Memory's Dramas, Modernity's Ghosts: Thornton Wilder, Japanese Theater, and Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*

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> The close relationships between theatre and memory have been recognized in many cultures and in many different fashions.… Central to the Noh drama of Japan, one of the world's oldest and most venerated dramatic traditions, is the image of the play as a story of the past recounted by a ghost, but ghostly storytellers and recalled events are the common coin of theatre everywhere in the world at every period.
>
> —Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*[1]

> For an American dramatist, all roads lead back to Thornton Wilder.
>
> —Paula Vogel, Forward, *The Skin of Our Teeth*[2]

Whether explicitly or obliquely, Paula Vogel's plays often respond to and rewrite works by canonical writers from Shakespeare to David Mamet. In her 2003 play *The Long Christmas Ride Home* (hereafter *LCRH*), Vogel revises Thornton Wilder's one-act plays *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* and *The Long Christmas Dinner*, while incorporating aspects of Japanese Nō drama and Bunraku puppet theater. Like her 1992 break-out play *The Baltimore Waltz, LCRH* commemorates Vogel's brother Carl, who died of AIDS in 1987. And like the return of Uncle Peck's ghost at the end of her 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning play *How I Learned to Drive*, *LCRH* is haunted by ghosts—of Carl, of Thornton Wilder, and of a social history that is both personal and collective. *LCRH* bears all the Vogel trademarks—sharp juxtapositions, a combination of humor and pathos, the use of circular form, and a focus on a political issue examined through the lens of the American family—but it is also markedly distinct from

her previous work. It is a highly conceptual, poetic, and formally complex piece, and in contrast to the embodied historicity and social specificity of her other plays, *LCRH* invokes notions of time and place that are, at once, more abstracted and more immediate. It marks a shift in her oeuvre away from a central female character and toward a more diffuse ensemble of perspectives, striking notes of solemnity and reverence in contrast to the irreverent humor of her previous plays. In its use of Japanese theater techniques, *LCRH* also marks Vogel's first experiment with a non-Western theatrical tradition.

Given these differences, I would like to examine *LCRH* in relation to Elin Diamond's provocative question: "How does one of modernity's key features—its way of inventing/thinking about historical time—get dramatized, and what would 'modernity's drama' as a configuration *do* to the ways we think about *modern* drama?"[3] Whether conceived of as linear progression, cyclical repetitions, or postmodern ruptures, modernity's time has been "invented," in various ways, as a method for organizing human experience and making sense of the relationship between past and present. Likewise, modern drama has been "invented" as a body of legitimized, canonical texts and performances that hierarchically organize theater history and construct the value and meaning we associate with certain plays. Modern time and modern drama are neither disinterested nor universal, but rather human constructs bound up with the broader technological, scientific, political, imperial, and ideological developments that characterize the modern era. And since "performance contains an irreducible material historicity," thinking in terms of "modernity's drama"rather than "modern drama" invites a method of interpretation that examines the way theater and its literature register "the new modes of historical thinking that modernity fostered."[4] Diamond's argument dovetails in interesting ways with Marvin Carlson's theory of ghosting, which he defines as the uncanny effect created by theater's "recycling of specific material," which generates "repetition, memory, and ghosting" as effects that "are deeply involved in the nature of the theatrical experience itself" and yet that also manifest "in a very different manner in different periods and cultures."[5]

The plays of both Wilder and Vogel represent time in ways that generate a ghosting effect and that complicate the cause-effect narrative

logic and naturalistic characterizations of Western realist drama. In his plays written during the interwar period, Wilder moved away from realism to dramatize time as a kind of teleological unfolding of the eternal present, a present populated by ghosts that signify a generational past returning to remind the living of what is being lost in time. Recycling Wilder's plays in the early twenty-first century and integrating them with techniques of Bunraku and Nō theater, Vogel's *LCRH* dramatizes time as a series of recursive returns, memories that interrupt the present moment and disrupt the continuity and linearity of realist drama and narratives of progress. In *LCRH*, ghosts (and puppets) join the living to watch time unfold differently, disjointedly, as the characters try to make sense of the "what was" in relation to the open-ended "what if." The complex intertextual connections among Wilder, Vogel, and Japanese theater encourage a cross-cultural, multitemporal investigation of the way modernity's methods for organizing time are recorded in modernity's dramas and reproduced as modernity's ghosts, embodied reminders that the past "will always need fresh actors … because *it is always under construction*."[6]

One of Vogel's most consistent strategies as a playwright is the way she uses history to confront contemporary issues such as domestic violence, pornography, and AIDS. Vogel's unique dramaturgy encourages audiences to look at these vexed issues from a historical perspective, where history is understood not as strictly dialectical in the Hegelian sense of progressing toward a future ideal, but rather as a series of recursive movements and moments that contain within them impressions of the past. Providing what Diamond calls a "double optic on the idea of history itself,"[7] Vogel suggests the way "history itself" is a product of our imaginations; she structures time in her playworlds in ways that disorient the present by juxtaposing it with a knowing past—that is, a past that offers a shrewd and critical perspective on the present. For example, in *The Oldest Profession*, five elderly prostitutes launch a series of witty, and sometimes poignant, critiques regarding the dire effects of Reaganomics on their Upper West Side business, interjecting these critiques with nostalgic stories of the "good old days" in their Louisiana brothel. The double optic within the play is reduplicated in the dialectical perspective generated between the 1980s playworld and the contemporary context, a perspective that highlights the

continued devaluing of the elderly, of sex work, and of the female body in our late capitalist present moment. Vogel's plays invite audiences into a lively, and, at times, uncomfortable dialogue with contemporary culture, with social history, and with a dramatic canon that seems perpetually in conversation with its own past.

Vogel's artistic perspectives are eclectically informed by Russian Formalism, Kenneth Burke, canonical playwrights such as Brecht, Artaud, and Strindberg, and, she adds, "all the songs of Judy Garland; every Broadway musical; and a gay brother, who, when I was seventeen, took me to see John Waters."[8] Vogel borrows liberally not only from the traditional canon, but also from the wider spectrum of theater history and cultural production, incorporating the lavish theatricality of the American musical and the bawdy comedy of vaudeville and burlesque, as well as elements from popular culture such as famous Hollywood film scenes and period music. Setting up a "perspective by incongruity" (Kenneth Burke's term)[9] and making use of circular form, Vogel poses a new way of seeing and, by extension, a new way of thinking about the historical constitution of cultural issues and social identities. She takes audiences on round-trip journeys that bring them back to the place from which they began, although with perspectives that have been inevitably changed by what they have seen along the way.

Typically associated with his 1938 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Our Town,* Wilder is one of those underacknowledged playwrights whose legacy has been somewhat stultified by the effects of canonization, which privileges certain texts and certain productions while omitting others that perhaps do not fit into the current critical or social ethos of the period. Vogel reminds us, however, that, "[w]e forget Wilder's vision and voice";[10] we forget his "subtle blend of humor and pathos, and his masterful balancing act of abstraction and empathy"(ix). But, "[o]f all his innovations, we are most indebted to the way Wilder transformed the passage of time on stage"(xi).Wilder used the theater to comment on the passage of time itself, developing an understated dramaturgical style that focuses on abstracted yet affecting impressions of time, place, and character. In his 1941 essay "Some Thoughts on Playwriting," Wilder defined four characteristics of the drama that distinguish it from other arts: first, it is a collaborative art; second, it should strive to raise the

spectator's imagination from the specific to the general; third, it has a forward movement of action and a broad field of interest; and fourth, it takes place in the perpetual present tense.[11] For Wilder, changing the way time is organized and dramatized onstage produces a change in the consciousness of the spectator.

Often structured around cyclical repetitions—birth, death, rebirth—Wilder's plays register time's relentless passing and its numbing effects on daily life, but also on its forward movement, ideally, toward a better society.[12] Wilder mapped out his belief in progress in the following equation in his journal: "Possibility=the modern Western world: liberty and progress."[13] From our post-Second World War, postcolonial vantage point, we recognize this as a highly flawed equation, both in terms of its unquestioning correlation of freedom with progress and in its association of these ideals with Western modernity. Indeed, Wilder's equation is revealing in the way it shows how those terms gain coherence in relation to one another, as political, cultural, discursive, and aesthetic constructions. Lincoln Konkle points out that Wilder's understanding of progress must be understood within the context of the Puritan tradition—as in, *Pilgrim's Progress*, an errand into the wilderness—and he argues that "the most prominent feature in Wilder's drama and fiction of the 1930s … is a faith in progress on the personal, social, and universal level."[14]

Wilder entered the canon of modern drama during a period of fascism and economic depression, and his work appealed to a critical establishment and a culture that valued art that promoted notions of progress and transcendence. Dayton Kohler wrote in 1939, Wilder's "art goes beyond the immediate concerns of his characters to give their speech and actions a significance which adds to our understanding of life and its essential truths."[15] Unlike the socialist playwrights of the 1930s, such as Clifford Odets, Elmer Rice, and John Howard Lawson, Wilder did not directly address class struggle or champion socialist principles. However, Wilder's plays might be reread, not as Neoplatonic dramas that transcend the material world to reveal life's "essential truths," but rather as dramas that stage the tensions generated from humanity's limited ways of thinking about time. Wilder's characters inhabit the same social world as those of Odets and company, but that world is structured differently in his plays. Eschewing naturalism and social realism in favor of something closer to

ritual, Wilder articulated a sense of social crisis by using a language at once direct and oblique, creating characters that appear both earthly and ethereal, and constructing a temporal setting somewhere between the everyday and the eternal. The drama of Wilder's plays emerges precisely in these tensions, and not in the conventional tensions of protagonist-antagonist, individual-society, conflict-resolution.

In his experiments with form, his striving toward universality, and his search for totality of vision and representation, Wilder is a characteristic modernist; in his focus on the specific moment, the everyday and individual, he is not. As Martin Puchner explains, "the success of modernism in the theater depends on the theater's ability to resist the personal, the individual, the human, the mimetic."[16] And yet, Wilder's focus was on precisely these. In "Toward an American Language," the playwright begins with the premise: "the bigger the world is, the *less* you can be content with vagueness."[17] Wilder criticized European modernists who evaded the material and the specific in favor of the metaphysical and the general, and sought, instead, to develop an American modernism that represented the way "concrete things exist concretely."[18] Wilder developed his dramatic aesthetic by drawing from German expressionism, Italian futurism, American emotional realism, and, less directly, Asian drama. In a 1961 letter to Martha Niemoeller, Wilder reflected that it was only in his later years that he developed a "great interest in the Noh plays," adding that "[m]y plays may seem to reflect some elements of Chinese and Japanese theatre but—in spite of the years I spent in the Orient as a boy—I have not been aware of any influence prior to the '40s that could derive from the East."[19] Whether Wilder's plays were directly influenced by his childhood experience of living in China is perhaps more debatable than the fact that, as a writer, he is part of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interest in Eastern cultural traditions and practices, which emerged out of the broader context of the European imperialist project. C. D. Innes explains, "The value of cross-cultural impetus for western modern and post-modernist art can hardly be overstated" and that "deriving, as it does, from nineteenth-century imperialism makes the nature of this stimulus deeply questionable."[20]

I. Modernism's Orientalism

From the poetry of Ezra Pound to the paintings of Henri Matisse, Orientalism permeates modernist art, and theater artists had particularly lively Orientalist interests. Vsevolod Meyerhold, Eugenio Barba, W. B. Yeats, and Gordon Craig all looked to Eastern traditions, as they sought to create a kind of sacred theater, in contrast to the time- and text-boundedness of the Western theater and the psychological realism of the Western actor. More famously, Bertolt Brecht, frustrated by bourgeois realism and the lavish spectacles that dominated the stages and placated audiences, was drawn to the impassive acting style of Nō theater, while Antonin Artaud looked to Balinese ritual for a way to dramatize the "primitive mind." A similar impulse can be seen in the later twentieth century, when theater artists such as Peter Brook looked to Southeast Asia to access a dramatic tradition less mediated by the text and by the spatial and temporal restrictions of the Western theatrical event. Modernist artists have often turned to Eastern traditions as a way to gain distance from the modern Western world, its historicity, its chaotic imperial endeavors, and its failed promise that progress equals freedom. Drawing from Eastern traditions allowed imaginative access to art and culture constructed as outside of history, beyond time. Theater, as a time- and space-bound social event, however, could never quite accomplish modernism's imaginative leap to universality and timelessness. As Puchner points out, "the living actor [was] the obstacle for a truly modernist art."[21] Matisse's odalisque is always spatially and temporally elsewhere, in contrast to the belly-dancing burlesque performer, who is emphatically here and now.

These examples of modernism's Orientalism point to one of modernity's other key features, which Diamond identifies, following Denise Albanese, as the way in which the modern world has produced itself through othering—through the discursive and material ordering of cultures and the demarcation of distinct regions of culture. Over the past two centuries, cultural hierarchies have been constructed both politically and aesthetically so that certain cultures and certain cultural forms could be legitimized, and others delegitimized.[22] As Min Tian points out, early twentieth-century avant-garde adaptations of Asian drama "suggest a reversal of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

Eurocentrism and Orientalism, but seen from their interpretations and their claims for universality, they in fact represent a re-defined and re-centralized position—a neo-Eurocentrism and a neo-Orientalism."[23] And yet, examples of Asian uses of European and American theater forms complicate such a claim. For example, in late nineteenth-century Japan, the *shingeki* movement developed as Japanese playwrights looked to Western realism for an alternative to an Asian theater bound by convention and tradition, and plays by Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, and O'Neill were adapted and staged. In both cases, drawing from another culture's artistic traditions provides a way not only of forging a new aesthetic and creating new forms, but also of breaking away from the ideologies produced and maintained by the legitimized aesthetic and dominant forms of one's own culture.

The question that emerges here is: does Vogel's use of Bunraku constitute a contemporary form of Orientalism? I would suggest that, given the kinds of complex cross-cultural engagements evident in the plays of Wole Soyinka, Satoh Makoto, Gao Xingjian, and Oriza Hirata, which draw from the ancient Greeks, Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, and American realism, we can no longer reductively assume that Western use of Eastern traditions is a form of cultural appropriation, since such assumptions ignore more complex patterns of contemporary cultural borrowings and work to keep in place the very power hierarchies that postcolonial theory and deconstruction have meant to problematize. Perhaps the most productive way to evaluate the use of any theatrical traditional is in relation to the specific context of its production and reception, as well as in relation to the broader social, political, and cultural history of which it is a part. Only by historicizing and contextualizing our interpretations can we prevent the reinscription of stereotypes that associate the West with authority, progress, and innovation and the East with passivity, timelessness, and tradition.

II. Staging the Perpetual Present

Wilder used the stage to infuse a sense of the eternal into the everyday. *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* revolves around a family trip to visit the eldest daughter of the Kirby family, Beulah, who has just lost her first-born child. While the title evokes a specificity of time and place, as

well as a forward movement of action, the play gives universal meaning to American institutions—like family and religion—and events—like car trips—by stripping them of sentiment, drama, and other expected accoutrements of realist drama. According to Jackson R. Bryer, "Wilder said of the play, '[i]t was the American family viewed as a fragment yet emerging as totality.'"[24] *Happy Journey* is important in that it marks Wilder's first experiment with the Stage Manager, a choric figure who provides distance from the stage action and points to the limitations of human perceptions of time. It is the Stage Manager, for example, who enables Emily Webb (and the audience) of *Our Town* to realize: "We don't have time to look at one another.… Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?"[25] As a universalizing figure, the Stage Manager offers an expansive perspective on a world of lost moments and narrow perceptions.

Happy Journey received its first professional production in New York City in 1948, alongside Jean-Paul Sartre's bitter drama *The Respectful Prostitute*. Theater critic Brooks Atkinson described Wilder's minimal set—"Only four kitchen chairs—imagine!"—as a device he "borrowed from the Chinese, who for about 4,000 years have been writing stunning dramas without scenery and with a few routine props." Atkinson concluded that although "thoroughly enjoyable," the play seemed "too simple, too kind, too romantic and too imaginative" to be a hit on Broadway.[26] At a time when Broadway was becoming increasingly commercialized and experimental drama no longer seemed like a safe, that is, profitable bet, Wilder's subtle one-acts were a tough sell. His plays lacked the heat and drama of Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, a focus on a tragic hero like Arthur Miller, or an explicit political message like Odets. Neither quite realism nor expressionism, Wilder's plays were imaginative exercises that used the theater as a spatial and temporal forum through which audiences might gain distance from the social world and recognize unacknowledged moments.

The Long Christmas Dinner, for example, dramatizes ninety years and three generations of Christmas dinners in the Bayard home, all concentrated in a single, thirty-five minute act. As the play moves from generation to generation, each family member enters through a door symbolizing birth, and eventually exits through the door signaling death.

Dispensing with plot and dramatic conflict, Wilder focuses sharply on single moments punctuated by everyday routines, and propelled only by the pulse of time's passing. David Castronovo describes the play as "the awesome spectacle of men and women enmeshed in petty concerns and accelerating toward death."[27] What the play emphasizes, however, is that family dinners, factory work, war, and weather are not petty concerns, but rather the very stuff from which lives and histories are made. And it is the awareness of this seemingly banal fact that animates, elevates, and gives meaning and context to the lives of the characters. As Patricia R. Schroeder puts it, although "the rituals themselves endure … they change by retaining the imprint of each character who has enacted them."[28] There is always a residue of the past in Wilder's "perpetual present," and as such his plays are often edged with a sense of loss. In a 1955 *New York Times* feature article on the playwright, Tyrone Guthrie described *Christmas Dinner* and *Happy Journey* as "masterpieces of their kind," and yet, like Atkinson, he recognized that, "none of these works could truthfully be regarded as likely to hit the jackpot of popular favor."[29]

Guthrie offers a point of connection between Wilder and Vogel in his pithy précis: "It is an essential part of Wilder's theatrical creed that the theatre is a place where actors and audience meet in a game—but a profoundly serious game—of make-believe."[30] Similarly, in *LCRH*, Vogel writes that what she is looking for is "the magic we feel from communal participation in the make-believe of the spirit."[31] In this serious game of make-believe—and of making belief—Vogel conjures the ghost of Wilder. Striving not for universality, but for critical reflection, Vogel borrows Wilder's focus on family, car trips, and holiday dinners and his skillful fusion of abstract and concrete, while translating his representation of teleological time into a recursive pattern, a series of moments and memories recollected by a family of five traveling in the car on one "very cold Christmas…decades and days ago."[32] And while Vogel's play posits a past that actively inhabits the present, the stalling of any final forward movement provokes a question pertinent to our contemporary moment: "now where?" Vogel revises Wilder's belief in progress into what might be interpreted as a kind of nostalgic hope, a looking back that generates a longing for home and also a longing for hope.

III. Staging Memory

LCRH fuses the principles of the one-act play and the techniques of Bunraku to dramatize a family car trip to have Christmas dinner at grandma's house, as well as the emotional repercussions of this trip in the lives of each family member. Vogel says of the play, "I chose Christmas because for us in America, regardless of whether we are Christian, it is the closest thing to myth we have."[33] Vogel suggests that the play be produced during either "[t]he before [or] the aftermath"[34] of Christmas, a suggestion that displaces the present by focusing on the halo of memories that cluster around annual rituals. The play begins in an undetermined past, then flashes forward in time, and at a pivotal moment of crisis stands still. The action pivots around a fight between the mother and father, referred to generically as Man and Woman, which erupts in the family car, signaled simply by a bench. As the mother and father argue in the front seat, their two daughters, Claire and Rebecca, and son, Stephen, sit anxiously in the back seat, and as the argument escalates and the Man raises his hand to strike the Woman, the car veers out of control, coming to a stop on the edge of a slippery cliff. Vogel stops this moment, a violent memory that reverberates throughout the play as the "before and the aftermath" of the play action.

The violence of this moment, and others throughout the play, is divested of its expected affective impact through the juxtaposition of a Japanese aesthetic with Western cultural content. As Vogel puts it, *LCRH* exemplifies "one westerner's misunderstanding of Bunraku. The misunderstanding is key."[35] Vogel's use of Bunraku techniques defamiliarizes subjects such as family, violence, religion, and sexuality, displacing habituated responses with responses that require constant negotiation between drama and aesthetics, identification and distance, affect and intellect. For example, as Good King Wenceslas is played on a samisen with Bunraku-like puppets performing the parts of the children, the emotional values associated with these cultural values are radically altered. Vogel draws on the nonrepresentational aesthetic of Bunraku for ways to disorient conventional modes of spectatorship associated with Western realist drama, to dramatize time in a nonlinear pattern, and to problematize notions of individual agency, privacy, and interiority central to constructions of the modern, Western subject.

Deriving its name from eighteenth-century playwright Uemura Bunrakuken, Bunraku developed out of earlier forms of sixteenth-century doll theater. Unlike Nō theater, which emerged in the fourteenth century under the support of the shogunate, Bunraku emerged as a popular form that appealed to the general public. And yet Nō and Bunraku are both highly literary forms. As Donald Keene points out, "Bunraku is the one theatre of dolls for which literary masterpieces have been especially composed,"[36] and this literary emphasis both connects it to Nō and differentiates it from Kabuki, a popular form that places primary focus on the actor's body and gestures. The text of Bunraku is sung by chanters who occupy a central role in the performance. As Keene explains, "the chanter was moved from backstage to a place before the audience, as if to deny the illusion that the puppets were speaking for themselves, and to insist on the primacy of the written word."[37] The chanted narrative is embodied and performed by the puppets, which are three to four feet tall and operated by three puppeteers. The senior puppeteer wears elaborate traditional robes and holds the puppet upright, while observing its movements and reacting to them expressively. The two assistants, who dress in black cloaks, manipulate the arms and legs in minute and intricate movements that take a lifetime of training to master. As Keene points out, the senior puppeteer "makes no attempt to conceal the fact that she is manipulating the puppet," since "the illusion that the puppets [are] moving and speaking of their own accord" is not the aim of the spectacle.[38] The aim of Bunraku performance is the unity of elements, from the unified breath of the puppeteers to the coming together of the three components—text, music, and puppets. Keene explains: "If the three operators of a puppet must 'breathe' as a single entity, it is no less essential that the three component parts of Bunraku, the narration, the music, and the puppets, 'breathe' as one."[39] As the three puppeteers breathe together, the puppet comes to life for the audience; the more unified the breath, the more lifelike the puppet appears. Similarly, the more indivisible the dramatic components seem, the more animated the spectacle.

Bunraku splits the conventions of Western theater into three separate elements, thus presenting a total, though divided, visual display. In his essay, "The Dolls of Bunraku," Roland Barthes writes:

> Bunraku practices in effect three separate modes of writing, which allow us to read simultaneously three areas of the spectacle: the marionette, the manipulator, the vocalizer: the effected gesture, he who effects the gesture, and the vocal gesture.[40]

Barthes connects the divided elements of Bunraku theater and Brechtian epic theater, which challenged the unity of the "total work of art," pointing out that, in the Asian actor, Brecht recognized "here reigns the *quotation*" that is "freed from the metonymic contagion of voice and gesture, of the spirit and the body, which cements together [the Western] actor."[41] This performative "quotation," which deconstructed voice and gesture, spirit and body, would be called by Walter Benjamin, "*gestus*." In *Understanding Brecht*, Benjamin describes Brecht's "theatre of interruption," identifying the interruptive element as *gestus*,"the quotable gesture," which disrupts the flow of action and creates a distance between the actor and the action being performed. "'Making gestures quotable' is one of the essential achievements of epic theatre,"[42] concluded Benjamin. As the crystallization of a social condition, the *gestus* aims to separate actor and consciousness and to suspend the citation of a social action long enough for the spectator to see other possible actions that might be performed in its place. It is this deliberate theatricality that Diamond mobilizes for a feminist theater practice, one that "transforms an object into a *gestus* or a dialectical image (Brecht, Benjamin)" out of which "truths [are] produced in engaged interpretation."[43] Vogel too mobilizes this suspension of a social action and interruption of linear time, quoting a past moment long enough for the audience and actors to analyze its continued resonance in the present.

The dialectical image, like the *gestus*, is an interruption in historical time that yields social meanings in the present—or now-time (*Jetztzeit*). As Benjamin writes:

> The dialectical image is one flashing up momentarily. It is thus, as an image flashing up in the *now* of its recognizability, that the past … can be captured. The redemption which can be carried out in this way and in no other is always to be won out of the perception of that which is being lost irretrievably.[44]

We might recognize Wilder's "perpetual present tense" as the humanist's version of Benjamin's mystical now-time. As Diamond explains, the notion of now-time "is key to Benjamin's Messianic Marxism—his

visioning of revolution not as the logical result of class struggle in all its stages, but as the perpendicular collision of linear historical time with Messianic time, when, suddenly, history becomes 'citable [meaningful] in all its moments'."[45] From this perspective of now-time, "we are palpably, mimetically immersed in the unrecorded history of our social existence—in the conflicting loops, freeze-frames, vanishings, fragmented memories … that aesthetic time banishes."[46] Taking a private memory and suspending it for public scrutiny, Vogel shows how the organization of time shapes the bodies, thoughts, and choices of her characters.

The subtitle—*A Puppet Play with Actors*—suggests the puppets' central role in *LCRH*, a centrality that visually complicates some of the fundamental dualisms structuring Western theater and culture: body/voice; interiority/exteriority; active/passive; past self/present self; private/public; individual memory/collective memory; performativity/theatricality. The actors playing the adult children operate the puppets, which stand in as their child-selves, and the movements are orchestrated in response to the dialogue narrated by the mother and father. In this way, the puppets become animated representations of the past, while the puppeteers witness a re-enactment of this past (their past) from an objective perspective. And as the actor-puppeteers replay their memories in an improvisational performance, they gain an opportunity for critical examination and revision of these memories. The puppet-puppeteer relationship enacts a critical distance between actor and action performed, between memory and affect, and between past and present. Like Bunraku puppeteers, the actor-puppeteers in *LCRH* remain visible when manipulating the puppets. However, unlike the animated facial expressions and precise manipulations of Bunraku puppeteers, the puppeteers in *LCRH* operate the puppets somewhat awkwardly with expressions that remain "neutral and unemotive."[47] The actor-puppeteers appear like a diegetic audience, watching the action that they are making the puppet perform and placing the audience in the same position of detached analysis, rather than emotional (over)involvement. Making the puppets the primary focus further displaces conventional practices of interpretation and identification, discouraging the moralizing tendencies that often accompany representations of gender, sexuality, religion, and family.

Along with the theatrical displacement of body-voice, act-agent, past-present effected by the puppets, Vogel draws on the narrative technique of Bunraku to problematize Western notions of psychological interiority, privacy, and individuality. The first section of the play uses nonrealistic dialogue, with the parents narrating the thoughts of their children and of each other aloud to the audience, in past-tense, verse form. This technique not only disrupts naturalistic conventions of character, but also notions of individuality and interiority so central to Western constructions of selfhood. The Man, for example, narrates his wife's thoughts during Christmas mass: "The mother thought perhaps she should have an affair / To feel the heat and motion of a man's body against hers" (17). The Man and Woman also narrate the thoughts of their children. As Stephen struggles with anxious thoughts about his burgeoning sexuality, his father speaks these thoughts aloud to the audience: "Was he bad? For watching boys? / Think, Stephen, of something else / Without heat and motion" (17). Similarly, the Woman narrates her daughter Claire's thoughts: "She had asked for cowboy boots and cowboy guns… She had not noticed that slight crease / in her mother's brow, a concern, / A question too soon to be asked" (19).What is experienced initially as private and shameful is here publicly re-enacted as a shared experience. Further, the ventriloquism performed by Man and Woman separates performative gestures from the authority that gives them force and meaning. Thus, as the Man and Woman (the authority) narrate the thoughts of their puppet-children, the puppets perform or "cite" these narrated thoughts in the form of gestures. The relationship between thought and act is in this way taken apart and made visible. And although the parents are invested with the authority to speak the thoughts of the children, it is the adult-puppeteers who are the agents of the performative act. Like the *gestus*, this disjunctive narrative technique disrupts the autonomy of the speaker, positioning the social aspects of the voice in dissonant tension with individual bodies, thereby radically disrupting the notion of a private, inner consciousness with a circulation of thoughts and feelings that, although understood as individually felt, are actually collectively experienced.

This distinctive narrative strategy also suggests that sexuality is neither private nor individual, but part of a shared system of internalized codes, gestures, and affects. As Judith Butler writes in *Undoing Gender*, sexuality is relational and resists claims to possession:

> And so when we speak about *my* sexuality or *my* gender, as we do (and as we must) we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are *modes of being dispossessed*, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another.[48]

Gender and sexuality can never be "mine," then, but are always products of the social world from which I speak. This displacement of body and voice in the play stages a unique challenge to understandings of gender and sexuality as the essence or secret truth of one's identity. As the seemingly private thoughts and feelings of the children are made public by the parents' narration, the audience reads this narration as a dispossession; the children are dispossessed by the authority of their parents and the heteronormative culture of which they are a part, and the puppets become emblems of this dispossession, homeless materialized spirits still seeking refuge.

One of the play's central concerns revolves around questions of belief. Narrated by the Man, Claire repeatedly asks her parents during Christmas Mass at the family's Unitarian church, "But What Do We Believe?" (24, 28). In a culture that has lost its faith in universal categories and communal values, the characters in *LCRH* search for something solid on which to build a belief. Religion, like art, involves constructing a system of belief through which meaning and value are created. In his chapter entitled "The Production of Belief" in *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu writes, "aesthetic conflicts about the legitimate vision of the world—in the last resort, about what deserves to be represented and the right to represent it—are political conflicts (appearing in their most euphemized form) for the power to impose the dominant definition of reality."[49] Utilizing theater's capacity to make and remake different versions of reality, Vogel foregrounds the relationship between artistic and political representations while demystifying the systems of belief (religion) and institutions (family) that give value and authority to *certain* bodies and *some* voices. What is at stake in the production of belief systems is the authority to make distinctions between what is real and what is not, to define what is right and what is wrong, and to decide what (and who) matters and what (and who) does not.

Neither theater nor religion is, in Vogel's play, about a belief system based on binary divisions between real and illusion, right and wrong, spirit and flesh. As the young Unitarian Minister's sermon reinforces, "It

is not only Joy To The World! It is Joy In the World" (25). The Minister's didactic function in the play underscores the various ways we learn and internalize cultural beliefs and values. Here, religious authority is used to construct alternative ways of looking at social and spiritual realities that disrupt distinctions between material and spiritual, sacred and profane, public and private. Showing slides of Japan's Edo period as part of his sermon, the Minister inadvertently shows an image of a Japanese prostitute. Transforming his mistake into a teaching moment, he describes the prostitute as "a lady of the…um, Theatre district of Edo. A working lady" (26). He elaborates on the image in a neutral tone, describing the position of the prostitute on the bottom, "And on top a very nice gentleman, possibly of the warrior class. In our culture, we revere Mary Magdalene in a similar way. Although Mary Magdalene, um, renounced her line of work" (26).

This passage forges connections between the sexualized iconography of women in both Western and Eastern cultures, past and present. Moreover, his lesson reinforces the working lady's labor *as labor*. Curious, Claire asks her mother, "Did the Virgin Mary work?" and her mother answers, "No. She stayed at home. Like your mother" (27).Through this cross-cultural comparison, the play constructs a micromaterialist history of female labor and female sexuality out of sacred feminine icons. In this way, the sacred is historicized and revealed as part of the larger narrative of the history of sexuality.

The Minister, like Vogel, looks to Japan for a perspective that is not so locked into binaries of spirit/flesh, physical/metaphysical, sacred/profane. As the Minister points out, "Sometimes using the distance and perspective / Of a Far-off land, of another people / We can return and see our home more clearly" (25). In sharp contrast to the denunciation of bodily desires and pleasures that characterizes much Christian theology, the Minister suggests, "Putting aside Western notions of guilt and shame about the body— / Why not embrace what will too soon be gone?" (25). He points to "artists and courtesans, actors and merchants" as models to follow, since they are "[d]etermined to enjoy the flesh because it was ephemeral" (25). As the Minister explains, "Artists who wrestled with this relationship of man / And nature called this art: 'Ukiyo-e' / The Floating World" (25). *Ukiyo-e*, or the Floating World, is the Japanese term for a type of art that seeks to represent humanity's relationship to nature. Emerging from

the urban culture of Edo (modern-day Tokyo) between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, *Ukiyo-e* is art that is closely connected with the pleasures of theaters and restaurants, of geisha and courtesans. Vogel invokes this notion in her play to disrupt and defamiliarize the Western tendency to view bodily pleasures as morally suspect, presenting pleasure, instead, as something to be honored, celebrated, remembered. In its liminality (to use Victor Turner's term), theater itself is a kind of floating world, an embodied medium that reminds us of the pleasures and transience of inhabiting a body. Significantly, the play's epigraph is a poem entitled "Floating World," written by Carl Vogel, whose ghost inhabits the play and whose body is revived in its performance.

As Christmas Mass shifts into Christmas dinner at the grandparents' house, the play's focus on religion shifts to a focus on family. And as the Minister narrates the role of grandmother and grandfather, religious and family rituals are implicitly juxtaposed and the thoughts and tensions simmering beneath the surface during Mass and in the family car bubble forth into overt violence. Claire is given a gift that clearly demonstrates that she is her father's favorite child, Stephen is shamed and mocked by the Man for his sexual disposition, and the grandfather rails against the Man for so callously hurting his son, hurling the verbal barb,"Kike!" at his son-in-law, to which the Man responds with "Cocksucker!" (37). As "*the two men waltz in a wrestler's embrace,*" they enact a stylized fight performed in the present, but narrated as an event of the past, bringing distance to the emotional impact of this moment. And as the Minister narrates the emotion of the moment—"And the women and children keened a collective:... 'Aaaahhhhh!'"(38)—Claire takes over with the memory of "feeling the shame / … And whatever happened from that moment on / Moments linked to moments / It was all her fault" (40). Unlike the minutes that Emily witnesses in *Our Town*, which move ever forward, time in *LCRH* moves recursively, interrupting perspectives of progress with memories that return to haunt the present. After the fight at the grandparents' house, the play returns to the family car to stage the fight between the Man and the Woman. As the Woman says bitterly to her husband, "Well. What a lovely Christmas you've given me," the Man responds by "*ritualistically draw[ing] his right hand back to strike*." But Claire halts this moment by making a future promise—"I will never have children" (46)—and the play

flashes forward to witness the failed relationships of Claire, Rebecca, and Stephen, all of whom are still living out this frozen moment in the family car.

In the second half of the play, each sibling has a parallel scene in which each performs a monologue, spoken in the present tense, prose form and punctuated by Japanese wood blocks. The monologues are spoken not to the audience, but to the siblings' respective partners, who were, in Mark Brokaw's production at New York City's Vineyard Theatre, represented by looming shadow puppets (designed by master puppeteer Basil Twist) positioned behind a screen backstage, without any defining or humanizing characteristics. As the actors stood facing stage left to speak their lines, the shadow puppets performed broad, theatrical gestures, producing an imposing silhouette that suggested both the enormous presence of the past in the siblings' future lives and also their distance from it. Twenty-five years later, Rebecca rails against her lesbian lover, who has been cheating on her and who has locked her out of their apartment, twenty-four years later, Claire yells at her abusive partner, who also has locked her out, and sixteen years after that fateful Christmas car trip, Stephen laments his partner's infidelity. Each stands outside in the winter cold on Christmas Eve, homeless.

Unlike his sisters, Stephen moves fluidly across temporal and spatial boundaries in this section, as he witnesses his sisters' suffering, re-enacts his own, and provides critical distance on the stage action through his direct addresses to the audience. After delivering his dejected monologue to his ex-partner, Joe, Stephen's scene moves to a gay bar, where he meets a "*hunky version of one of the Village People*" (49), and has an impromptu and unprotected encounter in the backroom, performed by puppets that "*simulate a sexual act that means this play will never be performed in Texas*" (50). As the puppets thrust behind the screen, Stephen, also behind the screen, mimes gestures that suggest at first a state of pain, then relaxation, then pleasure, and finally realization. Stephen's repositioning from upstage to backstage behind a screen metaphorically dramatizes the denial and repression of a homophobic culture. Reaching their own respective moments of hopelessness—Rebecca sitting frozen in a snow bank waiting to die and Claire holding the gun in her mouth—the sisters are suddenly saved by a memory of their brother, a memory that resuscitates

their bodies with an infusion of breath. What the audience realizes is that Stephen has since died of AIDS and returns every year on the day after Christmas, St. Stephen's Day, to observe his sisters. Considered to be the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen is invoked as one of the many ways the play works to defamiliarize AIDS and homosexuality, the way it juxtaposes Eastern and Western religious and cultural traditions, and the way it displaces a habituated moral response with aesthetic distance.

In the latter half of the play, the Ghost of Stephen takes on a central role and acts as a mediator between the theater audience and the play world. Stephen tells the audience about his love for Joe, his admiration of Zeami, Kabuki, and "all things Japanese" (49), and his yearly return to visit his sisters, adding, "All of our ancestors come back to observe the still breathing" (51). It is the breath—and not the body—that separates the living and the dead in *LCRH*. This reformulation works to displace the moral significations embedded in bodies, particularly those bodies marked as sexually deviant and contaminated, with an emphasis on the breath as ontological ground zero. Philosopher Mladen Dolar explains, "In many languages there is an etymological link between spirit and breath (breath being the 'voiceless voice,' the zero point of vocal emission); the voice carried by breath points to the soul irreducible to the body."[50] The play's emphasis on the breath repositions the social discourse surrounding AIDS as a shared, collective concern, rather than a problem arising from the sexual deviance of a marginalized group.

In its ceremonial solemnity, the middle section of the play borrows more from Nō drama than from Bunraku. And in the tradition of Nō, Stephen assumes the role of *shite*, the first actor and central figure that, Keene explains, is the "only true personage"[51] of a Nō play. Depending on the play, the *shite* performs the role of a demon, a god, a woman, an old man, or a child. Keene points out that, the *shite* "has usually died before the play begins,"[52] and returns as the incarnation of a powerful emotion left unresolved, such as "enmity, possessive jealousy, or remorse."[53] Not at all the protagonist of Western realist drama, "the *shite* belongs to another world, not our own, and the creation of character, in the sense that the term is used in other forms of drama, is meaningless in Nō."[54] As Zvika Serper explains, the skill of the Nō actor is demonstrated in the performance of "contrasting acting qualities," such as "feminine/masculine" and "delicate/

demonic." Performing such contrasts generates an "aesthetic tension between the actor and the character and enable[s] a greater appreciation of acting as art."[55] Further, since Nō is nondialectical—that is, it does not rely on the conflict generated between a protagonist and antagonist—the other players, the *waki* (second actor), *tsure* (companion to the *shite*), and the *jiutai* (the chorus) "are merely observers of the action and not antagonists."[56] This nondialectical, nonrealist dynamic engages the audience in a different kind of theatrical spectatorship, one that demands attention, at once, to affect and aesthetics, dramatic effect and technique, unity and fragmentation. And in the tradition of the *shite* figure of Nō drama, Wilder's Stage Manager, and Christianity's first martyr, the character of Stephen assumes a prominent role at the center of the play, not as a moral figure, but as an artistic expression of a social condition.

Reflecting on his contraction of AIDS, Stephen describes his illness to the audience in aesthetic terms:

> How my sisters will cry. I could feel the virus entering my body. But I could not undo what had been done. And for the next several years, I could feel the virus multiply with a ferocious beauty—replicating patterns that changed and mutated. I could not see the beauty then, of course.… It is a very terrible beauty. But it is a beauty all the same. It takes distance to see the beauty in it. And now I have all the distance in the world. (50–51)

The "terrible beauty" that Stephen describes calls to mind Benjamin's theory of the aura.[57] As a spatial and temporal term, the aura implies both physical and historical distance. As Diamond writes in *Unmaking Mimesis*, "Benjamin links the 'experience of the aura' with a complex temporality." "To destroy the aura," Diamond suggests, "is to *release experiences*—emotions, understandings correspondences—for *exoteric* use in the present."[58] Defining the disease that took over his body from an aesthetic perspective, rather than a pathologizing one, Stephen's above speech uses a different set of correspondences, images, and emotions to define AIDS and to describe the bodies affected—and stigmatized—by it.

Providing the dramatic and aesthetic center of the play is a dance, which is performed by the same actor who plays the Unitarian minister and grandmother. Of the dancer, Vogel suggests in her stage directions, "*oh, let him be beautiful*" (52). The dance is a version of the *mai-goto* of Nō drama, a conceptual dance piece performed to instrumental music. Vogel

notes that directors and choreographers should decide for themselves how to interpret this section "*for western eyes*," admitting that "*it is as unknown to me as the backroom of the bar*" (52). Quite characteristically, Vogel adds a reference to the eclectic musical subtext informing her writing practice: "*I wrote this part to the musical segment 'Porno 3003'… and a very manic version of 'Tomorrow Shall be My Dancing Day'*" (52). That Vogel draws inspiration from the synthetic rhythms of the Japanese pop group Pizzicato Five and a traditional English Christmas carol in order to write a highly abstract, erotic dance suggests a great deal about the way she uses formal experimentation to disorient cultural stereotypes. As the dancer moves seductively and gracefully around Stephen, the dance becomes an aesthetic revision of Stephen's romantic relationship and of the violent intrusion of AIDS into his life, evoking connections between art and eroticism. The mise-en-scène of this section was created by Neil Patel at the Vineyard using a red silk backdrop, which provided the visual and symbolic subtext of the dance. The effect suggested a mode of perception grounded not in dualities but in immanence, an understanding of spirit *in* the flesh, suffering *in* pleasure, beauty *in* pain. At the end of the dance, with the dancer "*breathing hard … he takes Stephen in his arms and pours his breath into Stephen's mouth*" (52). Here, breath is linked to desire, a desire that is both ephemeral and embodied, of the spirit and of the flesh. After the dance, the Ghost of Stephen then turns to the audience to say:

> How wonderful it feels to breathe! You cannot know how beautiful it is. When you are alive, you cannot see your breath. But we your ancestors can see the air move when you breathe. Your breathing creates a spectrum of color; the motion and heat of your life. And often—in a church or a meeting, in a mosque—or like now, in a theatre.… whenever a family or an audience hold your breath together—a moment of silence before you collectively expel the air—Ah, then: Fireworks for the ancestors! (52–53)

Like the unified breath in Bunraku that brings the theatrical spectacle to life, breath is envisioned here as the force that unites metaphysical and physical worlds. And in this moment of a collectively held breath, living and dead are united in the Floating World and a different kind of temporality is imagined, one in which the past bears witness to the present and those who have passed return to remind the present of what has not yet been remembered. And with the theater audience positioned as both spectator and spectacle, the play returns to the fight in the family car.

Inviting the audience to return with him to that frozen memory

on the edge of the slippery cliff, the Ghost of Stephen says, "There is a moment I want you to watch with me. A moment of time stopping…. Come back with me now and perhaps you will see it" (53). He breathes life back into the puppets, resumes his place among the living, and the play begins again at the moment when the Man is about to hit the Woman, only, now, the audience understands the implications of this moment in the future lives of the three children. As "*the man raises his right hand and backhands the woman, slowly, ritualistically*" (53) and the car comes to a halt on the edge of a precipice, a cascade of hopeful "what if's" erupt from each family member: "If I try harder" (55) wonders the mother, "If I dress a bit younger—If I say softer things" (56). And together, the Man and Woman wonder, "If," until Rebecca interrupts:

> *Woman and Man*: If…
> (*Beat. The Narrators almost turn to each other.*)
> *Rebecca*: And then our father thought of Sheila.
> *Ghost of Stephen*: The cream of her breasts
> *Claire*: The sliver of her thighs
> *Rebecca*: And he wanted to see her.
> He must see her. (56)

Rereading their father's thoughts, his desire to see his mistress Sheila, the children identify the force—the desire—that eventually propelled the family car back onto stable ground. In the past tense, Rebecca narrates, "As one family and one flesh, / We breathed as one" (57), and with the breath as *gestus*, the past is brought to life in the present. As the siblings assume narrative authority, they look critically at the past and see other possible outcomes of that moment decades ago, revising the thoughts and words of their parents in the theatrical present tense, and thus potentially reformulating their future effects. And as the Ghost of Stephen observes *"the currents of color and air"* generated from the breath of the gathered collective, he comments on the spectacular convergence of past and present, living and departed: "Ah! How beautiful!" he says, "Do you see it?" (57). The play concludes, however, with the Man's present tense imperative—"Children:—let's go home"—followed by Stephen's final line, narrated in the past tense: "And so—we went" (57). The recursive movements of time and memory, in the end, lead back home. In an era in which progress has proved to be a limited and problematical way of

thinking about and dramatizing time and the nuclear family continues to function as the symbolic and social center of American culture, Vogel's play seems unsure of where to go; it registers a nostalgic longing—for home and for hope.

In his *New York Times* review of Long Wharf Theatre's 2003 production of *LCRH*, directed by Oskar Eustis, David DeWitt described Vogel's approach as "a revelation … pure as mathematics in its translation of the prosaic into the abstract."[59] However, "the achievements of this production," according to DeWitt, came "with sacrifices," such as the lack of "gripping momentum" and an overall tone that was "constantly chilly, seldom finding the heat of anything visceral or immediate."[60] The play was lauded as a unique experiment in form, but its lack of conventional conflict and forward movement troubled popular critics and audiences. And although it participates in the recent popularity of puppetry in contemporary theater—from *Avenue Q* to *The Lion King* to *War Horse*—*LCRH* is considerably less spectacular than these more popular shows. Despite its verbal expressions of "heat and motion," the play was seen as too detached, its fusion of Western subject matter and Eastern formal techniques pushing its audiences away, instead of inviting them to "come closer." Ann Pellegrini argues, however, that *LCRH* "reveals the fragility and the hope of human (re)connection," and the characters "yearn for contact with each other, with the past, with lost parts of themselves."[61] The play seems, paradoxically, both alienating and nostalgic, seeking distance from an emphasis on the body, but at the same time also yearning for the warmth of embodied connection.

One way of interpreting the play's two jostling impulses—its nostalgia and its distance—is to consider them in relation to Jill Dolan's theory of the utopian performative, a theatrical experience that "lets audiences imagine utopia not as some idea of future perfection that might never arrive, but as brief enactments of the possibilities of a process that starts now, in this moment at the theater."[62] The utopian performative does not resolve or redeem the past, nor does it promise a better future; rather, it shows us how these temporal arrangements are always (and only) being imagined, constructed, and enacted in the present moment. In *LCRH*, the utopian performative emerges when the ghosts of memory, theater history, and modernity converge in the "phantom note" of performance. This

theatrical experience does not signal the transcendence of time, history, and difference, but rather a recognition of our participation in "a larger web of culture" and of history that "requires empathy and connection over space and time."[63] Vogel's plays all cultivate such empathic connections, forged out of an engagement with material history and fostered in the present-tenseness of theater. In her forward to *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Vogel looks to Wilder for both critical distance and aesthetic inspiration, revising his belief in progress into a belief in hope:

> He believed that the most pertinent of voices to listen to in times of crisis are the voices passed down through the ages. If, at this point in time, we may not share Thornton Wilder's confidence in the strength of canonic literature and great minds to pull us through, we can enjoy, in the words of critic Francis Fergusson, Wilder's "marriage of Plato and Groucho Marx." And now, more than ever, we can appreciate his legacy, his questioning mind and his belief that hope is the most necessary of civic virtues.[64]

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Notes

[1] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 3.

[2] Paula Vogel, forward, *The Skin of Our Teeth: A Play* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2003), viii.

[3] Elin Diamond, "Modern Drama/Modernity's Drama," *Modern Drama* 44 (2001): 3–15.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Carlson, 10–11.

[6] Diamond, "Modern Drama," 5.

[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] Paula Vogel, "Interview with Alexis Greene," *Women Who Write Plays: Interviews with American Dramatists*, ed. Alexis Greene (Hanover, N.H.: Smith and Kraus, 2001), 430.

[9] Burke states that "perspective by incongruity" makes for a *dramatic* vocabulary, as opposed to the liberal ideal of *neutral* naming in the characterization of processes. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 308–11.

[10] Paula Vogel, forward to *The Skin of Our Teeth*, viii. Quotations from this volume are hereafter cited in the text.

[11] Thornton Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwriting," in *Intent of the Artist*, ed. Augusto Centeno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 89.

[12] In his journals, Wilder reflects on his understanding of time, affirming a belief in what he calls "the forward movement of society." Wilder interprets Chekhov's plays, for example, as conveying

a sense that "the world will get better and better." See *Journals of Thornton Wilder, 1939–1961* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 107–8.

[13] Ibid., 108.

[14] Lincoln Konkle, *Thornton Wilder and the Puritan Narrative Tradition* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 92.

[15] Dayton Kohler, "Thornton Wilder," *English Journal* 28 (1939): 1–11.

[16] Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 4.

[17] Thornton Wilder, "Towards an American Language," *Atlantic* 190 (July 1952): 26–39.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Thornton Wilder, *The Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder*, ed. Robin Gibbs Wilder and Jackson R. Bryer (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 588.

[20] C. D. Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892–1992* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 16.

[21] Puchner, 4.

[22] See Diamond, "Modern Drama," 8; Denise Albanese, *New Science, New World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

[23] Min Tian, *The Poetics of Difference and Displacement: Twentieth-Century Chinese-Western Intercultural Theatre* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 238.

[24] Quoted in Talcott B. Clapp, "Thornton Writing a New Play," in *Conversation with Thornton Wilder*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Jackson, Miss.: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), 49.

[25] Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (New York: Samuel French, 1965), 83.

[26] Brooks J. Atkinson, "'The Happy Journey': New Stages Produces Thornton Wilder's One-Act Idyll as Curtain Raiser," *New York Times*, 21 March 1948, xi.

[27] David Castronovo, "Strange Discipline: Wilder's One-Act Experiments," in *Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder*, ed. Martin Blank (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), 99–115.

[28] Patricia R. Schroeder, *The Presence of the Past in Modern American Drama* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 61.

[29] Tyrone Guthrie, "The World of Thornton Wilder," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 November 1955, 26.

[30] Ibid., 27.

[31] Paula Vogel, author's note, *The Long Christmas Ride Home* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2004), 5.

[32] Ibid., 13.

[33] Quoted in Gerard Raymond, "Puppets and Politics," *The Advocate* 903, 25 November 2003, 56–57.

[34] Paula Vogel, author's note, 7.

[35] Ibid., 5.

[36] Donald Keene, *Nō and Bunraku: Two Forms of Japanese Theatre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 124.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 130.

[39] Ibid., 127.

[40] Roland Barthes, "The Dolls of Bunraku," trans. David Savran, *Diacritics* 6 (1976): 44–47 (46).

[41] Ibid., 47.

[42] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1973), 19.

[43] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Routledge), 147.

[44] Walter Benjamin, "Central Park," trans. Lloyd Spencer, *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 32–58 (49).

[45] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, ii.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Paula Vogel, *The Long Christmas Ride Home* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2004), 6.

[48] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19.

[49] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production,* ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 101–2.

[50] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Boston: MIT Press, 2006), 71.

[51] Keene, 18.

[52] Ibid., 9.

[53] Ibid., 18.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Zvika Serper, "'Between Two Worlds': The Dybbuk and the Japanese Noh and Kabuki Ghost Plays," *Comparative Drama* 35 (2001–02): 345–76.

[56] Keene, 18.

[57] The concept of "aura," which is one of Benjamin's most influential contributions, is best understood as both a temporal and a spatial term, suggesting both physical and historical distance. The aura implies authenticity, although this authenticity is recognized only in its destruction by mechanized reproduction.

[58] Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 145, 147.

[59] David DeWitt, "There's Mom and Dad and a Lot of Problems," *New York Times*, 1 February 2004, 14CN.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ann Pellegrini, "Repercussions and Remainders in the Plays of Paula Vogel: An Essay in Five Moments," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 482–83.

[62] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 17.

[63] Ibid., 162.

[64] Vogel, forward to *The Skin of Our Teeth*, xiii.