested 20,000 pesos ransom money, Tito has his captain write out a receipt for Steve and Tito to sign. Tito then also offers the Americans his blankets for their covering during their long journey back to the city. Most obvious, however, are the similarities between Tito’s and Villa’s words. After Tito informs Len that if he is not ransomed, Tito will have to shoot him, Len threatens that “there’ll be nothing left for you but the mountain tops the rest of your life!” (III:5). To this Tito responds with a shrug, “Then there’ll be nothing left to me, but what I like most—the mountain tops!” (III:5). Villa made an almost identical statement during his interview with Treadwell:

I remember, on a day during the revolution, I came across a newspaper in a deserted rancho. It said in big letters: ‘Nothing is left to Villa but the mountain tops.’ I roared with laughter at those reporters. ‘Nothing is left to Villa.’ I said to myself: ‘But what he likes best, the mountain tops.’

(Treadwell “A Visit to Villa”)

Treadwell’s almost direct quote from Villa offers positive proof that Pancho Villa served as the basis for the character of Tito el Tuerto.

*Gringo* was Sophie Treadwell’s first foray onto the New York stage, and the second professional directing credit for Guthrie McClinic, whose perfectionism later made his shows known for their “overall shape and polish” (Wilson 247). Although critics generally liked McClinic’s directing and the acting, the script itself resulted in
mixed reviews. *Gringo* opened at the Comedy Theatre on December 18, 1922. Many criticisms from the opening night performance resulted in Treadwell changing the ending. Instead of seeing Len and Steve trying to win Myra's heart, Treadwell ends the show with Bessie leaving her father to follow Tito into the mountains, even carrying Tito's saddle-bags for him. Percy Hammond, critic for the *New York Tribune*, felt that the new ending made the play "smoother and more direct" (Hammond, n.p.). As did most critics, Hammond lavished praise on Jose Ruben as Tito, as well as the other actors. He also complimented Treadwell for providing Ruben more than the stereotypical Mexican villain role, but a "picturesque study of a malevolent, humorous flaunting and at times ridiculous buccaneer" (Hammond, n.p.). He then continued praising Treadwell's characterization of Tito in his "grim gracefulness of language and a conquering way with women—velvet words with iron meanings" (Hammond, n.p.).

On the negative side, one reviewer felt that Treadwell had committed a great injustice by striving for historical accuracy rather than using that opportunity to avenge what he felt to be past wrongs:

> Here was a superlative chance to "get" a Mexican bandit and thereby make amends for that conspicuous failure in "getting" Villa, to mention only one instance. Just as everybody got set for the pursuing Americanos to begin dropping bombs on the bandit lair from an airplane or something, in walked the Gringos, meek as lambs, and they turned over 20,000 pesos in pure gold. (Craig, n.p.)

Although he conceded that the story was indeed following a precedent, he argued that the audience would have left the theatre far happier if Treadwell had "inspired somebody to
take a pot shot at the villain as he sneered his way off-stage, followed by the half-caste American girl” (Craig, n.p.).

Another critic seemed condescendingly amused at Treadwell’s apathy for popular public opinion:

Why, here this woman has a play which mixes up natives and immigrant Americans beyond the Rio Grande, and she actually seems to prefer the Mexicans. We do not pretend to regard her greasers as embodying our ideals of social conduct, but we must say we like them rather better than her gringo[sic]…. Very unfashionable of her. Really, we despair of Miss Treadwell’s ever writing a great popular success. (Woolcott, unsourced UALSC)

Despite critics’ lukewarm responses, Treadwell persevered. She never wrote for the critics; she wrote for herself and her audiences. Nor had she forgotten the advice that Mme. Modjeska had given her so early in her career never to change her work for someone else and compromise her artistic integrity.

4. Aims and Issues Persevere

Years later, after producing her play *Hope for a Harvest*, Treadwell spoke of her use of playwriting in order to “crusade” against that which “stunned me, shocked me, gave me no rest” (Treadwell “I Remembered”). Treadwell’s desire to alter the typical depictions of Villa and Mexico as a whole constituted just such a crusade for her. Again, her words in defense of *Hope for a Harvest* could easily have been said for *Gringo* as well:

They say I preach and use a pointer—and I do. That’s what I wrote the
play for: to point. They say I don’t solve anything, and I don’t. I can’t. I don’t even pretend to. They say the talk is commonplace. And it is. But thousands of Americans have recognized this talk...even New York Americans. (Treadwell “I Remembered”)

Treadwell certainly could be termed a crusader. She brought up issues for public discussion that easily could have been ignored until the public forgot about them entirely. And although she never tried to solve the world’s problems single-handedly, she worked hard to encourage people to work together and effect change.

In Gringo Treadwell explored a number of issues on which she had previously touched in her articles for the New York Herald Tribune. These included the rise of socialism in Mexico, the state of the institution of marriage at that time, and, finally, the shifting roles of women in society. These issues proved themselves key topics as the decade of the 1920s continued. Socialism became a popular cause among artists and intellectuals, and women’s roles in marriage and rights in general were changing dramatically as they were empowered by the vote and all the freedoms that came with it.

Treadwell felt impressed to use Gringo as a forum to discuss the pros and cons of socialism, the political and economical theory advocating government ownership rather than private ownership of goods and services. Treadwell often stated that she considered herself a socialist, despite a friend’s comment that it would be impossible for her to ever survive as a socialist. This personal interest led Treadwell to further investigate the role of socialism in Mexico a few years after the Carranza Revolution, citing two articles in what was then Mexico’s new constitution. Article 27 nationalized the land and its subsoil products, oil in particular, while Article 123 delineated labor rights. Both of these
articles were considered “Bolshevik” or “red” because of their insistence on government control over human and natural resources (Treadwell “Land for Indian” 8). Gringo includes the character of Leonard Light, the American expatriate who spends his time expounding on the advantages of a society in which socialism rules. He is described as having “made his living working on a local newspaper, and dabbling in socialistic propaganda until the outbreak of the war” (Treadwell Gringo I:1). Interesting to note is that Treadwell chose a very unlikable character to embody what had been her own personal beliefs and values for so long. This marked an important shift for Treadwell from thinking as a group to thinking as an individual. Indeed, those beginning questions of socialism would not be answered convincingly for many years, when Treadwell traveled to Russia for a tour of Machinal and became quickly disillusioned by the communist state realized in that context.

The institution of marriage also suffered the blows of social analysis through Treadwell’s eyes. Treadwell had married William McGeehan in 1910, ten years before writing Gringo. Even in marriage, Treadwell never stopped fighting for more rights for women. She broke the social norm by keeping a separate address apart from her husband, even when they both lived in New York. Journalistically speaking, Treadwell addressed marriage when writing “Jean Traig,” her coverage of murder cases, and even when describing the women who aided in the flight of Carranza. Regardless of circumstance, the woman who was true to herself, never doing something simply because it was expected by her husband, always played the heroine in Treadwell’s writings. This fiercely independent spirit advocated love and happiness above all, as seen by both Myra’s and Bessie’s choices in Gringo.
Though Myra continually tries to encourage Len to work at his job and pay attention to her, he keeps his needs at a higher priority than hers. When Steve comes along and treats Myra as a social and intellectual equal, she can not help but fall in love with him. Although she struggles with these feelings of unfaithfulness to her husband, in Treadwell’s original script they win out, and Myra leaves Len for Steve, placing her needs above her previous commitment for the first time. Bessie also makes an important, life-altering change for love. She follows after Tito into the mountains, leaving her beloved father who had dreamed of sending her to America to attend Bryn Mawr. Her reasoning is simple:

BESITA. I don’t care! I’ve never been happy in my life before! And here I am! I love to lie out under the sky! And I love Tito and I!

CHIVERS. What are you saying?

BESITA. I don’t care! I love him! I love him!

CHIVERS. But you told me it was Steve!

BESITA. [. . .] I was so unhappy maybe I did think about Steve when he came! But I don’t any more! He didn’t care anything about me!

Nobody did! And you were all always talking and talking! But Tito!

Tito took me in his arms and— (Treadwell Gringo III:20)

Such a position was not often depicted on the stage, and it foreshadowed a new breed of women referred to as the Jazz Babies to be discussed in the next chapter.

Finally, the shifting role of women in society as a whole inspires great dialogue. Treadwell’s participation in the Lucy Stone League just prior to the passing of the eighteenth amendment had an enormous impact on her. Treadwell’s advocacy did not
stop with her personal interests. She used her journalism to increase the public’s awareness of misrepresented groups such as Mexicans, and then she turned to her plays to explore those groups on a smaller, more specific, scale, such as the roles and duties of women.

Myra offered the primary example of the shifting role of women. She had been raised to follow Victorian morality, believing that a commitment could not be broken. Since the greatest commitment was marriage, it was obvious that no woman could leave her husband, regardless of how miserable they were. Although Len often spoke of thinking and acting for oneself and developing one’s own thought processes, he constantly quoted portions from books to Myra, belittling women and/or her role of dutiful wife as compared to his position of husband. Also, Myra mentioned to Steve at one point how much it hurt her “when Len let’s [sic] me see I’m outside” (Treadwell Gringo II.19).

Myra’s situation was not an uncommon one for the American women at the time. She was torn between following Victorian rules of decorum and breaking out into her own world of freedom and self-fulfillment. In a sense, she really was being “selfish,” as Len had accused her, when she would not follow him to bed when he wanted her (Treadwell Gringo II.19). However, Myra’s guilt for selfishness lay in her desire to place her diminishing self-worth higher in importance than sheer obedience, and begrudged obedience at that.

In summary, the issues that Treadwell probed were prominent topics of the day. The rise of socialism in Mexico, the state of the institution of marriage at that time, and the shifting roles of women in society proved to be key issues in the 1920s. Treadwell’s
ability to adapt the stories of those about whom she reported to characters in her plays proved to be Treadwell’s key to success as a playwright. Although Gringo won no awards, it did draw Broadway audiences, which, then as now, was no small feat.

Herald Tribune later asked her to return to Mexico and write a series of articles on Mexican politics and culture in 1924. The series, entitled “The Mirage of Mexico,” included nine daily installments. The paper ran the first article on the front page, with the following stories on the inside, usually on page eight. Key topics for the series included: the newly elected President Calles, who replaced Obregon; his election and potential difficulties; the rise of socialism in Mexico; the fight for Mexico’s oil; the country’s labor problem; the Mexican army; and the outlook for the Mexican natives. Years later, in 1942, Treadwell spent ten months in Mexico City as a correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune before returning to California.

In summary, Sophie Treadwell’s love for Mexico’s language and history aided her greatly in her dual careers of journalist and playwright. Her mastery of the Spanish language and empathy for the Mexican culture prepared her for her groundbreaking coverage of the flight of President Carranza in 1920. Those reports proved her trustworthy, so the new Obregonist government rewarded her with an international scoop: the first interview by President Obregon. Despite this great success, Treadwell still felt compelled to top that story. She succeeded the following year when she met with the infamous Pancho Villa on his ranch in the mountains of Mexico. Treadwell was so charmed by Villa’s gallantry that she used him upon whom to base the character of Tito
in what became her first Broadway play, *Gringo*. This was not to be the only time Treadwell would base a play on her journalism, however. Six years later, after having a second Broadway show in 1925 with *O Nightingale*, Treadwell’s *Machinal* hit the stage and caused a flurry of excitement over its striking parallels to the recent Snyder-Gray murder case that had been filling tabloids for a year.
CHAPTER 4

MACHINAL

During the early years of her career, Sophie Treadwell wrote about a wide variety of celebrities, from Sarah Bernhardt to Pancho Villa. However, her reports as a staff writer on murder cases with female defendants obviously had one of the strongest impacts on her, both emotionally and creatively. Indeed, she drew directly from these cases as well as the infamous Snyder-Gray case as she wrote Machinal, which is generally considered to be her greatest play. It is this play which helped modern historians to recuperate Treadwell’s work, with particular attention to the feminist material in her plays. However, too often overlooked is the strong feminist critique present in her journalism as well.

This chapter begins with an overview of two major murder trials which Treadwell covered as a young journalist. These included the cases of Leah Alexander and Elizabeth Mohr, both accused of killing the men whom they once loved. These cases are followed by an examination of the Ruth Snyder case. Although Treadwell did not cover the latter trial in an official position, it certainly inspired her and formed the background for her
most commercially successful play, Machinal. The second section of the chapter focuses primarily on the play Machinal, itself. It presents a brief plot summary, followed by a production history that focuses on the artistic styles of the director and the set designer for Machinal. The critical reaction further establishes the use of the term expressionism while drawing parallels between Treadwell’s play and Living Newspapers as well as Elmer Rice’s The Adding Machine.

The third section then relates Machinal to Treadwell’s journalistic coverage of crimes similar to the one described in Machinal. Specifically, it explores the mental and emotional background of the defendants in such cases by examining Snyder’s personal statement as well as a psychologist’s description from a Freudian perspective. Importantly, this section concludes by reasserting the fact that Treadwell did not base Machinal on the Snyder case alone. It reviews the traditional literary influences that result in our feeling shocked at the possibility of such crimes, then cites Treadwell’s own description of her basic idea upon starting to write her play.

The fourth section examines the feminist critiques present in both of Treadwell’s chosen writing styles. It begins by defining Treadwell’s approach to the women’s movement and women’s rights. Then it continues by categorizing her writing alongside materialist feminism, citing both Treadwell’s personal experience with what is termed “social crisis” as well as the Young Woman’s experience with the same phenomenon.

The chapter concludes by summarizing the role of journalism in Treadwell’s creation of Machinal. Indeed, journalism serves as a key point of understanding Sophie Treadwell’s dramatic works. The two forms of writing with which Treadwell expressed herself were quite different. However, it was nothing less than just such a difference that
allowed her to express the full spectrum of her interests and opinions. Treadwell’s job as a journalist put her in touch with the most current news and issues. Although she could not freely expound on her own opinions in her articles or serials, her playwriting offered her free reign. She experimented with a variety of genres and story lines in her plays, but key themes such as women’s rights; racism and marriage certainly recurred often.

By examining this duality of writing, it is easily discovered how Treadwell’s experiences and opinions about the events on which she reported influenced her dramatic works, particularly that of *Machinal*. Treadwell often covered stories about the persecution of people, particularly women. Therefore she developed a natural interest in such stories and could not help but, like the rest of America, get caught up in the Snyder-Gray case as it unfolded. She then disclosed her personal opinions on the case and others like it by writing *Machinal*. In this way, with *Machinal* as well as with other of her plays, Treadwell was able to balance her life by turning journalism and playwriting into complementary careers.

1. Early Trial Coverage

Treadwell covered her first murder story in 1914. The young Leah Alexander was tried and found guilty of killing J. D. Van Baalen. Van Baalen had been having an affair with Alexander for the several years previous, physically abusing her most of that time. One day, Alexander walked into the advertising office where he worked and shot him. Although it was generally assumed that Alexander murdered her lover as retaliation for his abuse, she reportedly seemed oblivious to her actions at the time. Thus, no one could ever determine a conscious motive for the act. Jerry Dickey cites one of Treadwell’s articles for a description of Alexander’s case:

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Next Tuesday morning, before Judge Dunne, a woman—young, handsome and radiant with health—goes on trial for her life. This thing is coming towards her, silent, powerful, inexorable. (Dickey 119)

Dickey notes this example of Treadwell’s journalism as foreshadowing the Young Woman’s plight in Machinal.

In 1916, Treadwell covered a second highly publicized murder trial. When Elizabeth Mohr discovered the infidelity of her husband, Dr. C. Franklin Mohr, with their maid, Emily Burger, this prompted her to plot his murder and Burger’s maiming. The Providence, Rhode Island, woman was accused and found guilty of paying three African-American men, including her chauffeur, to commit the crimes. Treadwell’s coverage of the trial was greatly praised by her editor on the New York American: “Your stories have been uniformly excellent. They have attracted considerable attention in the office, and beyond doubt are the best stories printed in New York” (McCabe). This coverage of the Mohr trial again raised questions in Treadwell’s mind about how young, presumably intelligent and refined women could commit violent crimes. As she attempted to answer those questions in her articles, she added a depth and thoughtfulness that made her work stand apart from that of other court reporters.

Despite Treadwell’s examination and probing efforts to understand and even empathize with those young murderesses, she still had one burning question left to answer: What drove these otherwise-ordinary women to kill the men they had once loved? Eleven years after the Mohr trial, Treadwell had the opportunity to re-explore that question as she sat in on one of the most controversial murder cases of her time: the Snyder-Gray trial. The story of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray had been filling the
newspapers and tabloids from the time the arrests were made on March 22, 1927. Treadwell attended the full proceedings of the eighteen-day trial which spanned the months of April and May. She also followed its subsequent November appeal and, finally, the executions of both Snyder and Gray on January 12, 1928.

Ruth Snyder was a Long Island housewife, married to the editor of a boating magazine. Feeling unloved by her husband, Snyder had an affair with Gray, a traveling corset salesman. They were arrested and finally found guilty of killing her husband, Albert Snyder, in his sleep by bludgeoning him with a window weight and then strangling him with picture wire. Upon questioning, both Snyder and Gray blamed the other, offering such ostentatious alibis that one reporter nicknamed the case “The Dumbbell Murder” (Feingold).

Important to note is that Treadwell sat in on all of the proceedings as an observer rather than a reporter.\(^1\) Her career as a freelance writer permitted her the flexibility of choosing which stories she wanted to cover for newspapers and which she would reserve for her own creative uses. Therefore, instead of writing a series of articles about the case as she had for previous murder trials such as those of Alexander and Mohr, Treadwell decided to reserve the Snyder-Gray story for adaptation to a play format. In her dissertation, Wynn proposed that Treadwell worked with the general outline and concept of Machinal in the summer of 1927, after Snyder’s and Gray’s convictions in May, then finished most of the play after their January 1928 executions. The play was copyrighted at the end of April 1928 (Wynn 109).

\(^1\) The trial was covered in detail by the tabloids and newspapers, becoming one of most publicized events of the twentieth century (Heck-Rabi 63). Only reporters gained entrance to view the electrocution, with no cameras allowed. However, one journalist from the Daily News was able to hide a small camera strapped
2. Developing *Machinal*

The story for *Machinal* was inspired by (rather than based upon) the Ruth Snyder-Judd Gray murder case. In fact, Treadwell used *Machinal’s* expressionism to present women’s issues in America after the 1920 passing of the nineteenth amendment that granted women’s suffrage. Through her use of stylized language and stage directions, Treadwell delved into the thoughts and key events in the life of one Young Woman, depicting the character’s confusion about her place as a woman in a society ruled by men and machines. That confusion led to despair, which led to fear and finally loathing of her grudgingly accepted role as dutiful wife and mother. The Young Woman refused to believe her mother and co-workers, despite their insistence that lack of love in life was a normal fact, simply to be accepted. After tasting freedom and passion in an adulterous relationship with a Young Man\(^2\), she finally decided that she had to escape from the confines of societal pressure. The only way she felt she could do so successfully was to kill her husband. He embodied the tangible proof of her acquiescence to the invisible ruling force of societal expectations throughout her life, and became, therefore, her chief visible antagonist.

*Machinal* opened September 7, 1928, at the Plymouth Theatre and ran for ninety-one performances. Arthur Hopkins produced and directed it, with settings by Robert Edmond Jones. Both men had enjoyed success and popularity for their expressionistic work on Broadway for years, so they were natural choices to head the production team.

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2 The Young Man was originally played on Broadway by a then unknown Clark Gable. Soon after the close of *Machinal*, Gable left New York for Hollywood to begin his successful film career, which turned him into a legend.
In the late teens and early 1920s, Arthur Hopkins firmly established himself as an innovative director and one of the most adventurous producers in New York. He helped develop the careers of young actors from John and Lionel Barrymore in some of Shakespeare's tragedies to Clark Gable in *Machinal*. His directing style differed greatly from that of his dictatorial, turn-of-the-century predecessors like Augustin Daly and David Belasco. Instead, he generally faded into the background, allowing his actors to make discoveries as they worked, never rushing or forcing them to conform to a predetermined idea. Thus, his productions were often "characterized by a slow pace, the absence of theatrical tricks, a careful coordination of all effects, and a broad pictorial impact" (Wilson 246).

Hopkins also recognized and took chances on talented new playwrights, such as Eugene O'Neill and Sophie Treadwell, as well as innovative new designers such as the avant-garde designer Robert Edmond Jones. Jones began implementing the "new stagecraft" before the majority of his colleagues. This "new stagecraft" was, essentially, a visual movement combining the spare and abstract sets, lighting, and costumes of simplified realism with the symbolic and highly subjective style of expressionism in order to evoke a more emotional effect from the audience. Through their adept application of this new, visually stimulating style, Hopkins and Jones proved that it not only added depth to the dramatic interpretation of plays, but that it could be commercially viable as well. Through Jones' innovative use of expressionistic techniques, he was able to present his audiences with a depiction of the world as seen through the eyes of the protagonist, thereby clearly demonstrating the Young Woman's emotional state for the audience.
Jones’ sets and visual effects emphasized the overall mood and pace of *Machinal.* In their reviews of the original Broadway production of the show, several critics favorably commented on the ways in which Treadwell combined German expressionism with American realism:

> It is told...by means of the blinding flashes for which expressionism tries and, thanks to the laconic vividness of the method, it has that same air of being at once true and unbelievable which marks all accounts of the more extraordinary crimes; so that one leaves the theater exactly as one often puts down a newspaper—knowing that certain events have taken place and yet not believing that such things can be. (Krutch 302)

With that comment, Joseph Krutch drew a foreshadowing parallel to Living Newspapers of the 1930s, which presented factual statistics in a dramatic form. Just as the Living Newspapers of the Depression era exposed truth that seemed impossible to believe, Treadwell felt driven in the 1920s to analyze the then-familiar tabloid tale of the young woman who turned killer. By doing so, she hoped to develop a dimension of empathy in the public’s hearts for those women whose lives were plastered on the front pages of newspapers across the country for public scrutiny. For this empathetic approach, Treadwell seemingly recalled her time at the *San Francisco Bulletin,* when Fremont Older so strongly encouraged her to write articles to touch people’s hearts or stir them to action.

As Treadwell’s most renowned and public success, *Machinal* is undoubtedly the play for which she is best known today. However, mere popularity does not dictate translation into historical documentation. That requires a certain level of timeless
understanding and approachability. Several critics compared Treadwell’s expressionistic writing to that of Elmer Rice, whose 1923 play, *The Adding Machine*, examined the dehumanization of modern life which led up to the Machine Age of the 1930s. Wynn felt that Treadwell’s choice of this style truly connected her purpose as a playwright with her agenda regarding journalism:

Treadwell’s use of this presentational style not only is the perfect choice for her story of murder and adultery, but it transforms those tabloid cliches into sensational drama which suggests a universality of concerns. (Wynn 110)

That “universality of concerns” was key to both Rice and Treadwell as they strove to tell compelling stories about the lives and deaths of their respective protagonists amidst the shifting attitudes towards life and living during the Industrial Revolution. As with Mr. Zero in *The Adding Machine*, *Machinal*’s Young Woman represented a sort of Everywoman character to whom audiences, both then and now, could relate in some way.

3. Truth is Stranger than Fiction

As Treadwell sat in on the various murder trials over the years, she found herself fascinated by the mental and emotional background that could contribute to such heinous crimes. As Louise Heck-Rabi put it, “How is it possible for a woman to be so oppressed by life and her husband that she kills him?” (63). In Ruth Snyder’s official statement, given the day before her arrest, she described life with her husband as explanation for his murder:

I was constantly being belittled by my husband. My husband and I had quarreled frequently and things became worse since we moved to Queens
Village. He was constantly picking and nagging at me and I had gotten at that stage where I would take means to get out of it all. I could not divorce him. Mr. Gray was the only one who would listen to my troubles. ...about two or three weeks ago when I had another argument with my husband, when my husband said he was going to blow my brains out, and I wrote this to Mr. Gray. I wrote back to Mr. Gray, after he had asked me in the letter whether I thought my husband would do it or not, that I certainly thought he would do anything in a fit of temper because he had an awful temper. Then Mr. Gray wrote back to me...that it was better for Mr. Gray and I to get him (my husband) before he got me. (Kobler 121)

Such testimony had an obvious impact on Treadwell's creation of the Young Woman. When the judge asked the Young Woman why she did not simply divorce her husband rather than killing him, she responded, "Oh I couldn't do that!! I couldn't hurt him like that!" (Treadwell, Machinal 248). Treadwell obviously wrote this line in reference to Snyder's declaration that she "could not divorce" her husband (Kobler 121), even though Snyder gave no further explanation in the manner of the Young Woman. W. David Sievers explains the psychological processes of the Young Woman whom he asserts Treadwell created from a Freudian perspective:

The heroine, simply named The Young Woman, is a gentle, tender, sexually baffled creature in a hard, mechanized civilization teeming with sexual threats which arouse her anxiety. Craving emotional satisfaction yet having been brought up to view sex as loathsome, the Young Girl is in constant panic at her libidinous urges which threaten to break through
wherever she turns... and she goes to her death as an escape from a life that had been a sexual hell. (91)

Furthermore, Krutch points to literature’s influence on society to explain why we tend to find cases like Mohr’s or Snyder’s so incomprehensible:

Thanks no doubt to literary influence we have come to accept this assumption... that great crimes are committed by great criminals under the influence of great passions... and because of it we believe that a great woman like Lady Macbeth could kill King Duncan for the sake of his crown much more deeply and really than we believe that vulgar little Ruth Snyder killed her husband for the love of a corset salesman, or that (to take the case of the present play) and ex-typist could kill her husband for reasons no deeper than those which are given—that he was a maddeningly commonplace man and that she had found a lover in a speak-easy.

(Krutch 302)

As has been previously mentioned, because the Young Woman in Machinal and Ruth Snyder share so many similarities, many critics and audience members during the original production assumed that Machinal was based on the Snyder-Gray trial.

However, there exists strong evidence that this is only one aspect of the story. For instance, more recent theatre critics, such as Michael Feingold of the Village Voice, have postulated that Treadwell integrated circumstances of other similar trials of the time, such as that of London’s Edith Thompson in 1922 (Feingold). John Kobler, in his history of the case published in 1938, also compared Snyder’s case to trials such as Thompson’s (Kobler 1). Although Thompson’s essentially followed the same line as Snyder’s case.
the reality behind the London lovers' act proved less brutal than that of Snyder and Gray's.

Thompson longed to be an artist and resented the domesticity forced upon her by her older husband. She vented her frustrations by writing letters to her lover, describing her fantasies of feeding her husband meals laced with diced light bulbs (Feingold). Though Thompson may or may not have known her lover's intent to murder her husband, when police found the letters, she was charged with conspiracy. However, neither defendant in the Thompson case ever accused the other, unlike Snyder, Gray, or the Young Man in *Machinal*.

Actually, there is no record of Treadwell ever directly commenting on either trial in relation to the play. However, Heck-Rabi quotes a letter from Treadwell to a potential producer of the play in 1955, regarding her ideas about *Machinal*:

... I would like to put down briefly for you the simple basic idea I had when I started to write the play. It is all in the title—"Machine-al"—machine-like. ... A young woman—ready—eager—for life—for love... I wanted to unfold her story in vital situations—teeming with life—but deadened—squeezed—crushed—by the machine-like quality of the life surrounding them. This machine thing is not only in machines themselves, but in what they have done to all living and to human beings... She is a woman innately unsuited to this mechanization of life. She is a woman who must love and be loved. And she goes through life trying to satisfy this. She reaches out to her mother—to a man to marry—to having a child—a lover—searching for that living "somebody." She cannot reach
to God, and she dies with this call—“somebody.” She finds her answer once—in the lover. And in this scene comes her blossoming—she is complete—like a flower—like a child. . . . (Treadwell. Ltr. to Goodman)

Most important in Machinal is the Young Woman’s desire to know herself and to have control over the things she feels should be hers. Her repeated declaration, “I will not submit,” acts as a hallmark for the times when she gives up her desires to comply with others’ wishes or demands. In Machinal Treadwell portrays the struggle of the honest, but lost young woman against the world and its social requirements. Her pragmatic mother has taught her those expectations, and the majority of the people the Young Woman comes in contact with press her to live up to those societal obligations. The Young Woman’s father is not present and, therefore, is not the stereotypical patriarchal antagonist. Instead, it is society, in all its mechanization, that forces the Young Woman first to work and take care of her mother, then to marry her boss so that the mother will enjoy a comfortable life, even if it is at the expense of the daughter’s happiness. Douglas describes the daughter as feeling she has no choice:

In the play’s most poignant line, the Young Woman, a neurotic and unhappy person unsure of her rights, uncertain if she has any rights at all, cries: “Is nothing mine?” She’s been incessantly violated from the day she drew breath. (251)

As a final wish before succumbing to physical death, bringing an end to the slow emotional torture that agonized her throughout her life, the Young Woman begs her mother to care for her own unwanted daughter and to “Let her live!” as the Young Woman never could.
4. Feminist Undercurrents

Such dramatic themes easily inspire feminist critiques, and the critiques of *Machinal* prove themselves surprisingly varied. The most prominent categorization which critics use to explain on the play is that of a materialist feminist critique. Sue-Ellen Case explains this perspective:

Rather than assuming that the experiences of women are induced by gender oppression from men or that liberation can be brought about by virtue of women’s unique gender strengths, that patriarchy is everywhere and always the same and that all women are ‘sisters,’ the materialist position underscores the role of class and history in creating the oppression of women. From a materialist perspective, women’s experiences cannot be understood outside of their specific historical context, which includes a specific type of economic organisation [sic] and specific developments in national history and political organisation [sic]. (82)

Indeed, this definition clearly holds true with respect to Treadwell’s *Machinal*, as Catherine Hildreth-Reed explains in her 1993 thesis. She declares that the Young Woman’s problem “is both the signifier for the social crisis being experienced in the early twentieth century and an attempt to intervene in this crisis” (27). *Machinal*’s social crisis could then be defined with reference to the Young Woman during the Industrial Revolution: How can this tender, emotional individual survive amidst her struggles to be true to herself and fulfill her needs while also endeavoring to keep her family and friends appeased.

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Sophie Treadwell experienced a similar “social crisis” to which Hildreth-Reed referred, and could, therefore, spin the Young Woman’s tale with both poignancy and empathy. Her crisis was, by definition, separate and individual from that suffered by the Young Woman, essentially creating a foil to the character with her own life. Instead of being continuously submissive to the suffocating world around her, Treadwell constantly fought to break the norms, be they professional or personal. Whether in her role as journalist, playwright, or wife, she, like most every professional woman at the time, was constantly under public scrutiny. For years, newspaper offices were considered inappropriate places for women to enter:

Newspapers were masculine bastions, notorious for their cigar smoke, dirt, and profanity. Moreover, reporters met unsavory people, saw unpleasant sights, and were sometimes in danger. Still, women persevered, paving the way for others. (Fedler 20)

Treadwell herself unquestionably persevered. Under Fremont Older’s tutelage in San Francisco, she had learned how to write a story and make it appeal to the masses, thus justifying and proving her worth as a journalist. When she moved to New York and joined the Lucy Stone League, she took a public stand for the advancement of women, not only in the workplace, but also in society as a whole. When Burns Mantle declared *Machinal* to be one of the top plays of 1928, Treadwell joined the prestigious ranks of a select group of playwrights who were, of course, mostly male.

Finally, on a personal level, even her marriage was something of a political statement. Most obviously, Treadwell never discarded her maiden name. More non-traditional for the time, she continued working full-time after her marriage. Even in
1942, female reporters were expected to quit upon getting married. Colleen Dishon reported for the *Columbus* (Ohio) *Gazette* at that time. When she divulged her plans to get married, her boss reminded her that wives were not allowed to work for the paper. She made this nonchalant reply: ‘That’s OK... We will just live together.’ Shocked, Dishon’s boss let the barrier crumble. Dishon married and retained her job” (Fedler 23). Though Treadwell was married to William McGeehan from 1910 until his death in 1933, they almost always kept separate residences from one another. Though rumors of Treadwell having an extra-marital affair do exist and are likely well founded, that period was probably relatively brief.

Although Treadwell had, essentially, succeeded in her fight to overcome that “social crisis” of the early twentieth century, she could not forget that her personal story was the exception rather than the rule. She had seen the anger in the eyes of both men and women as she marched with the Lucy Stone League. She was quite aware of the women who starved in jail for fighting for their rights, as did she know of the riots that often broke out at suffragette rallies. But what about the women who wanted freedom but were afraid to fight? What about those who did not even know that there were those who were fighting? These were the women Treadwell wanted to speak to and about. These were the women on whom she based the main character in *Machinal*.

Treadwell opened *Machinal* by first establishing the objectification of the protagonist by both her coworkers and fiancé. The Young Woman seems unaware and somewhat passive. Then, as Dickey states, Treadwell “quickly subverts audience expectations by employing a variety of expressionistic techniques that [moves the Young Woman] into the subject position . . .” (Dickey “The ‘Real Lives’ . . .” 177). Audiences
approach the play from the main character’s female perspective, bringing them into her world of anxiousness and self-consciousness.

Though feminism often manifests itself in anti-patriarchal sentiments, Treadwell wrote *Machinal* as a strong commentary on the shift in feminist ideology during the 1920s. She used the mother-daughter conflict to depict the rivalry between the Victorian feminism of the turn of the century and the new feminist agenda of the Jazz Age. Victorian feminists had as their goal the right to vote. They based their argument on morality, abstaining from sex and alcohol in an effort to prove that they were responsible individuals who could and should share full political rights with men. However, times and attitudes were changing, and by the time the United States government passed the nineteenth amendment in 1920, daughters of the Victorian suffragettes had abandoned their mothers’ struggles. Gone were the days of rallies and hunger strikes.

The new feminist agenda focused on sexual freedom, and the Jazz Baby was born. This new woman strove to break free from the social constraints that had been presented as “feminist” tenets. Ann Douglas terms this revolt against the mother “matricide” (252), for the new woman essentially killed her mother as she killed the morals and attitudes for which her “fore-mother” stood. Treadwell was very much aware of these changes in women’s attitudes. Born in 1885, she was thirty-five when women’s suffrage was granted. This placed her at an interesting point in history, for though she was old enough to have actively participated in and reported on suffrage rallies, she was also young enough to see and understand the rebellion that was happening in the next generation following the suffragette movement.
The Young Woman of *Machinal* never had to fight for her right to vote. Chances are, her mother was one of the jeering majority who paid little mind to the cause of the suffragettes nor their "silly antics," as some considered them at the time (Ross 128). Because of this lack of interest in women's rights beyond the minority of leftist groups, the protagonist had no reason to strive for anything more than what the world presented her. She had her job, so she kept it to make ends meet. She had physical appeal and the boss' interest, so her mother explained that she could do nothing but marry him. Economics and comfort far outweighed personal and emotional fulfillment in the mind of this matriarch. However, the Young Woman of the Jazz Age wanted more. She had sexual urges and the will to express them. In the play, the Young Woman represents someone who desires but is unfulfilled. Stifling these urges and desires seems the only sensible thing to do.

*Machinal* was undoubtedly Treadwell's most important contribution to theatre and the writing world in general. Though Treadwell partially based it on a number of trials and life stories which she had reported on in her early days as a reporter in New York, its contemporary appeal for the American people who had recently been besieged with tabloid-like information on the Snyder case is undeniable. Aside from serving as a touchstone to Treadwell's journalism of the day, *Machinal* also serves as a strong commentary against the old feminism of the 1920s, placing Victorian feminism against the new feminist agenda of the Jazz Age. In short, Treadwell's success with *Machinal* stemmed not only from her journalistic reports, but her life experiences as well.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

There existed in Sophie Treadwell’s life a constant relationship between her reporting and playwriting. Her beginnings in journalism, her interest in Mexico, and her reports on murder trials such as the Snyder-Gray case formed the foundation of her dual career. *Gringo* and *Machinal* certainly functioned as two key examples of Treadwell’s plays that flowed directly out of her journalism. Despite the cursory attention given to Treadwell’s journalistic career in past documentation, her newspaper work had an enormous impact on her playwriting.

This conclusion summarizes Treadwell’s journalism and dramatic works that followed *Machinal*. It then addresses the main revelations that have come out of the approach of jointly studying Treadwell’s journalism and theatre. This includes a review of how Treadwell approached socio-political ideas and intentions, as well as her documentary writing style. Thirdly, it presents questions for further scholarly examination, expanding and building upon the insights and information included here.
1. Post Script

Although Treadwell wrote nearly half of her thirty-nine plays after the great success of *Machinal*, only four more reached production on Broadway. Those included *Ladies Leave* (1929), *Lone Valley* (1933), *Plumes in the Dust* (1936), and *Hope for a Harvest* (1941). *Ladies Leave* and *Lone Valley* both had extremely short runs, and *Plumes in the Dust*, a biographical drama about Edgar Allan Poe, suffered from a great deal of negative pre-production publicity. Problems with *Plumes in the Dust* resulted because of a legal battle between Treadwell and John Barrymore. Treadwell accused him of agreeing to produce a play that his wife, Michael Strange, had written after reading and working with Treadwell’s script. Thus, Treadwell argued that Strange had stolen her idea and basic script. Although Treadwell won the case, newspapers unabashedly sided against her. Dickey points out that “the ordeal greatly soured her views on the manner in which playwrights were treated in the commercial theatre” (Dickey 10). Despite the Broadway failures of the previously mentioned plays, Treadwell had great hope for *Hope for a Harvest*. Aside from being chosen by the Theatre Guild as a star vehicle for Fredric March and Florence Eldridge, Treadwell felt that the play had genuine audience appeal, as it spoke out on key issues of concern in America at the time.

*Hope for a Harvest*, Treadwell’s final Broadway play, presented her ideas on how the United States could recover from the Depression of the 1930s. Treadwell felt that citizens needed to unite in “reinvigorating our national character with liberal doses of hard work, discipline, and faith in America’s opportunities” (Wynn 184-185), and she poured this into *Hope for a Harvest*. The play became her soapbox upon which she could
freely join her opinion to the suggestions posed by much of the American populous over the course of the country’s economic depression.

In *Hope for a Harvest*, Treadwell again used journalism to speak out against prejudice. This time, however, she based the play on less of her own journalism and more of her colleagues’ work. This is evident upon examining Treadwell’s source file for the play, located at the UALSC. The file’s holdings includes articles regarding the effects of the Depression in California, farming, and government assistance. It also contains clippings about cultural diversity in America and the importance of accepting those from cultures other than one’s own. Of note, Treadwell was not defending any one particular group as she had in *Gringo* and *Machinal*. Instead, in *Hope for a Harvest*, she fought for members of many marginalized groups in America, from foreigners to women. From various notations in her UALSC archives, Treadwell expressed her personal views against the prejudice and extreme racism found in Europe at the time, as well as her fear that similar problems were burgeoning in America. However, despite extremely positive reviews during out-of-town tryouts, *Hope for a Harvest* failed on Broadway because most of the major critics felt the play poorly written as well as providing a pat solution to a complex problem.

Treadwell’s journalism career also slowed drastically after the Snyder-Gray case. She spent the first few years after *Machinal* travelling for productions of the play in London and Moscow, while simultaneously preparing to publish her novel *Lusita* and mount *Lone Valley* in New York in March of 1933. Her husband then died in November of that year. The rest of the 1930s were essentially devoted to playwriting and travelling around the world. In 1942 she spent ten months in Mexico City as a correspondent for
the *New York Herald Tribune*. Treadwell later attempted a career as a screenwriter in Hollywood, but she quickly changed her mind. She adopted the child of a German maid in 1949, naming him William after her deceased husband. The two of them traveled extensively, finally basing themselves in Spain for many years. While there, Treadwell focused on writing novels.

As her age increased, her health continued to degenerate, and she moved to Tucson, Arizona. There, the University of Arizona produced her last play, *Woman with Lilies*, under the title, *Now He Doesn’t Want to Play* in 1967. First written in 1948 and subsequently revised multiple times with minor alterations, *Woman with Lilies* focuses on Ann, an American career woman who goes to Mexico in search of Richard Cragg, her former husband who had left for Mexico to continue his career as an artist away from her. After a near-reunion, Cragg realizes that Ann’s desire to be with him would never come ahead of her career, and they would soon be miserable once more. He quickly stops their relationship from progressing, and the play closes with Cragg dancing in celebration of his renewed sense of freedom and manhood. Audiences at the University of Arizona did not like the play, and Treadwell referred to the production thereafter as “the Tucson debacle” (Wynn 236). Treadwell remained in Tucson and died three years later.

2. **Revelations**

After studying Sophie Treadwell in terms of her journalism career, two key insights rise to the surface, both with regards to her theatrical career and herself as an individual. First, Treadwell made a point of writing her plays based on current events. Those events were often of national interest, but they always included personal angles and were results of timely situations. Next, her documentary style of writing reflected
not only her own approach to drama and journalism but also a strong trend in most of the arts in the early part of the twentieth century. Multiple newspaper articles by Treadwell provided a similar documentary feel, and Treadwell also wrote *Machinal* in that multifaceted, documentary style that was known for its investigative reporting which was often combined with photography or another source of imagery. Such investigative reporting forced her to probe the personal lives or thoughts of people involved in a story rather than simply reporting occurrences.

Throughout Treadwell’s life, her writing stemmed primarily from situations and experiences she had recently witnessed or experienced. This approach to journalism initially developed from her editor at the *San Francisco Bulletin*, Fremont Older. He encouraged his reporters to write about issues and events about which they felt passionate. As noted in chapter one, this approach had a strong impact on not only Treadwell’s style of journalism, but her playwriting as well. During her first year at the *New York American*, she had the chance to demonstrate her feminist point of view by writing reform articles. With those, Treadwell fought for marginalized groups such as abandoned children and prostitutes.

If highly political or personal experiences could be said to constitute Treadwell’s overall topic pool, then her typical style would have to be the documentary. As discussed in chapter one, Treadwell’s writing proved very successful and offered readers the information desired while simultaneously providing a broad overview of supplementary details. Treadwell first used the documentary style as a sob sister. She then continued to use it during her coverage of World War I. After using investigative reporting styles,
Treadwell then reformatted her reports into more subjective accounts as novels and plays, with *Gringo* being a prime example of a documentary article-turned-dramatic work.

3. The Next Installment

As with Treadwell's sob sister series, this thesis also points to "further installments." In such a study, one might consider a number of different possibilities. These might include the ideas of socialism in the 1910s and 1920s, how Living Newspapers combined art and politics in the 1930s, or why Treadwell wrote strictly for professional productions for the majority of her adult life. First, Treadwell exemplified a strong affinity for socialism in her early years as a playwright. This is certainly manifested in *Gringo*, as the character Leonard made convincing arguments for it throughout the dramatic action. Not until Treadwell took *Machinal* to Moscow did she have the opportunity to see first-hand the results of one attempt at communism, and it was then that she rejected the concepts she had advocated for so long. It would be interesting to study how the themes and topics of her plays reflected that reversal of opinion.

Another important topic with relation to both Treadwell's journalism and playwriting is the way her plays foreshadowed and/or mirrored the Living Newspapers of the 1930s. Scholars might also consider the following questions: Why did Treadwell refuse to write plays for not-for-profit or regional theatres? How does her focus on Broadway correlate with the fact that much of her work has only become rediscovered through university and community productions? These topics represent an infinite number of questions that could be considered for further research and scholarly discussion.
Despite the lack of attention to Treadwell beyond *Machinal*, her long, full career merits more attention. Of all the information presented in this thesis, however, I feel the most important things Treadwell left for posterity were neither her plays nor her journalism. Instead, through the course of this study, she has taught me the importance of standing firm for my beliefs, regardless of what society declares to be “right” or “the norm.” Treadwell did this repeatedly throughout her life, both before receiving Modjeska’s advice on not changing her plays to fit a producer’s desires. She wrote both plays and articles about topics of importance to her, such as Mexican-American relations, women’s rights, and human rights in general. All this was done despite the lack of social acceptance and popularity such topics carried with them.

Although she probably could have had a very successful career as a newspaper reporter, Treadwell knew that such a life could not make her truly happy. Her main goal was to live conscientiously, and all the jobs and revisions were simply means to an end. She wrote, advocated, traveled, and loved throughout her life. For Sophie Treadwell, the importance of those activities far outweighed the importance of “work” in the typical sense. For, regardless of how her activities at any certain moment, they were always done with the recognition that writing was her primary passion and was never simply her job. Such a lesson is difficult to learn and is seldom ever taught, particularly in an age where money and status often matter more than family and dreams. However, Sophie Treadwell teaches us by example, perfectly.
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