Dedication

To all those with whom I’ve worked, played, studied, and loved

For my Mother, Sister and Nephew
Acknowledgements

In gratitude to my University of Western Sydney advisors:
Jean Callaghan, Jane Goodall, Graham Marchant, and Glen McGillivray

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
Statement on Presentation

This submission comprises: Exegesis; two-part DVD of the first full-scale production of the play in December, 2004; program and postcard for the December, 2004 production; scripts of the 2004 production and most recent version of the play.

The Time Line for this DCA was governed by production opportunities. The dates for each of the productions along with their personnel are specified in Appendix G.

Because the subject of this study was American born and the majority of reference material was published in the U.S.A. American spelling has been adopted in order to maintain the integrity of direct quotations.

The paper on which this document has been printed is standard American-size “Letter” paper because the equivalent "International Standard A4” paper is not readily available in the United States.
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Abstract

In 1988, my interest in the Twentieth Century American painter and feminist icon, Georgia O’Keeffe, was sparked by two seemingly disparate events: The Art Institute of Chicago’s first posthumous retrospective show of the painter’s works and the twentieth anniversary reunion of the original Broadway cast of Hair (of which I had been a member) that was celebrated at the United Nations in New York. Somewhere within me at that time O’Keeffe and Hair became entwined. In studying O’Keeffe’s life I sensed that her sincerity of aspiration coupled with her dogged resolve were life-lessons that might inform all artists. As a performing artist, a logical vehicle by which I could explore O’Keeffe was through the creation and performance of a play about her life. In embarking in this direction, I hoped to discover some key to creativity whereby all artists could be informed.

O’Keeffe was a historical figure so my work included historical research that included autobiographical and biographical sources, videocassettes, correspondence, newspaper and magazine commentary. In addition to studying historical resources, O’Keeffe’s art was a primary resource; in particular what inspired it, how O’Keeffe painted and her philosophy of art. My research prompted the question: “At what point does the tenacious biographer leave off and the artful dramatist begin?” This question expresses the key creative and ethical problem of such a project: how much creative license can be taken with a subject who was an actual human being with a verifiable history?

O’Keeffe was a creature of contradiction so rather than attempting to reconcile the contradiction between historical accuracy and creativity, I would begin by immersing myself in the known facts about my subject which I would then use as an impetus for my imaginative engagement with her life. The frisson generated by this cohabitation of contradictions could result in a release that could then be shared with audiences and,
hopefully, enhance their understanding of the subject and the nature of creativity. To “dance”, so to speak, with her contradictions became my goal and methodology for writing *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe*.

A part of my study also considers my experience playing the character, Georgia O’Keeffe. I had not anticipated that O’Keeffe’s emotional contrarieties would affect me personally. I had expected her mood swings to manifest within the character of O’Keeffe; in fact, they also became a part of the actor portraying her. In addition, because O’Keeffe worked and reworked her subjects, I permitted myself that luxury as a writer; however, I neglected to allow myself as the actor time to engage in a similar exploration in order to integrate the rhythm of the role into my body. By default, I also became producer for the WorkShop production of my play (overburdening myself at a time when my focus should have been on the role of Georgia).

Nonetheless, O’Keeffe’s belief that one’s artistic expression must be the most perfect manifestation of one’s truth fueled my own conviction that integral to any artist of sincere aspiration was the quest for a pure form of personal expression as well as the necessity of maintaining one’s artistic vision. It was O’Keeffe’s philosophy that kept me on course as a performer. Moreover, although there is no blueprint for the creation of biographical drama, in the case of a work exploring the ambivalent O’Keeffe, embracing the dualities of historical accuracy and artistic integrity offered assurances of a probable road to travel. By embracing her inner direction and balancing her contrarieties, O’Keeffe seemingly guided my foray into her life.
Introduction

Georgia O’Keeffe’s need to manifest a uniquely individual art plus her earnest determination to succeed, remained constant, even when the seas were rough and the skies, overcast. As I began to study her life it became clear that focus on a task coupled with a dogged resolve were O’Keeffe life-lessons that might inform all artists. Moreover, of greater value to O’Keeffe than “a great gift” or “talent”, was “…something else. You have to have a kind a nerve. It’s mostly a lot of nerve, and a lot of very, very hard work.”¹ Part of my quest would require me to track the wellspring and path of this special “kind of nerve” and translate it into a dramatic form, both as a writer and as an actor.

My desire to develop a play about Georgia O’Keeffe was sparked in April, 1988, when two seemingly disparate events transformed my life. Two years after the death of the painter, the first posthumous retrospective of her work was mounted by The Art Institute of Chicago. There the breadth of O’Keeffe’s artistic output was demonstrated and I was galvanized by the power and passion of her paintings and invigorated by her artistic vision.

Coinciding with the O’Keeffe retrospective was my own retrospective-of-sorts. As a member of the original Broadway cast of the musical Hair, I was invited to participate in its twentieth anniversary celebration. This event, entitled Hair, For the Next Generation, was to be performed at the United Nations’ General Assembly, the proceeds of which were to benefit children born with AIDS. I journeyed to New York, performed with other Hair alumni and found the musical had galvanized and re-invigorated my life.
It is only now, after my play has been written and performed, and with the luxury of hindsight, that I realize how the linking of my \textit{Hair} background with the O’Keeffe retrospective were coinciding influences that have defined the subsequent work.

Part of \textit{Hair}’s method was to use shock as a means of social transformation. For example: four-letter words were not the norm in traditional theatre at that time and \textit{Hair}’s audaciously playful use of profanity freed theatrical expression, just as the infamous “nude scene” broke a major taboo of legitimate theatre. Despite entrenched institutional resistance, which at times threatened the show’s opening and placed a successful season in jeopardy, \textit{Hair} went on to become a Broadway triumph. In so doing, the production defied convention and set the standard for a new kind of art. In a similar fashion, many years prior to \textit{Hair}, Georgia O’Keeffe had challenged art goers with her playful experiments in watercolor, audaciously explicit oils of enlarged blossoms (reminiscent of female anatomy) as well as her infamous modeling for Alfred Stieglitz’s much-publicized nude photographs, that broke a major taboo in the world of pictorial photographic art. Despite critical disdain for her sexually-explicit Freudian forms and subjects, O’Keeffe’s commitment to her artistic vision, in defiance of convention, set a new standard for art and assured her an income as a painter for most of her life.

Somewhere within me, back in 1988, \textit{Hair} and O’Keeffe had become entwined. \textit{Hair} was my first Broadway play as a performer, and \textit{A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe} would be my first full-length work as a dramatist. Initially drawn to the painter in the hope that I might find a key to my own artistic expression by examining hers, I found instead that the painter’s contradictions, together with the exigencies of writing, producing and performing a play about her, forced me to confront, just as she did, the absolute necessity of maintaining one’s artistic vision. Writing about O’Keeffe revealed her quest for a pure form of personal expression that was integral to her work and my research confirmed that O’Keeffe’s work did indeed express visual aspects of her:

\begin{quote}
I long ago came to the conclusion that even if I could put down accurately the thing I saw and enjoyed, it would not give the observer the kind of feeling it gave
\end{quote}
me. I had to create an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking [at] – not copy it.²

O’Keeffe did not confine her aspirations to art alone but chose to view her entire life’s purpose as “filling a space in a beautiful way.”³ Certainly, I was striving to distil her essence and convey it through the written word as precisely as possible. This desire was shared by some of the authors of the other plays about the painter who also confessed to wanting to be the most perfect channel for both their subject and their craft.

In an effort to discover elements of the art of biographical playwriting unique to that genre, a portion of Part I examines seven biographical plays: McIntyre’s Modigliani, O’Brien’s Virginia (about Virginia Woolf), McDonough’s Zelda (on Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald), and four works by William Luce, Barrymore (John Barrymore), The Belle of Amherst (Emily Dickinson), Bronte (Charlotte Bronte) and Lillian (Lillian Hellman). By studying these many and varied examples of biographical dramatic writing I hoped to unearth some shared topics for investigation as well as a possible codified methodology for approaching the creation of biographical drama. In addition, I wanted to learn if the subjects of each of these plays shared some special drive or need for self-expression. As shall be seen, my examination of these plays revealed the artist-subjects were as intent upon achieving the ultimate personal expression through their craft as their biographical dramatists.

Introduction.¹ Towards the Creation of a Biographical Drama

Before beginning any work, there has to be an idea, a desire, and a plan. I reasoned that a dramatic work about a historical figure would necessitate historical scholarship. Poised to commence the research that would inform my playwriting, I wondered: “At what point does the tenacious biographer leave off and the artful dramatist begin?” In short, how much creative license is advisable when the subject in question is an actual human being with a verifiable history? This question, as I was soon to discover, vexed other biographical artists and the “correct” approach was contested.
In a 2002 New York Times article Edward Albee, indisputably one of the major names in theatre, when discussing the nature of biographical drama, was quoted saying: “I think the first rule of playwriting is never lie.” Yet in the same article his fellow luminary, Arthur Miller, took the opposite view: “I don’t think Shakespeare’s plays are historically accurate. That’s beside the point.”

Such divergence of opinion expressed by eminent playwrights might have stalled me as to how to proceed. However, instead of viewing historical accuracy and artistic integrity as contradictory impulses, I chose to see their dissension as an interesting challenge to the biographical dramatist. Rather than select one mode above the other, I thought to achieve a balance between the historical reality of a subject and the essence of a theatrically created protagonist. My plan was to immerse myself in the known facts about my subject and use them as a springboard for uncovering the underlying thrust of her life. By weighing up the opposing elements of verifiable fact and artistic impulse an interesting tension might develop. The frisson generated by this cohabitation of contradictions could result in a release whereby something heretofore unknown might be generated. Another piece of O’Keeffe’s puzzle might be revealed which could then be shared with audiences thus enhancing their understanding of both the subject and themselves. To “dance”, so to speak, with these contradictions became my goal and one mode of approach to writing A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe. I also sought to employ O’Keeffe’s own methods for making her art: the source of many of her images came from dreams. She also examined and re-examined existing themes, shapes, and subjects. Part II considers my approach to the creation of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe whereas in Part I below, I examine the methodology of other biographical dramatists as they grappled with their subjects. It became evident that they, too, had had to learn to “dance” with the contradictions of Truth and Art as well as trust that their subject would demand that his or her truth would be heard.

As for me, it was the confluence of circumstances in my life (the posthumous exhibition of her work at The Art Institute of Chicago and the Twentieth Anniversary Benefit Concert of Hair) that sparked my initial interest in this project but it was O’Keeffe herself, with her special “kind of nerve”, who suggested the way through the
complexities of biographical drama. The balancing of historical fact and artistic creativity became a possible method of accessing the painter whose predilection for contrariety made her an elusive subject. Moreover, based upon my examination of O’Keeffe’s pursuit of her art it seemed to me that the very nature of the artistic impulse (a quest for a pure form of self-expression) might be intrinsic to O’Keeffe’s work as an artist.

Researching O’Keeffe has not been an easy task for her many biographers, and her elusiveness as a subject has been enhanced by the posthumous embargo she placed on her papers being released to the public. Although all the biographies I read, as discussed in the Part I, provided useful information about the artist, naturally enough, as more material was released from the O’Keeffe archive, so too did the quality of the biographical insights improve. From my point of view as a creative, biographical dramatist intent upon adopting O’Keeffe’s painterly technique and mastery to my own writing and performance it will be interesting to learn how prescient are the conclusions I have drawn based on the research currently available.

I also note in Part I that, despite a plethora of dramatizations on the life of Georgia O’Keeffe, none has as yet, been called the definitive play about the artist. Of the many dramatizations of the painter’s life, I evaluate and contextualize works by well-known writers such as Canada’s John Murrell, Great Britain’s Julian Barry, and Australia’s Jill Shearer; an international roll-call that illustrates the continuing interest in O’Keeffe worldwide (at least in the Anglophone world). Despite so many contributions to the O’Keeffe legend I hope to prove that A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe represents a further development on the long road to both an understanding of O’Keeffe and a furthering of the mode of biographical drama. In additional, other biographical dramas are also considered to provide an overview of that field.

Part II concerns itself with my methodology of writing the play. My process reflected O’Keeffe’s own approach to creating her work: in particular, for her, before starting on a work, there was this “dream thing I do.” Happily, I, too, began to dream, but in imagery that became transmuted into words rather than paintings. As I discuss in this
part, I recorded many of these dreams in my journal that then provided the foundation for monologues and scenes in the play. In addition, just as O’Keeffe ferociously worked and reworked her subjects until she had distilled forms that expressed their essences, so too did I work and rework key events in her life until I had found just the right word, phrase, or monologue. Moreover, because O’Keeffe returned to re-explore similar shapes and subjects throughout her lifetime, I felt the need to mix up the linear chronology by revisiting moments in her past which impinged upon her present as well as repeating certain phrases, rhythmic styles, and landscapes. In addition, because Sigmund Freud’s explorations of dreams and the unconscious colored the critics’ and public’s interpretation of O’Keeffe’s art, Part II also considers the impact of Freud’s theories upon the artist and the public’s interpretation of her art. It also situates the painter within the movements of 20th Century art.

As Part III will show, playing the character of O’Keeffe introduced its own set of problems, not the least of them being the folly of underestimating the amount of pre-rehearsal preparation that should have been allocated to the actor interpreting the title role. Also, I had not anticipated that O’Keeffe’s emotional contrarieties would affect me personally. I had expected her mood swings to manifest within the character of Georgia; in fact, they also became a part of the actor portraying her. Lessons learned in hindsight also counsel a longer and more experimental rehearsal and technical period for all the actors as well as for the director, designers, and backstage personnel. One positive aspect of the truncated and inorganic inception of the production of my play is that despite odds against it, it was well received. Audiences were genuinely moved and their responses indicated that people left with a sense of the enormity of O’Keeffe’s trials and a respect for her subsequent victories. The staged reading of a portion of the play as part of its development from writing to production is also discussed.

Introduction


O’Keeffe’s intrinsic contrarieties encouraged me to seek a fluid equilibrium between the fact and fiction of her life in my approach. As a dramatist I had decided to juggle truth and fiction so it is useful now to consider some of these contradictions.
When O’Keeffe was awarded a medal by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, its presenter described her as an artist whose life had been dedicated “to the relentless pursuit of the self… step by step[,]…extract[ing,] through the hard won discipline of her inner life[,] a way to reveal her experience.” However, the application of this public accolade to the artist’s private work ethic is a curious contradiction. O’Keeffe was notoriously reluctant to discuss her art and was, according to her longtime school friend, Anita Pollitzer, “a solitary person and does not speak readily of the things that matter to her.” In a letter to Anita, as early as 1915, O’Keeffe reflects upon her ambivalence concerning the public’s comprehension of her work:

I always have a curious sort of feeling about some of my things – I hate to show them – I am perfectly inconsistent about it – I am afraid people won’t understand – and I hope they won’t – and am afraid they will.

More than sixty years later, in an eponymously titled collection of her work, published in 1976, an elderly O’Keeffe reveals herself to be consistent in her inconsistencies. Commenting on a painting she had done in 1930 called “Black and White” she writes: “This was a message to a friend – if he saw it he didn’t know it was to him and wouldn’t have known what it said. And neither did I.”

In the same publication, another painting, “Green-Grey Abstraction”, receives a similarly obscure explanation that, nonetheless, hints at a personal vision that only she can see:

There are people who have made me see shapes – and others I thought of a great deal, even people I have loved, who make me see nothing. I have painted portraits that to me are almost photographic. I have remembered hesitating to show the paintings, they looked so real to me. But they have passed into the world as abstractions – no one seeing what they are.

“Passed into the world… [with] no one seeing what they are,” is a curiously appropriate description of O’Keeffe’s ambivalence regarding her desire for public acknowledgement counterbalanced by her penchant for personal privacy.
As my research commenced, I would be as challenged by the painter as her many chroniclers before me. Jeffrey Hogrefe observes, “O’Keeffe’s secrets were not easily divined” and Sarah Whitaker Peters notes “her active resistance to interpretation” and “her almost pathological secretiveness.” It was O’Keeffe’s ultimate unknowability, her “pain, solitude, and a sublime and final distance,” that intrigued Roxana Robinson. O’Keeffe had a self-professed desire for privacy and often dressed in black because: “There’s something about black; you feel hidden away in it.” In a 2004 biography of the artist, Full Bloom, Hunter Drohojowska-Philp believes O’Keeffe “was not thrilled with the truth of her own story and took pains to disguise her past.” O’Keeffe, herself, acknowledges as much, yearning to “live in a tent [where] I could open the flaps at both ends and let the wind blow everything out and start all over again,” and toward the end of her life, she was even more explicit: “You’d push the past out of the way, if only you could.” There is something tantalizing about a public figure with a self-professed objective of “making your unknown known,” yet is perversely veiled about the meaning of her art.

A possible rationale for O’Keeffe’s passion for privacy could have been her superstitious need to retain a hermetic, untainted subconscious. As I noted above, O’Keeffe’s painting was that “dream thing I do.” The art historian, Sarah Whittaker Peters cites Jung’s thesis that “a great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never equivocal” and suggests that this is why O’Keeffe was obsessed with secrecy. As the source of the painter’s inspiration, dreams are neither predictable nor easily deciphered; therefore, it is understandable that O’Keeffe would be resistant to their analysis. I, too, felt reluctant to overly intellectualize my creative process. Indeed, I even let my character, Georgia, rebuff her psychiatrist’s probing with the remark: “Tracking an artistic journey is like trying to frame a snowflake.”

Nonetheless, she did reveal aspects of herself through her art, and she eventually surrendered some mysteries to my scrutiny. What I unearthed was the iconic Georgia O’Keeffe: an abstraction of What a Female Artist Should Do, a symbol of What a
Female Artist Can Achieve, who was, nonetheless, a cipher: “no one seeing” who she truly was, to borrow her own words.

Certainly, O’Keeffe becoming an artistic success at a time when female achievement was, at best, discouraged might have been an interesting subject for exploration. Yet O’Keeffe’s contradictions defy such easy categorization. On the one hand, she is “interested in the oppression of women of all classes” and regrets having “had to go to men as sources in my painting because the past has left us so small an inheritance of woman’s painting that has widened life.” Yet, the painter bridles at being referred to as a “woman artist” and, in Peters’ assessment, prefers to believe that “to separate painting, or music, or literature, into two sexes is to emphasize values in them that are not art.”

It appears O’Keeffe concurs. When she first joined the Stieglitz circle, she was not bothered that

the men didn’t want me around. They couldn’t take a woman artist seriously. I would listen to them talk and talk[…]…but I knew I could paint as well as some of them who were sitting around talking,”

In her later years the artist takes a less tolerant position: “I have always been very annoyed at being referred to as a ‘woman artist’ rather than an ‘artist’.”

Introduction 3 A Special “Kind of Nerve”

One way to explore O’Keeffe’s paradoxical view of herself as both a representative of female achievement and a genderless artist, might be to consider how she approached creating her art. Anita Pollitzer describes her friend as a student with a focused eye and a resolute work ethic:

The standards she set for herself were exacting…there was never an idle moment or gesture…her colors were always the brightest, her palette the cleanest, her brushes and paints the best.

Moreover, “there was something Spartan about her, as direct as an arrow, and completely independent.” This implies a life dedicated to the achievement of a
predetermined goal. In fact, Pollitzer’s “direct as an arrow” description is an over-
simplification.

It is unlikely that O’Keeffe would have viewed her own life as a simple trajectory. Rather than a smooth progression from achievement to achievement, O’Keeffe experienced terrific hardships and setbacks and was prey to insecurities and disillusionments. Her many biographers chronicle her illnesses including a case of typhoid and resulting baldness, measles and blindness, and suspicions of tuberculosis that had killed her mother. O’Keeffe was affected also by the 1918 influenza epidemic but did not succumb as so many others did. Later, there were bouts with breast cancer, and Stieglitz’s public infidelity with Dorothy Norman, while felling O’Keeffe failed to destroy her. A few of her biographers allude to her sexual abuse at the hands of her father and Jeffrey Hogrefe has uncovered evidence to suggest sexual molestation of O’Keeffe, not just by her father, but by her elder brother, Francis, as well. In a moment of uncommon candor, the elderly O’Keeffe admitted to an acquaintance that her father had, indeed, sexually abused her. Her brother’s molestation remains unconfirmed.

Given such a history, it is not surprising that, temperamentally, O’Keeffe was “prey to nerves and conflicting emotions, [and she] swung from elation to hopelessness and panic – and back again.” Hogrefe sums up O’Keeffe’s artistic and emotional balancing act in this way:

> her productivity would be characterized by periods of outbursts of work followed by complete breakdowns, in a creative seesaw that she would struggle to balance….  

Peters delights that this duality is reflected in O’Keeffe’s art, noting both the “rational” and “intuitive” in her work:

> Her colors swing back and forth between the descriptive and the imaginary. One of the greatest pleasures in looking at her work is trying to figure out which is which and then see how she balanced them for harmony and for meaning.
Moreover, an examination of the shapes expressed by her art reveals curves, ellipses, circles, womb-like sacs. Rather than arrow-like certainties, there are conundrums, nuances, and ambivalence. Peters considers her art “at once accessible and hermetic.”

Indeed, Hogrefe, sees her scrupulous approach as part of a larger picture:

She dressed in voluminous gowns; she spoke is spare sentences, using monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon words; she applied paint in tiny meticulous brushstrokes – in all these ways, she was always withholding some essential part of herself.

Despite having been a victim of parental molestation, rather than shying away from violence, O’Keeffe embraced it through the passion of nature:

The Eastern sky was all gray blue – bunches of clouds – different kinds of clouds – sticking around everywhere and the whole thing – lit up – first in one place – then in another with flashes of lightning – sometimes just sheet lightning – and sometimes sheet lightning with a sharp bright zigzag flashing across it.

Indeed, she drew artistic energy from the kind of emotional violation evoked through her encounters with the primitive side of the natural world. Her response to her journeys along narrow, steep-sided, winding cow paths to access Palo Duro Canyon in Texas illustrate this point:

you couldn’t see the bottom…[I] sometimes had to go down…holding to a horizontal stick to keep…from falling…those perilous climbs were frightening but it was wonderful to me and not like anything I had known before. The fright of the day was still with me in the night and I would often dream that the foot of my bed rose straight up into the air – then just as I was about to fall I would wake up. Many drawings came from days like that, and later some oil paintings.

Despite the terrors resulting from such encounters, O’Keeffe persevered: “I’m frightened all the time. Scared to death. But I’ll never let it stop me never!” Once again, the strength of the artist’s inner vision compelled her to keep going when everything within her cried out for her to stop.

Further research reveals more contradictions. As a young teacher, O’Keeffe,

…dressed funny…like a man. I never saw her in anything except tailored suits. I mean man-tailored suits and oxfords that were square-toed. Her skirts were just calf-length, normal. Her hair was just like a man’s, short….
Hogrefe suggests this is one of many indications of her repressed or closeted homosexuality, which is an interesting counterpoint to the allegedly overt female heterosexuality of her paintings, particularly those of her blossoms. Critics have noted “the organs that differentiate the sex speak, …women, always feel[ing]… through the womb.” One critic, Willard H. Wright, complained, “All these pictures say ‘I want to have a baby’.”

O’Keeffe’s public response was typical of the down-to-earth farm girl from Wisconsin:

The things they write sound so strange and far removed from what I feel of myself – They make me seem like some strange unearthly sort of creature floating in the air breathing in clouds for nourishment. When the truth is that I like beefsteak and like it rare at that.

However, her aplomb was mere bravado. Privately, gallery openings for shows of her work induced such emotional distress in the artist that she required a week of bed-rest after each one to assuage the “queer feeling of being invaded,” that such public scrutiny evoked.

Robinson believes that another of the emotional seesaws that seems to pervade O’Keeffe’s working life is actually one that besets many artists, the “delicate balance” when “the artist works in a state of serene creative detachment” that is:

usually early in the artist’s career, before society pays attention to his work. What should be idyllic is often marred by penury, however, or by despair at a lack of recognition. The perfect balance is difficult to achieve: once society stops ignoring the artist, it is difficult for the artist to continue ignoring society.

O’Keeffe soon discovered this. Years after her first show, she recalled the dismay she felt by the public and critical scrutiny: “I thought I could never face the world again.” Soon thereafter, an “authentically reticent” O’Keeffe set about devising ways of keeping the public and critics at a distance. Her eventual permanent shift to the isolation of New Mexico represents her final solution.
Notwithstanding her reluctance to display her works or herself, another contradiction is O’Keeffe’s teasing of audiences and critics using the fashionable Freudian sexual interpretations of the day, then denying that her works were in any way sexually-related. For example, she had begun her career by posing nude in a “collaborative performance” for numerous photographs by Alfred Stieglitz (who, at the time of the exhibition, described his subject merely as “A Woman”) and in so posing made use of whatever mystique and sexual aura was evinced by these images. Yet, in her own work, she actively resisted any sexual interpretation of her throbbing charcoals or, later, feverish flowers within this context – knowing full well that she and Stieglitz had been the parents of just such a critical and public consensus.

Stieglitz was the perfect foil for her emotional swings and paradoxes. When he began his photographic series of O’Keeffe, Peters believes her contradictory nature informed his work:

His pictures, which had already joined such opposites as objectivity/imagination and science/art, again became hybrids of opposite tendencies – this time of the descriptive and suggestive.

Peters further notes that their work was directly influenced by a “swing[ing] between the poles of nature (Lake George) and civilization (New York)” in the decade from 1919 to 1929.

A last duality is the tug between the work of living and the play of making of art. O’Keeffe was aware that time spent away from painting was time lost forever. She explains this pull:

The days one works are the best days. On the other days one is hurrying through the other things one imagines one has to do to keep one’s life going. You get the garden planted. You get the roof fixed. You take the dog to the vet. You spend a day with a friend…You may even enjoy doing such things…But always you are hurrying through these so that you can get at the paintings again because that is the high spot – in a way that is what you do all the other things for…The painting is like a thread that runs through all the reasons for all the things that make ones life.
I cannot think of a more beautiful articulation of how O’Keeffe attempted to balance her daily needs with her need to work.

Georgia O’Keeffe had relinquished art after an auspicious beginning at The Art Institute of Chicago and New York’s Art Students League, where she even won awards for her realistic oils. It was only after becoming exposed to the principles of Arthur Wesley Dow through her teacher at the University of Virginia, Alon Bement, that she resumed her art exploration – and in a totally different way. One of the basic tenets of Dow’s elements of style was the concept of Notan, “a Japanese word meaning ‘dark,light’[.] …Notan-beauty means the harmony resulting from the combination of dark and light spaces.” It is tantalizing to conjecture that this tonal balancing struck a chord in the contradictory temperament of the young artist thus showing her a way to harness her dueling inner impulses in a uniquely personal fashion. That this painter, championed by Stieglitz as one of a handful of artists who represented a genuine American art became reconnected to her craft through the Asian-inspired exercises of Arthur Wesley Dow is yet another of O’Keeffe’s intriguing contrarieties.

Although difficulties detoured O’Keeffe, and emotional tempests slowed her down, she persevered: “Never letting it [fear] stop me. Never!” Overcoming her fear was central to her art, as she explains:

I don’t think I have a great gift. It isn’t just talent. You have to have something else. You have to have a kind a nerve. It’s mostly a lot of nerve, and a lot of very, very hard work.

Understanding O’Keeffe’s special “kind of nerve” has become my self-appointed task. By insisting upon a theatrical exploration which embraced contradictory impulses, historical accuracy and artistic integrity, this dramatist’s experience paralleled the emotional tension generated by O’Keeffe’s ambivalence. From the resulting imbalance, a hybrid dramatic form emerged wherein words, images, moments, reflect the minimalist precision of O’Keeffe’s “impeccable and barely visible brushstrokes.” Moreover, I took a leaf from O’Keeffe, who believed: “Where I was born and where and how I’ve lived is unimportant. It’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest.” My approach approximated her mantra: it is what I’ve done with her facts.
that have afforded further insights into O’Keeffe, her creative process, and the act of theatrical creation.

There is no blueprint for the creation of a biographical drama; however, there are some requisite preparatory steps and artistic decisions that biographical dramatists must undertake. In addition to these, in the case of a work exploring the ambivalent O’Keeffe, embracing the dualities of historical accuracy and artistic integrity offer assurances of a probable road to travel. Perhaps all artists must balance the private Self and the public Self. There are the terrors and temptations of fame to circumvent. Perhaps we all have contradictory impulses that feed the unique tension between an artist’s life essence and that artist’s quickening to create. Should this be the case, an examination of the contrarieties of Georgia O’Keeffe affords a lesson for us all.

As will be shown, at times, I was forced to adopt O’Keeffe’s special “kind of nerve.” Without “a lot of nerve, and a lot of very, very hard work” my play would never have been written, produced, performed.68  Like O’Keeffe, I was “frightened all the time. Scared to death. But I…never let it stop me never!” 69

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10 Cited in Pollitzer 28.
11 O’Keeffe, opposite plate 53, unpaginated.
12 O’Keeffe, opposite plate 55, unpaginated.
15 Robinson 560.
16 Cited in Hogrefe 60.
18 Cited in Hogrefe 50.
19 Cited in Hogrefe 23.
20 Cited in Hogrefe 155.
21 Cited in Cowart, Hamilton, & Greenough 206.
22 Cited in Peters 16.
24 Cited in Peters 16.
25 Cited in Robinson 291.
27 Pollitzer 1-2.
28 Pollitzer 3.
29 Robinson 53-54.
30 Robinson 75.
31 Robinson 22, 153.
32 Robinson 193-194.
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34 Robinson 359.
35 Hogrefe 17-18.
36 Hogrefe 111.
37 Peters 33.
38 Hogrefe 34.
39 Peters 17.
40 Peters 22.
41 Hogrefe 33.
43 O'Keeffe, opposite Plate 5, unpaginated.
44 Cited in Robinson 166.
45 Cornelia Patton Wolflin, fellow student, cited in Robinson 89.
46 Hogrefe 31-33.
47 Paul Rosenfeld cited in Robinson 240.
48 Cited in Lisle 69.
49 Cited in Robinson 241.
50 Cited in Hogrefe 125-126.
51 Robinson 173.
52 Cited in Hogrefe 126.
53 Peters 38.
54 Drohohojowska-Philp 434.
56 Eisler 276.
57 Peters 142.
58 Peters 228.
59 Cited in Gherman 116.
60 Hogrefe 43.
61 Lisle 44-45.
63 Drohohojowska-Philp 113.
64 Cited in Robinson 166.
65 Cited in Robinson 166.
67 O’Keeffe, Introduction, unpaginated.
68 Cited in Robinson 166.
69 Cited in Robinson 166.
Part I: Biographical Resources and Other Dramatic Works About Georgia O’Keeffe

This part will further examine the available resource material that acquainted me with the painter’s special “kind of nerve” and informed my project. As noted in the Introduction, there must be an idea, the desire to explore it further, and a plan for its execution. Once a subject has been selected, the playwright must consider the overall arc of the journey for both the character and the play; she must consider the characters with whom the protagonist will interact to further the story; consider themes, imagery and conflicts; as well as the rhythm and tempo of the piece. The play’s trajectory, the style and type of language, the choice of scene juxtaposition, as well as the overall purpose of creating the play are other important factors for a dramatist’s consideration. Moreover, when the protagonist is a historical figure, research is a necessary component of a writer’s work, as well. It is also important to consider the nature of biographical drama, as a genre, in order to contextualize my play, as well as previous dramatizations about O’Keeffe. With regard to these other plays about the painter, few of those dramatists had access to the wealth of biographical information that was at my disposal; nonetheless, they presented valid solutions to the problems presented by O’Keeffe, many of which would challenge me.

1.1 Information and Misinformation About O’Keeffe and Resources Available for Research

1.1a Laurie Lisle’s Portrait of an Artist

At the time of O’Keeffe’s retrospective at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1988, there had been many articles, photographs, and newspaper stories about her, but, curiously, only
one biography. Laurie Lisle’s *Portrait of an Artist* (1986) completed in the year of the painter’s death is a finely researched, if somewhat reverential, work that asks as many questions as it answers. Amongst its omissions is its glossing over of O’Keeffe’s complicity with the impresario and photographer, Alfred Stieglitz, in creating the myth of Georgia O’Keeffe through his nude photographs of her.\(^1\) Although subsequent biographers discuss this collaboration, Lisle reports somewhat ingenuously O’Keeffe’s amazement at seeing her “face for the first time.”\(^2\)

Eisler, Robinson, Hogrefe, and the most recent work, a biography by Drohojowska-Philp (2004) all discuss O’Keeffe’s descent into blindness.\(^3\) Curiously, Lisle’s work only quotes an observation made by O’Keeffe in 1971, “My world is blurred,” and indexes the subject as “eyesight”, never explaining that she had incurable macular degeneration and that the “blur” eventually became permanent.\(^4\) In fact, as Hogrefe writes, her problems with her eyesight had commenced in 1964, at which time her macular degeneration was diagnosed, and she made the observation chronicled by Lisle.\(^5\) Moreover, by the spring of 1967, her sight had deteriorated to such an extent that O’Keeffe was shunning bright afternoon sunshine because of the danger it posed to her sensitive eyes.\(^6\) Lisle’s coyness around O’Keeffe’s blindness may be explained by how the painter and Juan Hamilton, her companion for the final years of her life, conspired to prevent the world from learning that the elderly artist was sightless.\(^7\) The quite explicit creation of the O’Keeffe legend by the painter herself and the keepers of her flame is lamented by Hogrefe who finds it regrettable that “O’Keeffe had [not] been depicted as a scared blind person who still made her way courageously into the world,” but was, instead, portrayed as a legendary figure, frozen in aspic.\(^8\)

I experienced a similar duplicity during my first visit to The Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe. A museum guard was explaining to a visitor that the painting, “Black Abstraction” had been painted by O’Keeffe to chronicle the time she had a broken arm re-set in hospital. “A docent” had been the source of this tale.\(^9\) The truth behind this painting is infinitely more interesting, and, to my thinking, depicts O’Keeffe as a more courageous and multi-faceted individual. She had undergone her first biopsy for a breast tumor in August 1927: fortunately, this tumor was diagnosed as benign, but she
translated her experience under anesthesia into the painting. The O’Keeffe legend seems to be rigorously policed by the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation. During my visit, I discovered that there were only two of her myriad biographies for sale at the O’Keeffe Museum Gift Shop. These two, seemingly endorsed by The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, are those by Laurie Lisle and Roxana Robinson, (the latter’s work does make plain the source of “Black Abstraction”). Nonetheless, the “keepers of the O’Keeffe flame” continue to perpetuate O’Keeffe’s trick of showing her art yet withholding its true meaning, and, in so doing, abetting what Robinson mourns as “the confusing morass about Georgia O’Keeffe.”

1.1b Omissions by early O’Keeffe Biographers and Embargoes by O’Keeffe

Lisle “glosses over” numerous specific details about O’Keeffe. Although O’Keeffe was prey to nerves throughout her life, and it appears that she suffered several major nervous breakdowns, Lisle downplays these by cataloguing them under the heading “nervous illnesses.” Moreover, there is no mention of O’Keeffe’s homosexuality, infidelities, potential sexual abuse by her father and brother unearthed by subsequent writers. O’Keeffe, herself, would argue that such matters should be irrelevant: “Where I was born and where and how I have lived is unimportant. It is what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest.” Rather than seeing her advice as counterproductive to historical scholars, it could be viewed as further evidence that even posthumously she continues to protect the enigmatic Self within the public symbol and icon.

From a dramatist’s point of view, however, there can be no glossing over of conflict or pain. On the contrary, in drama, one must embrace the dramatic situation and story. If one is to understand a life and its impulses that which one runs from is as much a part of the story as that which one runs to. In O’Keeffe’s case, her repeated triumphs over adversity could become an important lesson for my play’s viewers. Indeed, they support another of her contradictions: despite being terrified, she “never let it stop” her from going forward.
However, rather than being an accomplice in the painter’s self-protective position, perhaps a part of the reason for Lisle’s omissions lies with O’Keeffe herself. In 1970, when Lisle first thought of writing a biography of Georgia O’Keeffe, she approached the painter and was rebuffed; however, O’Keeffe did tell Lisle: “You are welcome to what you find.” Lisle knew enough about her subject not to take O’Keeffe’s resistance personally, and her research was as thorough as it could possibly be given the limited documentation available when she began her investigation. The painter had been defensive about self-revelation even with her longtime friend, Anita Pollitzer. When she authorized Pollitzer to write her biography, she seemed to rejoice that, at one point in 1950, Anita “…seem[ed] to be on the way to becoming an authority on me”. Soon after, however, O’Keeffe regretted her decision to permit her friend access to her life, and she withheld permission for the publication of the work. O’Keeffe objected to Pollitzer’s dream picture of me…a very sentimental way you like to imagine me – and I am not that way at all…I really believe to call this my biography when it has so little to do with me is impossible – and I cannot have my name exploited to further it.

Despite O’Keeffe’s embargo on her friend’s biography, a posthumous weaving together of Pollitzer’s reminiscences and letters was published by Anita Pollitzer’s Estate in 1988.

Soon after Lisle’s and Pollitzer’s books, a proliferation of works about Georgia O’Keeffe appeared, seemingly spawning a cottage industry. One explanation for the rash of publications has to do with a series of restrictions placed upon Stieglitz’s and O’Keeffe’s voluminous correspondence by O’Keeffe, herself, at the time of Stieglitz’s death in 1946. Stieglitz’s letters to other women as well as to his first wife, Emmy, and his daughter, Kitty, had been embargoed until 1976, with other letters being released incrementally over the next thirty years; the last of these are not due for release to scholars until 2011. As a result of these periodic revelations, O’Keeffe has managed to orchestrate an ongoing interest in her life and art seemingly from beyond the grave.

O’Keeffe’s posthumous maneuverings notwithstanding, these biographies helped me understand the artist and informed my project. Despite its omissions, Lisle’s
examination, Portrait of An Artist, is a coolly detached, well-researched overview of the painter’s entire life. Although O’Keeffe refused to participate, Lisle managed to obtain interviews from over a hundred of the artist’s intimates and associates.\textsuperscript{18} It was Lisle’s intention to trace

…the evolution of a Wisconsin farmer’s daughter nicknamed Georgie into the matriarch of modern art known as O’Keeffe – [in]… the hope that others might be moved by the example of her courageous, independent, and successful life. [Moreover,] writing this book has been an engrossing, exciting experience, for despite her elusiveness, Georgia O’Keeffe has given us great gifts not only in her paintings but also in the very way she lived her life.\textsuperscript{19}

As the first O’Keeffe biography, Lisle’s is a seminal work, and it was after reading her thoughtful study that I realized O’Keeffe was a suitable subject for dramatization.

1.1c Anita Pollitzer’s A Woman On Paper

Anita Pollitzer, one of O’Keeffe’s closest and oldest friends, had originally approached the painter in the late 1940s with the idea of writing a biography about her.\textsuperscript{20} When Pollitzer proffered the completed work to O’Keeffe, the painter expressed strong misgivings regarding the manuscript’s content and approach, objections that Pollitzer attempted to override, but to no avail. The editor of Pollitzer’s memoir, Clive Giboire, believes that “Pollitzer’s innate optimism so permeated the manuscript that it clashed with O’Keeffe’s own more austere and controlled approach to life and work.”\textsuperscript{21} O’Keeffe complained that Pollitzer assumed that the artist’s life thrust had been the pursuit of happiness whereas

\begin{quote}
I do not like the idea of happiness – it is too momentary – I would say that I was always busy and interested in something – interest has more meaning than happiness.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

In a sense, “interest” represents an active engagement whereas “happiness” is more passive. O’Keeffe’s restless urge to continually forge ahead, expressed by her desire to “never letting it stop me. Never!” provided a clue that I mentally filed away for future exploration. A Woman on Paper is an intimate, personal correspondence between two old friends from schooldays. Posthumously published in 1988 by the Estate of Anita
Pollitzer, it reveals a seminal period in O’Keeffe’s development. A series of letters exchanged between two intrepid young women spanning 1914 to 1918 illustrate the significance of Anita Pollitzer to the artistic life of the young O’Keeffe. It was to Anita that O’Keeffe confessed her frustrations and confusions about “Art.” Georgia wrote that Anita’s letters kept the young painter buoyant despite being entrapped in one of her many teaching positions: for example, her time in the stultifying backwater of Columbia, South Carolina:

“Your letters are certainly like drinks of fine cold spring water on a hot day – They have a spark of the kind of fire in them that makes life worthwhile – That nervous energy that makes people like you and I want and go after everything in the world – bump our heads on all the hard walls and scratch our hands on all the briars – but it makes living great, doesn’t it?”

The lifelong conflict between protecting her private self, expressed through her paintings, and the need to exhibit her work emerges in the letter at this early stage of her career: “I hate to show…I am perfectly inconsistent about it – I am afraid people won’t understand – and I hope they won’t – and am afraid they will.” Pollitzer was also instrumental in introducing O’Keeffe’s art to Alfred Stieglitz. When the artist was trying a new approach to her work, she wrote to Pollitzer: “I guess if I’m going to do something that is my own, I’d better start, and I’ll start in black and white.” O’Keeffe posted these new drawings to her friend, who showed them to Stieglitz and changed O’Keeffe’s life forever.

For archivists, the communication between O’Keeffe and Pollitzer provides an invaluable insight into the young O’Keeffe. Her richness of language, keen appreciation of the natural world, and passionate search for clarity of artistic expression are all revealed in these letters. They unveil an uncensored O’Keeffe – irrepressible, optimistic, open – an antithesis to the veiled icon she became in the hands of Stieglitz. Later communications between O’Keeffe and Pollitzer afford a window into Stieglitz’s growing influence over the painter and a rare glimpse of what O’Keeffe loved in the man and the mentor:

“I had a kind of belief in Alfred that made those days especially fine. I had a need of him that I had never seemed to feel for anyone else before. His feelings for
music, concerts, books and the outdoors was wonderful. He would notice shapes and colors different from those I had seen and so delicate that I began to notice more.28

In so many ways, the O’Keeffe-Pollitzer correspondence reveals an O’Keeffe at odds with the icon of Stieglitz’s creation. Her conflicting emotions and moods swings, her passion to experience all that life could offer despite being “terrified all the time” are all there in the letters which provided me with an invaluable primary resource. The focus of my own work, increasingly, would be O’Keeffe’s dualities.

1.1d Roxana Robinson’s Georgia O’Keeffe

Roxana Robinson’s Georgia O’Keeffe (1989) was an important new addition to the O’Keeffe canon. Robinson was able to enlist the support of the O’Keeffe family and longtime friends and associates, some of whom were commenting on their famous relative for the first time.29 Robinson’s research also had the advantage of time. Embargoed documents had been released at Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, providing the biographer with a wealth of new material.30 Robinson’s work is a comprehensive study and, with its seven page bibliography, was the most thoroughly researched biography published at that time.31

1.1e Benita Eisler’s O’Keeffe & Stieglitz, An American Romance

Another work that fills in a piece of the O’Keeffe puzzle is Benita Eisler’s O’Keeffe & Stieglitz, An American Romance (1991) in which she details O’Keeffe’s collusion in Stieglitz’s manufacture of the Georgia Myth:

…couched in the romance of conflict and reconciliation, the real drama of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz, as with most couples, was collusion. Especially for men and women whose careers are intertwined, fueled by one another’s success, there is a private union and its professional, public face …collusion is a system of deals and trade-offs, tacitly agreed to and carried out, for the most part without the exchange of a word. Preferring avoidance to confrontation on most issues, O’Keeffe was the principal agent of collusion in their union. [But]…evidence of collusion must be teased out, lying as it does literally between the lines, in what is not said.32
O’Keeffe acquiesced to Stieglitz’s proclamations of her as a Great-Feeling-Naif and Woman-as-Sibyl. Such nomenclature was at odds with her pragmatic Mid-Western personality and passionate, pantheistic temperament, but was useful for keeping people at a distance. Although I can only conjecture the extent of O’Keeffe’s complicity in the fabrication of her myth, Eisler’s work encouraged me to look “between the lines” of the Stieglitz-O’Keeffe partnership.

1.1f Jeffrey Hogrefe’s O’Keeffe, The Life of An American Legend

Jeffrey Hogrefe’s O’Keeffe, The Life of An American Legend (1992) set about demystifying the icon that O’Keeffe became. As my approach to O’Keeffe would be through her contradictions, a work whose goal was to reveal that which she had taken pains to obscure was indispensable:

So many people have idolized her that the real person has been clouded by the polite reverence of the worshipful…O’Keeffe’s isolation had reached obsessive proportions long before I met her. Destroying her correspondence with friends as well as her own paintings, she said that family members who talked about her were liars, and she had attempted to block others from writing about her in any form at all.33

Hogrefe’s book details events unknown to Lisle, ignored by Pollitzer, questioned by Robinson, or alluded to by Eisler. He dares to synthesize all the different O’Keeffes: from the passionate young artist of the Pollitzer letters, through the manipulated artistic creation of Stieglitz’s publicity machine, to the experimental sensualist of Lake George and Taos, and the cantankerous autocrat of the desert in her final years. O’Keeffe became a human being with conflicting impulses, mood swings, a desire for acclaim, a need for privacy, and more. Hogrefe encouraged me to further explore the emotional pendulum that swung through her life and attempt to replicate her experience of it. Hogrefe’s audacious study dared to ask the very questions I, too, felt needed answers:

How did a mad schoolteacher from the Texas Panhandle become the best-known American woman artist of this century?
What connected her madness to her art?
Was she a lesbian?
What connected her sexuality to her art?
From what was she running?  
What were her inner sources of strength?  

Not only are these good questions for a biographer but they are also key questions for the dramatist of O’Keeffe’s life as well as for an actress intending to portray her as a character.

1.1g  O’Keeffe on Herself: Introduction to Alfred Stieglitz’s Georgia O’Keeffe: A Portrait

In addition to others’ words on O’Keeffe, there are also her own – already heard in the Pollitzer correspondence – and these, together with her paintings, shaped my vision. Commenting on the hold Stieglitz had over her, O’Keeffe observed:

If they [people] crossed him in any way, his power to destroy was as destructive as his power to build – the two extremes went together. I have experienced both and survived, but I think I only crossed him when I had to – to survive.

1.1h  Perry Miller Adato’s Georgia O’Keeffe

In Perry Miller Adato’s 1974 documentary, O’Keeffe half-jokes: “Listen, you try arguing with Stieglitz and see where it gets you,” a comment that suggested being the wife of Alfred Stieglitz was not always easy. That Stieglitz was also a creature of emotional extremes merely reinforced their “rightness” as a partnership and his dualities further piqued my interest. However, O’Keeffe was characteristically taciturn concerning her marriage, and it was not until 1997, after I had read Eisler’s book, examining the O’Keeffe-Stieglitz relationship that I began to sense the enormity of Stieglitz’s manipulation.

1.1i  O’Keeffe, the Artist and the Legend in Popular Culture

More than reading O’Keeffe’s words or seeing her in Adato’s documentary, it was her powerful images that were my primary introduction to the artist. O’Keeffe had been a legendary figure throughout my childhood, regularly featured in photographic spreads for Life or Look or celebrated in Time Magazine. Because of the longevity of her life
and the endurance of her artistic career, her enlarged blossoms, surreal charcoals, minimalist watercolors, and bleached desert bones, seemed to always be there. It was at the 1988 retrospective of her work at The Art Institute of Chicago that I was struck by the sheer volume and uniqueness of her artistic output. I marveled that her art had been both ubiquitous and illusory to my world, thus discerning the first of many contradictions I was to discover about the painter.

1.2 An Exploration of the Nature of Biographical Drama

All the plays to be discussed including my own fall within the genre of biographical drama. Unlike biographies, biographical drama takes actual events from a person’s life and then imaginatively renders them so as to reveal something about that person that may not appear on the record. Prior to an examination of my own play’s genesis and evolution, it is useful to establish a broader context by exploring biographical drama as a genre. I have, therefore, selected seven plays not about Georgia O’Keeffe for evaluation: Dennis McIntyre’s Modigliani, Edna O’Brien’s Virginia, Kaye McDonough’s Zelda, and four works by William Luce: Barrymore, Bronte, The Belle of Amherst, and Lillian. I chose these plays because, like my play, they are full-length pieces that utilize a small cast to portray multiple roles. In addition, there is a historical consonance with O’Keeffe because almost all the subjects of all the plays were alive during O’Keeffe’s lifetime. O’Keeffe lived from 1887 to 1986. Modigliani is set in 1916; Virginia spans 1895 to 1941; Zelda spans 1912 to 1948; Barrymore is mostly set in 1942 with sojourns back to earlier, halcyon days, and Lillian starts and ends in 1961 with memory journeys to Hellman’s Southern childhood. Only The Belle of Amherst (which takes place 1845 to 1886) and Bronte (set in 1849) predate O’Keeffe. A majority of the protagonists of the selected works (as well as Georgia O’Keeffe) lived in a world that saw the advent of the modern era through two devastating wars, and through tremendous industrial, scientific and technological advances: as “modernist” artists their work reflected this. In the case of Emily Dickinson and Charlotte Bronte, I felt that their work as isolated women gave them a kinship with O’Keeffe. As single women making their way in a primarily male field (writing) they resonate with O’Keeffe. I chose Modigliani specifically because it was about a visual artist and I reasoned that
McIntyre’s challenge would have been similar to mine: to find a verbal equivalent for a character who expressed himself/herself visually. I chose to include Virginia, The Belle of Amherst, Bronte, and Lillian because I wanted a point of comparison with other female artists, in order to see if common themes, specific to gender, also emerged. Zelda is there as a contrast to artists of drive and talent: she lacked the gifts of the other artists but she burned for artistic achievement as brightly (if not brighter) than those who actually achieved some degree of immortality. Finally, Barrymore was included because it is the most recently-written of all the plays and its subject lends itself to dramatization the most easily because its main character is the great actor and rogue, John Barrymore.

Like the O’Keeffe plays, I was interested in exploring the decisions these playwrights made about the scope of the life covered and the relationship of their protagonists to other characters in the plays. In the case of the one-person works, the other characters are often played by the actor portraying the title character although in one instance there is another live person (offstage) in Barrymore and there are (offstage) recorded voices in the case of Lillian. In examining these non-O’Keeffe works, I asked “What was it these playwrights hoped to reveal about their subjects and how successful were they?” In addition, whenever cited, the dramatist’s methodology and self-stated intention are also considered. This kind of exploration led me to certain conclusions about the nature of biographical drama and ways of creating it; these realizations will underpin the analysis of my own approach in the next chapter.

1.2a Modigliani by Denis McIntyre

Modigliani takes as its subject the time in an artist’s life before he or she becomes famous. Its poignancy arises from the dramatic irony of the audience knowing that he later did achieve fame so that the events leading to this moment – his decision to take one path or another – are brought into sharp relief. Modigliani, (1968, revised, 1980), is set in Paris in 1916 when the title character and his fellow artists, Chaim Soutine and Maurice Utrillo, have yet to be discovered and fear they never will be. The play opens with Modigliani having been in Paris for ten years with, dishearteningly, little success to show for his time and efforts. Other characters in the play include his good hearted, but
pretty hopeless agent, Zborowski; his model, mistress, and muse, the pragmatic South African poet, Beatrice Hastings; Cheron, a prominent art dealer, upon whom Modigliani’s hopes are pinned; and a hapless waiter who is the target of a botched theft by Modigliani and his fellow artists. The play consists of three acts: the first two contain four scenes each; the last act has only three.

The play begins in a comic flurry with Modigliani falling through the window of a posh Right Bank restaurant as he beats a hasty escape after consuming two bottles of red wine he is unable to pay for. On his way through the window, he cuts his hand. In Scene Two, his co-painters, Soutine and Utrillo, like characters from Beckett, are waiting for success, fame, change, *anything* to visit them. Each has their own agenda: Soutine, yearning to steal a rotting “side of beef” which promises “a whole new palette” of colors for him; whereas Utrillo, jealous of his mother’s new husband, wants assistance to organize the man’s murder. The third “buffoon”, Modigliani, arrives, bleeding from his recent injury, and, although his friends are too drunk to attend to his physical wounds, or understand his spiritual malaise, Modigliani unburdens his soul:


But a passage to Martinique requires money, so the three conspire to rob the waiter, botch the job, and contrive to ask Modigliani’s inept agent, “Zbo”, to lend them the travel fare.

In the next scene, rather than hear Zbo’s good news, “Modi”, as he is called, is obsessed with cadging, borrowing, stealing money to get to Martinique. It is only after a time that Zbo manages to reveal that the art dealer, Cheron, is interested in one of Modigliani’s sketches. Immature and disillusioned Modi is, initially, too impatient to stay in Paris a few more days to meet Cheron. He fears that if Cheron does not buy, it will be his end.

Then, his depression gives way to mania: “If they hang my paintings in the Louvre – wouldn’t that be remarkable?”
By Scene Four, Modi returns to the studio he shares with Beatrice; she is out, so he starts to sculpt. Beatrice returns with some stolen whiskey, and a few shots are enough to distract him from his marble and begin foreplay with Beatrice, but she refuses to comply: “I’ll go to bed – You sculpt.” Learning of Modi’s possible sale to Cheron, she suggests that Modi meet Cheron himself as the unprepossessing Zbo will repel the dealer. Modigliani’s paranoid self-loathing is palpable:

If he didn’t buy – If – He – Didn’t…Nobody buys me – Bea – And I’m – I’m…I’m frightened – I’m so – Buy – Buy me! I’m cheap! A “Modigliani’s” cheap!…Bea?!…Hear them?…They’re out there…I can smell them, Bea…They didn’t think I don’t hear their shoes…You’ll spot them. They’re all in white…White! 

Beatrice responds, “Modi – there’s nobody out there!”, and Act One ends on this critical note.

By Act Two, Scene One, we realize that their frustrations at being unsold are driving each of the painters to their own forms of self-destruction. They are all alcoholics, but Utrillo goes one step further and enlists in the army at the height to World War One. He is personally affronted that Modi will not join him at the front, but Modi’s resistance to Utrillo emboldens him to meet Cheron.

In Scene Two, Modi confronts Zbo and asks for the return of his best works, particularly his nude, “Beatrice”, but Zbo has given it away for free because someone appreciated its beauty. Now, Modi doesn’t even have his “Beatrice” to show Cheron. His only hope is that “He’ll buy faces. It’s my line – that’s what counts. He likes my lines.”

McIntyre finally confronts the nature of personal expression in the visual arts, one of his central themes, mid-point in the play:

See – that’s what those bastards don’t appreciate about us. When they look at our paintings – they’re looking through our eyes – right through them – they’re inside our heads….
However, no one wants his vision, and that is the major obstacle to Modigliani attaining the immortality he craves. Interestingly, as in the life of O’Keeffe, there is also the desire for a child; Modi equates the creation of a child with the fulfillment gained from creating a painting:

If I had a child – with breath – eyes that moved – real hands – a smile – If I had all that – then I’d have something to leave behind. [gesturing to a painting] It wouldn’t have to be this – just this. A child…That’s what I want. I won’t even show her how to paint. No – won’t do that. And I’ll never let her see a painting.47

In another violent and dramatic ending to an act, Modi’s fears motivate him to beg Bea to give him that child. She refuses, “You don’t need a child. You need your painting!” He is adamant, grabs her, tears off her dress, and rapes her.48

The final act of the play commences optimistically: Modi meets Cheron, and he is offered money for three of his pieces, but it is a total of seventy-five francs rather than the fantastic fifty-thousand francs he had anticipated. A violently despairing Modigliani slashes his work in a gesture that is, “Impassioned. Very. Just like a child.”49 Cheron continues in this vein:

…your lines unusual – eccentric. But not much more than that. It’s somewhat limited at the moment. Static. Almost adolescent. You have a talent – but I doubt you’ll ever develop it. You’re good – no – more promising than good….50

Then, he delivers the final insult: Picasso does, indeed, have a Modigliani on his wall – he had run out of canvas one night, so he scraped off Modigliani’s work and painted over it.

[CHERON:] …if you insist on being a painter – then you should always know the truth.

[MODIGLIANI:] But I don’t want to know the truth. Didn’t you know that?51

Utrillo, meanwhile, has been thrown out of the army because of his alcoholic hallucinations. They both fear they are losing their minds: “We don’t want to end up like Van Gogh, do we?”52 Together, they head to the Louvre with the idea of “donating”
Finally, they return to the Studio, and, despite Bea’s objections, they destroy every “Modigliani” sketch, painting, and sculpture. Beatrice is furious and in despair. The man she loves is a creator not a destroyer:

[BEATRICE:] You have to discover…you have to work…that’s the only way you can grow…More paintings. More drawings. More sculpture…I won’t let you destroy it!

[MODIGLIANI:] You won’t let me?! I painted it!

[BEATRICE:] You painted it --but I made it possible!

[MODIGLIANI:] You made it possible?!

[BEATRICE:] I posed.

[MODIGLIANI:] I let you pose.

[BEATRICE:] I stole your paint! I found your stone! I kept you alive!

He assumes she did it for the love of him. She delivers the ultimate truth:

You?! Who are you? I loved your sculptures! Your drawings! Your colors! Your lines!…I loved the smiles! The eyes! The hands! The genius!…

Because of his willful destruction, he has smashed all that she loved, and she decides to leave him:

I’m going home. Somewhere. I’m going to write my poems. I’m going to live my life. I can’t live yours any more…and I don’t want to be around when you die – Modi –I don’t want to watch it…I did love you – Modigliani. I did. [gesturing to the ruined art] It wasn’t always this.

Her departure awakens something in Modigliani; he inspects the remnants of his art, picks up a charcoal, and starts a sketch. Beatrice’s final act of love, leaving him, forces him to consider his life and reaffirm his commitment to his art.

I have recounted the plot of the play at length to illustrate the author’s veering through emotional extremes. Either the painters are shuffling about in an alcoholic haze of
denial or else they are committing violent acts of desperation. What I find fascinating in Modigliani is the dissolution of its protagonists. Like O’Keeffe, the painters were prey to mood swings, but in Modigliani, these arise from a perverse self-abuse, fueled by drugs and alcohol, that allows them to do violence to themselves, their art, and to others. In comparing their trajectory to O’Keeffe’s, she is all the more heroic in her forging ahead despite being a woman who had to take up teaching to earn her living. Whereas Modigliani, Soutine, and Utrillo spend their days filling canvases and living off their girlfriends or mothers, a disciplined O’Keeffe managed to earn a living, experiment with her colors and shapes, as well as imbue her life with the artistic philosophy she adopted from Dow: “to fill a space in a beautiful way.”

McIntyre’s portrait of three Post-Impressionist painters is a “warts and all” approach that genuinely explores his subject. In a sense it typifies a romantic fantasy of the early modernists, from the perspective of the “permissive” sixties, (a “let it all hang out” ethos that also spawned Hair), and reinforces the narrative of a charismatic male artist and his journey from garret to stardom. Some of Modigliani’s themes, the importance of a personal artistic vision, one’s art being one’s child, the necessity of letting go of anything but the pursuit of craft, the importance of a supportive partnership, and the struggle to emerge from anonymity and to be recognized as an artist are traced in my play, and are shared by many of the other biographical dramas. In addition, McIntyre explores the path of creativity through excess (whether it be through alcohol, outrageous acts of destruction, or even drugs.) Although O’Keeffe has a similar narrative arc from anonymity to fame, and she certainly had her own challenges, it is her pragmatism, self-discipline and how she uses the fiery relationship with Stieglitz to further her art that stand in sharp contrast to McIntyre’s artists.

1.2b Virginia by Edna O’Brien

Virginia Woolf also had some real conflicts in her life that arose from her position as a “woman artist” in a male dominated field; that stemmed from her obsessive perfectionism that caused her to agonize over the selection of the perfect word or phrase, or from her lifelong struggle with the mental illness that finally killed her. O’Brien’s
Virginia is elegiac in tone, and, like my work, spans the writer’s entire life. Elegantly structured, the play is book-ended with the same set of words. In using the same words to begin and end her play, O’Brien mirrors Woolf’s own device in The Waves:

…I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down. I went under the sea, I have been dead and yet am now alive again – it was awful, awful, and as before waking, the voices of the birds and the sound of the wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing towards the shores of life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.\textsuperscript{57}

There is a curious similarity between this speech and the monologue I wrote about Georgia’s madness. During her illness, O’Keeffe had an irrational fear of water and, of course, Woolf drowned herself, so it is hardly surprising that water figures in both plays.

What follows in Virginia are the writer’s memories flashing before her eyes, as she “scrapes the sea bed [of her mind] clean.”\textsuperscript{58} Death is a constant in the play despite Virginia’s observation, “We’ve had too many deaths…it’s against our code to mourn.”\textsuperscript{59}

Comprised of two acts, with three scenes in Act One and five in Act Two, O’Brien writes with Woolf’s voice. The young Virginia is precocious and perceptive; of her mother’s death she says simply, “Death plays havoc.”\textsuperscript{60} Soon, however, her father’s mourning oppresses them all, and she calls him “a skinless man with skinless children,” and, feeling her “hate rising up in me against him, sharpening, sharpening” wonders “Does it spread to all other men?”\textsuperscript{61} Seemingly not, because, after willing her father to die, (“If you must die, why don’t you?”), she and Vanessa set up house in Bloomsbury. Their Thursday soirees attract the Oxford friends of their brother, Toby, intellectuals like Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Sydney Turner, and Leonard Woolf.\textsuperscript{62} Yearning for “a mind, a man, a sparring partner,” Virginia is exposed to the miraculous world of language:

Every word has an aura. Poetry combined the different auras in a sequence. But is it founded upon texture or upon structure. I would think I am a story, he is a story, she is a story, but how to get it. Not just the theory and the argument, holding the thing -- all the things – the innumerable things together.\textsuperscript{63}
In comparing Virginia’s excitement about writing with my Georgia’s quest for artistic vision, again, the language and goals are different, yet the passionate drive to know is parallel:

When I was out there on the Plains – living my landscapes – alone with my own “music”…my work crystallized – because my vision was – crystalline. And the form took care of itself because I kept my vision focused: on seeking to make my unknown known…I felt almost capable of catching, crystallizing, a clearer vision of life.  

Interestingly, there are some other similarities between Virginia’s story and Georgia’s. Apart from both suffering nervous breakdowns and being passionate about perfecting their art, Virginia, too, was molested by a family member. Because her first sexual encounter was a rape at the hands of her half-brother, George – “Eros came on dirty wings” – she endeavors to put it behind her with observations like “love and marriage…a lowdown affair” and “love is faintly ridiculous.” Nonetheless, both she and her sister, Vanessa, accede to Leonard Woolf’s and Clive Bell’s respective entreaties. “Saved by marriage – what a preposterous thing,” she exclaims at the end of Scene Two. In a sense, Georgia is also “saved by marriage”, or, at least, by a relationship; when Stieglitz gave her the “year to paint” that she craved, he provided her with an opportunity to focus full-time on the work she loved.

Unlike Stieglitz, who is the catalyst for O’Keeffe’s madness, Leonard is the dam holding back the madness that always threatens to engulf them. After one nervous breakdown, Virginia laments:

[VIRGINIA:] It was dreadful, dreadful. Two wasted, wearing years.

[LEONARD:] They are over. They are behind us now.

This sentiment echoes dialogue I wrote for Georgia regarding the time consumed by her madness:

[ANITA:] They’re considering discharging you.

[GEORGIA:] How long have I been here?
[ANITA:] Almost four years.

[GEORGIA:] So much time passed. I’ve got to be discharged – I’m 46, there’s almost no time left for “hope.”

Seemingly, Virginia’s bad years are behind them. Leonard has bought a printing press and has plans that they manually print his and her work: “It will be good for you, something physical,” he reasons. Virginia confesses she “would hate to fail...hate to go under again – months, years wiped out of one’s life.” This is not unlike my Georgia’s “…I can’t risk going back to the world yet: I don’t know if I’d recover if I were wrecked again.”

Meanwhile, Leonard acts as guardian. As long as she eschews excitement, she’ll be fine: “Everything has to be rationed, work, and walking, and people, and parties.” By the end of the scene, however, invitations come in; they are accepted, and a heady round of events begins to take its toll on the sensitive writer:

Into the drawing room which was full, bright, miscellaneous. If one’s normal pulse is seventy then in five minutes it was one hundred and twenty. And the blood is not the sticky, white fluid of daytime but brilliant and prickly like champagne.

If alarm bells are sounded in Act Two, Scene One, the second scene starts peacefully enough. The Woolfs are dissecting the many characters they have met lately including Yeats, Stein, Sitwell, and Vita Sackville. However, Virginia’s voiced disdain for Vita is a smokescreen for her true feelings as Vita’s glamour has charmed her:

…I trace your passions five hundred years back and they become romantic to me. I have a perfectly untrue but romantic vision of you in my mind, stamping out the hops in a great vat in Kent, stark naked, brown as a satyr and very beautiful.

When they are together again, they are drawn to each other. They mock-play that Vita is a swashbuckling male from her past. “Life and a lover. It does not scan.” Virginia observes, but of course it does. Vita is her Muse, and her idea for Orlando has been born. Virginia goes to Vita’s country place, and the scene ends.
Vita, however, reveals that she must travel to Persia to be with her husband, who is the ambassador. Vita invites Virginia to meet them in Greece, but Virginia is cautious:

> What would happen if I let myself over a precipice – marked V? No I won’t come. I shall stay here and write about it. That shall be my victory. Orlando. A Biography.\(^{76}\)

It is again, interesting, to contrast Virginia’s reluctance to risk her sanity for a sensation to O’Keeffe’s defiant journeying to Santa Fe and reinvention of herself:

> There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Striking – or being struck. The instinct to survive. Snakes are charming. Magically, they shed their skin. The lesson is to shed mine. Gotcha!\(^{77}\)

Of course, Virginia had a history of madness. This was Georgia’s first experience of it, and she felt confident that she was strong enough to never let it overtake her again.

Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf’s decision to stay at home and write proves a sound one. Orlando becomes a tremendous success. They have money, fine clothing, and she and Leonard decide to relocate to the quiet of the country. They enjoy the miracle of her sanity and even start to take it for the granted:

> [VIRGINIA:] How does the light return to the world?

> [LEONARD:] Miraculously, later normally, always with a great sense of relief.\(^{78}\)

What is very wonderful in this play is that each of the characters is sympathetic, plausible, even honorable. Leonard’s love is palpable; Virginia’s need of it and him is, too. That Vita has been good for her and for the Woolfs, because she has inspired Virginia’s work, is indisputable. They are each attempting to carve out some degree of happiness within the parameters of their worlds and limitations.

In Scene Four, the couple is in their garden. Leonard and Virginia make married, small talk. She regrets not having had a child, but sees it as for the best. Leonard concurs,
It’s not a world for children any more. The die is cast. It is now a question, an impending question, of war versus peace, ugliness versus beauty, civilization versus savagery.\textsuperscript{79}

Neatly, Chamberlain, on the radio, announces that Britain has declared war on Germany.

[\textbf{VIRGINIA:}] What do we do now?

[\textbf{LEONARD:}] We wait and we go on discussing the new room or the new chair or the new book or the new cistern.

[\textbf{VIRGINIA:}] How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with their feet on the ground. And die like stars.\textsuperscript{80}

O’Brien is sounding a warning bell: war versus peace, and a Virginia “tired…of phrases…with their feet on the ground.”

In the next scene, which is set only six months after the declaration of World War II, Virginia has changed:

I begin now to forget, I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of solid objects and say “Are you hard.” I have been so many different sentences, all lost in the process of eating and drinking. And now I ask “Who am I?”\textsuperscript{81}

Leonard is late getting home, but when he enters, he overhears Virginia:

[\textbf{LEONARD:}] Who were you talking to just now?

[\textbf{VIRGINIA:}] You know me, tongue always clacking.

[\textbf{LEONARD:}] But not so fast.

[\textbf{VIRGINIA:}] A new book pumping in the brain. My mind is agape and red-hot with it. It’s in here [taps her head] stored. I shall scrape the sea bed, clean.\textsuperscript{82}

Leonard is concerned but accepts her assurances. Meanwhile, their home in the city of London has been bombed to rubble, and the river here in the country has burst its banks. They go out to “walk in the moonlight and see our inland sea.”\textsuperscript{83}
The tide, however, has turned. The play ends with Virginia’s end:

And in me too the wave rises. It swells, it arches its back, it is death – Death is the enemy…Against you I will fling myself unvanquished and unyielding – oh death!84

She leaves Leonard a farewell note and leaves the world anticipating “something tremendous about to happen.”85 The play has come full circle.

In Virginia, the playwright has selected key moments to illustrate how Virginia’s sensibilities were formed. Her desire for artistic excellence coupled with her struggle against mental illness makes her heroic and is not dissimilar to how O’Keeffe balanced her dualities. O’Brien has crafted dialogue that feels as though Virginia Woolf, herself, had written it. I, too have tried to incorporate O’Keeffe’s voice in my material. The way I have woven her words with my own to tell her story represents a blending of truth and artfulness.

1.2c  Zelda by Kaye McDonough

In Zelda, Kaye McDonough explores the nature of sexuality (“truths and mystifications about men and women”), the laws of attraction and repulsion (“alienation and love”), as well as the popular theme “creativity and madness”.86 The work is a self-professed “fantasy…indul[ing] in unlicensed distortions.”87 McDonough admits to using biographical research as the basis for her work and in paraphrasing F. Scott Fitzgerald; however she also admits to having “taken enormous liberties the most flagrant of which is the dream sequence [that she] amalgamated with my own nightlife tours…”88 In short, McDonough’s Zelda is a fusing of the author’s research on Zelda Fitzgerald and experiences in order to explore topics perhaps of more interest to the playwright than to Zelda. Given the writer’s self-professed distancing from the actual historical journey of her subject it is not surprising that the other characters in her play should be disparate isolated entities. There are Zelda and Scott (“the heroine” and “the poet”), Ernest Hemingway (“adversary/provocateur”), Virginia Woolf (“the old world artist”), and
Gertrude Stein (“the teacher, mother and oracle”). These characters are as much symbols as dramatic participants.

The play is divided into six segments: a Prologue by Virginia Woolf, a second prologue by Zelda refuting Virginia’s. Parts I, II and III explore the courtship, marriage, dissolution and madness of the Fitgerlads. In the Epilogue, Virginia Woolf suggests Zelda’s life was “an offering” to the act of creation. Virginia Woolf’s Prologue introduces the theme of creativity and madness. She touches upon the labels applied to the Fitgerlads as epitomes of their generation. Virginia puts forth a question central to any biographical dramatist:

Who are these people anyway, and…why dredge them up again? What did they have to do with anything important?

Gertrude Stein, as our truth barometer, intervenes throughout the piece with “F.A.C.T.”, but here she provides an answer: “Spirit beyond gender”, thus introducing another of McDonough’s themes. Zelda’s Prologue is in direct contrast to the sober tone of Virginia’s. Although her life is not easy…[and] gladly I’d tidy up my life and make a smile of it…what can be done with fact and what done with feeling?…[nonetheless,] I’ll try to be true.

This introduces the disparity between factual history and the distortions of memory. Apparently, it is not only dramatists who reinvent a life. Zelda feels trapped by her golden, macabre history and, in the pursuit of truth, demands that we join her in determining “what it is to be alive”. Both Virginia and Zelda, speaking from beyond the grave (the former, dispassionately; the latter, passionately) about the relationship of life and art, have set the stage for the play’s journey.

In Part I we meet Zelda Sayre. We see her attraction to Scott Fitzgerald and his for her. Stein explains it to us:

These two one artist make. I see their sweet drawing together…this is the puzzle perfection puzzle piece will not certainly be whole. Sexuality a piece of the puzzle, a piece of the puzzle only.
Their union, it seems, was a groping towards their artistic creativity through a merging of their male and female into one creative whole. Stein admits to being “neither man nor woman [but]…decoy I am. I a strange puzzle.” McDonough seems to favor Stein’s grasp of gender and its place in art. The author has Scott Fitzgerald recoil at Virginia’s “sexless despair” and decry “the convenience of androgyny”. Thus, another theme, sexuality and creativity, is put forth. However, the fifth character, Ernest Hemingway, will have none of this artful posturing. His only use for such “rare and expensive brains” is as a focus for his target practice. He entreats us to take our rifles and “pull!” with “a frictionless shot” that “blows out the drag of feeling”. This ends Part I.

Part II opens with the optimistic Fitzgeralds as newlyweds. Quickly we witness their “fall from domestic grace”. Their mutual infatuation confounds Zelda who concedes “I should never have tried to be a woman”. What Zelda really means is that she should never have tried to be a wife and mother. It was diminishing for her free spirit. Moreover, Scott is using her essence to fuel his work. Zelda rebels through infidelities with men who only diminish her further:

I shone back at their glittering tyranny…though I could see the winning of my autonomy was going to take some doing.

Zelda is trapped by men who expect her to glitter and entertain and entrance. Her efforts are doomed to failure even for her beloved Scott who confides, “My fantasies of her were better than she was.” Their perfect union to create art together had failed. There was nothing for them both except the slide downhill. Once again, Hemingway has a hand in acts of destruction telling Zelda “you’re a loser and you’ll make a loser out of Scott.”

By Part III, Zelda’s attempts at creativity have confounded her: “I was a dilettante at everything except compulsion”. In yearning to be extraordinary without any talent to couple with this desire, Zelda burned herself out. Conclusions to be drawn from McDonough’s study are that artists should exist independent of their sexuality. The male-female exploration of the Fitzgeralds, the sexless androgyny of Woolf, the machismo bluster of Hemingway are doomed to self destruction. It is only Stein,
embodying both male and female within herself that can endure. Zelda realizes she has “failed for everybody though that was certainly never my intention”. Nonetheless, Zelda has not lived in vain. Her “relentless spirit travels the universe of blood transforming ordinary order.” For McDonough when Zelda’s “star drops in the sky, blinds us, then fails”, the would-be artist becomes “an offering” thus suggesting that trying is as important as achievement.

1.2d Biographical One-Person Dramas by William Luce

Four works by William Luce are considered as examples of biographical drama; however, because they are also all one-actor vehicles, they need to be examined under the umbrella of a collective sub-heading to in order to discern any factors distinguishing these works from multi-character biographical works.

A general observation regarding one-person plays is that they need to be less-formally-constructed than multi-character plays because the chameleon-like demands on the only actor (who must portray all the other roles as well as the protagonist) require a fluidity of character, time and place. The transformations are best served within a simple two-act structure incorporating memory fluctuations between the present and the past. In Luce’s work often, these trips to the past are instigated by the discovery of an object that has a history for the protagonist or the intrusion of the outside world (the sound of a church bell, the howl of the wind and pelting of the rain, etc.) that reminds the hero/heroine of another time when that sound was heard. These forays into memory also serve as springboards for the artist-main character to launch into examples of his art. Introductions of verse and prose (as per Dickinson and Bronte respectively), Shakespearean soliloquies juxtaposed with music hall songs and humor (Barrymore), and pieces from her dramas or her House Committee on Un-American Activity testimony (Hellman) reveal the artist, the human being, and the issues that precipitated any revelations to an audience (i.e. the dramatic device prompting the character to speak here and now).
In *Barrymore*, John Barrymore must rehearse *Richard III* prior to venturing forth as the character one last time. He is ill-prepared and scared. Lillian Hellman in *Lillian* considers her life alone now that her longtime companion, Dashiel Hammett lies dying of cancer in the adjacent room. The reclusive *Belle of Amherst*, Emily Dickinson, is a-twitter because company could be coming. A cake must be baked, and, by speaking with us, she is breaking not only the fourth wall but also her wall of shyness. Finally, Charlotte Bronte in *Bronte* returns to unforgiving Yorkshire as the last remaining Bronte sibling having just buried her beloved Anne at the seashore.

In all the plays, the protagonist has a need to talk: a major event is upon each of them. In the first two pieces, there are voices other than the solo actor’s. *Barrymore* has an off-stage live performer, the Prompter. *Lillian* has recorded questioners of Hellman during her testimony at the House Committee on Un-American Activities hearings. In the last two works, only the actor portraying Emily Dickinson or Charlotte Bronte is heard. The actresses playing these roles are required to summon up all the other characters as well.

**Barrymore**

John Barrymore, possessed of a “demonic talent”, was the most popular actor in America, a matinee idol and known as The Great Profile when he first challenged himself to *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. Luce begins his play twenty-two years after Barrymore astonished the world with his Shakespearean portrayals. In blackout, a voice over of Barrymore as “Anthony” persuades us we are about to witness Shakespearean greatness. Lights up: an empty theatre, an empty stage. Luce overturns our expectations when a tipsy Barrymore enters pushing a drinks trolley and singing a vaudeville-style version of “I Got A Gal in Kalamazoo” a popular hit of the time (1942) and then launches into off-color limericks. The audience had been poised for a Shakespearean reverie. Now they are uncertain whether to laugh or cry. Meanwhile, John Barrymore can’t believe

I forked out good money to rent this Godforsaken dump for one night, just to run a few Goddamned lines...[but] Richard was my first real
success as a classical actor. So I’ve got to try to get the old bastard on his feet again.\textsuperscript{111}

He is trying to do this because it is his one final dream despite his inebriation, delirium tremens and lapses of memory.\textsuperscript{112} “The say a man isn’t old till regrets take the place of dreams” he muses.\textsuperscript{113} Rather than wallow in regrets, Barrymore sets out to correct the prevalent notion that Jack Barrymore is a tragic figure...I’ve had one helluva life – for a man who has been dead for fifteen years.\textsuperscript{114}

Props in a stage barrel propels him back to his childhood. Another prop causes him to reminisce about his alcoholic father (“Is that my inheritance? Scares the hell out of me.”)\textsuperscript{115} Just as Barrymore is poised to indulge in darker musings, the conscientious Prompter arrives – an off-stage disciplinarian intent upon getting Barrymore line perfect in the role of Richard III.

The ever-hopeful Prompter’s suggests “Now” as a cue for Barrymore to begin Richard’s opening soliloquy. Barrymore flounders “Now is the what? Now is the what?”\textsuperscript{116} It is not long into Barrymore that the audience realizes Barrymore is never going to be able to play Richard III the next night or possibly ever again. Barrymore, realizing it as well, decides to use the time to entertain his imaginary audience with rauous tales of his extraordinary life. If he can’t be an excellent Richard, he’ll be an excellent Jack Barrymore. He attempts to divert his Prompter from the impossible task of teaching him Richard with anecdotes, personal questions, and tales of his four wives.\textsuperscript{117} Recalling his wives is even more painful than trying to remember Richard. He wrenches himself back into Richard III only to digress back to his third wife.\textsuperscript{118} Then, in turn, the actor playing Barrymore portrays his third wife, Katherine, next, his fourth wife (Blanche) and her lesbian lover, Mercedes De Acosta, and finally, his “savior”, the young Harvard graduate/director, Ned Sheldon.\textsuperscript{119} As Ned, he challenges Barrymore to stop wasting your talent...you could be doing the classics [except] you’re a coward, Jack. Why are you so afraid?...You could be the next Edwin Booth...Are you game?\textsuperscript{120}

Barrymore is back in 1920 with Sheldon, his kingmaker and one true friend. Their summer together in Italy segues to Jack’s last summer, alone, when he had been
institutionalized for alcoholism. In quick succession, he is the Matron of the Clinic, an old journalist friend who visits, and the journalist’s strait-laced mother, Mumsie. For all his bravado Barrymore is forced to conclude:

Little drops of water
Little blades of grass
Once a noble actor
Now a horse’s ass.

Hollywood, as embodied by the gossip columnist, Louella Parsons concurs. Unable to pander to Louella, Barrymore is triggered back into Richard: “I that am not shap’d for sportive tricks, nor made to court an amorous looking glass….“ Barrymore’s memory has him sliding in and out of his life and other Shakespearean roles. His Hamlet in London was a triumph: “I waited till the theatre was dark and empty. Then I walked out onto the Haymarket stage and stood there all alone – except for the ghosts.” After an exquisite rendition of “To be or not to be”, Barrymore shares both triumph and regret:

…There’s one moment in a lifetime when all the stars seem to gather and become one – and that moment belongs to you. It was there on that dark stage that I suddenly saw it could all be mine – if I wanted it. But the moment wouldn’t wait for me. It passed me by.

Therein lies the heart of Luce’s Barrymore: for all his posturing, joking and trying, he knows it is all in vain. His thoughts return to his London Hamlet triumph, his father, his step-mother (who seduced him), and his real mother who died when Jack was very young. The Prompter tries to pull Jack back to Richard III with little success. Jack laments, “He’s always trying to save me, but I never listen. And now, like Richard, I’m lost.” This honest admission propels the actor into a perfect soliloquy as Richard III. Frailty intervenes:

Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass
That I may see my shadow as I piss.

Prompter: Pass!
Jack: Pass!

Because of a necessity for Jack to empty his bladder, Act I ends and it is Interval.

By Act II, we are fairly certain Barrymore’s Richard III is doomed to failure. The Prompter is becoming distraught as Jack makes sport: “A line! A line! My kingdom
for a line!” Because Jack is certain as well, he tries to get the Prompter to digress with him by talking of his regrets (alimony) and hopes (“The one thing in the world that still excites me is a woman.”) “Just say the line! Cut the bullshit!” is the Prompter’s response. An incensed Barrymore reminds him:

I was a good Richard!

Prompter: No! You weren’t!

Jack: What?

Prompter: You were a great Richard. You were a great Hamlet.

Jack: Yeah, well what happened to me?

Barrymore launches into an impeccable Hamlet (“I have of late, but wherefore I know not lost all my mirth”). The Prompter suggests they get back to Richard. Barrymore confesses: “I’d like to get back to something. I want to be something, whatever the goddamned role.” The ghosts of his brother, Lionel, and sister, Ethel, reprimand him (both, again, portrayed by the actor playing Jack as well). The Prompter leaves in disgust, calling him a coward. His dead mother tries to comfort him, but Barrymore will have none of it:

Actors are like waves of the sea. They rise to separate heights, then break on the shore and are gone, unremembered…You can douse the lights now.

Prompter: But sir you haven’t come to the end.

Jack: Oh yes I have. I won’t fool myself any longer….

One more quip, then Barrymore is gone, as swiftly as the waves breaking on the shore.

Luce’s study of a man who “had seized the moment” only to try for it again and fail includes the important self-knowledge that he will surely fail. This self-knowledge elevates the character drawn by the playwright above the level of buffoon to a kind of tragic hero. Luce believes “that Jack’s decline was pathetic is true. That it was tragic is debatable.” The poignancy of Jack’s realization that he is doomed makes the character memorable, noteworthy, and, not unlike Zelda who also kept on trying in defiance of her inevitable failure. According to Luce, Barrymore “experienced an artistic ‘high’ known to few. Perhaps the one tragic thing would have been his not daring the flight ‘close to the sun’.”
With Lillian, William Luce explores the essence of the playwright, Lillian Hellman. That he felt particularly challenged “reworking…[the] words and…meanings [of] America’s great woman of letters” is a self-expressed certainty.\textsuperscript{141} That his subject was pleased with his result (“It’s my voice. Thank you.”), makes the work even more important to study.\textsuperscript{142} Hellman was available to Luce and even assisted him in his efforts.\textsuperscript{143} Therefore, what sets this work apart from the other biographical dramas being evaluated in this study, is that Lillian came forth with the blessings of its subject.

The play opens at a pivotal moment in Hellman’s life: her longtime companion, Dashiel Hammett, lies in a coma in an adjacent hospital room. It is a situation prone to reminiscence and reflection, and Lillian does: “I think I’ve always known about my memory. I know when it’s to be trusted and when some dream or fantasy entered on the life….\textsuperscript{144} The audience has been forewarned. This woman knows herself and the way her mind operates. It is likely she will be sharing her truth. Immediately, she confesses her earliest “rampage angers” were because others had distorted their truths. As early as fourteen, she defied her bigoted, mercenary aunts and uncles. Even as a teenager, the young Hellman was a fighter for causes. Born in New Orleans, her Uncle Jake was the greatest villain in her world “breaking the spirit of people for the pleasure of the exercise.”\textsuperscript{145} However, when Hellman pawned a ring from him to buy books, rather than scold her, her Uncle Jake proffered praise: “So you have spirit after all. Most of them are made of sugar water.”\textsuperscript{146} Lillian, true artist, later gave these words to a character in her play, The Little Foxes.\textsuperscript{147}

Lillian unravels her history like a sweater with a loose thread. As she pulls on the yarn we go back to her childhood in New Orleans and (after the age of six) New York. She puzzles over her distant parents (“Mother was dead for five years before I realized I loved her very much.”)\textsuperscript{148} Brought up by her Negro nannies and her Great Aunts, she learned values from the former and “generosity of spirit and money” and humor from
Her Great Aunts’ place in New Orleans was Lillian’s first, true home and the fig tree on the lawn was her haven, confessor, teacher, and guide:

It was in the fig tree that I learned to read, and had what I called “the ill hour”... an intimation of sadness, a first recognition that there was so much to understand that I might never find my way; and the first signs... that the way wouldn’t be easy.  

Because life’s difficulties have been broached, it is only now that Luce’s Lillian opens up and reveals why she is speaking aloud to us today: “My closest and most beloved friend is in a coma. He doesn’t wish to die and I like to think he doesn’t know he’s dying.” The playwright permits Lillian’s thoughts on Hammett’s impending death to free associate to her partner’s life and accomplishments – but only for a moment. This Lillian is too strong to permit more than a cursory dip into the memory pool:

Thirty years together is a long time I guess. The memories skip about and make no pattern. They’re out of order and out of time, and somehow I don’t seem to want to put them in place.  

Like McDonough’s Zelda, it becomes clear that Luce’s Lillian is as much about the nature of artistic partnership as it is about America’s foremost American playwright. To this Lillian, in a sense people become who they are because of the sharing, questioning, and journey they share (in her case with Hammett). She observes, “You want him to approve of you.” “I don’t think I would have written without Hammett,” and “…before I met Hammet I was ignorant pretending to be wise, lazy pretending to work hard” are other self-observations. Because Hammett was her mentor, Lillian instructs herself using Hammett’s voice (“The truth is you don’t like theatre except when you’re in a room by yourself putting the plays on paper.”)  

However, Hammet was not the only influence on Lillian Hellman. The rise of Fascism and the Spanish Civil War profoundly changed Hellman’s world view and prompted her to write The Watch on the Rhine. What is astonishing is that Hellman considered herself “not a political person...[and yet] she is identified inextricably with the political consciousness of this country [America], in particular with the political persecutions of the McCarthy era.” Therefore, it is not surprising that her stand before the HUAC,
pivotal to her life and the story of McCarthy’s persecution of thinking people in America, should also become a crucial point in Luce’s play.

Lillian observes that at

...the House of Un-American Activities, Joe McCarthy and his boys, Cohn and Shine...played with the law as if it were a batch of fudge they enjoyed after their nightly pillow fight.\footnote{158}

Earlier in the play, Luce’s Hammett refuses to name names before the Committee: “If it were more than jail, if it were more than my life, I’d give it. I don’t let cops and judges tell me what democracy is”.\footnote{159} The next day, Lillian tells us, Hammett went to jail and, when he got out, his “stubborn sense of commitment led him right back to the same causes that put him there.”\footnote{160} Lillian ends Act One by recalling the bargain she offered God at the time of his release from prison: “Please God, don’t let him go back to jail. If he could just be sick and die in peace, I’ll be a good girl, like a nun and I won’t ask anything else.”\footnote{161} Observing Hammett’s condition now she admits to being “afraid my bargain with God is coming true.”\footnote{162}

Act Two continues where Act One left off. Hammett’s death is near and Lillian is trying to come to terms with their life together, who they were and who she might be without him. They had had many rows about Hammett’s “casual ladies”.\footnote{163} Lillian traces the roots of her indignation to a willful streak in her early teen years that prompted her to run away from home on a principle and rent a room in a New Orleans colored hotel by claiming she was the half-black relation of her Mammy, Sophronia.\footnote{164} Clearly, Luce’s Lillian wanted things her way from an early age and was willing to take a stand for her beliefs. In the haphazard way that grief and fear can churn up disparate memories, as she waits in the hospital for the inevitable, memories of past events come tumbling out: “Dear God, I’m all out of order here, as most memories are.”\footnote{165} She acknowledges hers is a nature that “blocks out the good times, until any success becomes an accident and failure seems the only truth.”\footnote{166} Lillian needs to find and hold onto those good times because the memories will be all she has once Hammett is gone. However, it is not in her nature to let herself off without a full tracing of those thought patterns. Lillian
credits her Mammy, “Sophronia Mason[,]…an angry woman [as the one who bestowed
upon the writer a sense of]… anger, a dangerous, uncomfortable, and sometimes very
useful gift” and with instilling in her a righteous indignation at injustice. Sophronia is
the first person to actually take stock of Lillian and, in so doing, cause Lillian to evaluate
herself. “It takes a searching wind to find the tree you sit in,” Sophronia observes.

Hammett is soon to die and Lillian’s “searching wind” is howling within her. Because
“the traceries of what you were to what you become are too raw, too simple”, Luce’s
Lillian opts for reportage. In defying the Committee who put America’s free-thinking
individuals on trial, she scores the first broadside in the counterattack by the Left on
Senator McCarthy. Her “I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit the year’s
fashions” went on the record as did her letter to the Committee. It was distributed to the
press, reported, and she was excused. Nonetheless, her proudest moments are the
special ones she shared with Hammett. One of those moments is their last morning in
their country home:

Hammett: Come down, Lilly. Be very quiet. When you get to the foot of
the stairs, crouch very low, so you can’t be seen through the
window…

Lillian: Before me was the finest sight of my life…so mysterious and
beautiful that I began making choking sounds…Up the wide road
from the lake, through the fruit trees, a majestic pack of deer,
forty or fifty, bucks, does, fawns, moved toward us in a way very
few people have ever been allowed to see them. All of them
moved without fear.

They share a precious moment. In Luce’s play, quite soon after this reverie, Hammett
dies. Lillian recalls

…knowing that death wasn’t too far away, I tried for something to
have afterwards, to have now. So one day I said, “We’ve done
fine, haven’t we?” And he said “Fine’s too big a word for me.
Let’s just say we’ve done better than most.”

Luce’s account of Hellman’s life, a jumble of the bitter and the sweet, concludes:

The past, with its pleasures and its rewards, its foolishness and
punishments, is there for each of us forever, and it should be. I
tell myself that that was then, and there is now…but the then and
the now – are one.
If we accept Luce’s account that Hellman herself approved of this work about her life — and why should we not? – Lillian becomes an important play to examine in the field of biographical drama.\(^\text{174}\) Luce’s comments on the creation of this and his other works are explored further in the section on the methodology for the creation of biographical drama, below.

**The Belle of Amherst**

Luce’s first major success as a biographical dramatist was the 1976 one-woman play about the New England poet, Emily Dickinson, starring Julie Harris. It is a self-admitted “love affair with language, a celebration of all that is beautiful and poignant in life.”\(^\text{175}\) Commenting on some post-nineteenth-century evaluations of the reclusive Dickinson’s psychic and emotional state, Luce observes that two important factors about Emily Dickinson that he wished to convey were her “humanity and reasonableness” and to not portray her as “a social isolate possessed of disordered impulses and mentally alienated from reality.”\(^\text{176}\) Accepting Luce’s thesis that Dickinson was an intensely sane woman whose life was a “deliberate covenant with Nature and Art, a premeditated channeling of creative desire” (again possessing a spirit not unlike O’Keeffe’s), the play begins.\(^\text{177}\)

Although the character greeting us is a fifty-three-old spinster her combined enthusiasm, self-mockery, and timidity (at proffering us a piece of her homemade “Black Cake”) exudes a youthful charm. She is almost proud that she is a topic for the village gossips: “I give them something to talk about. I dress in white all year round, even in winter. “Bridal white”….”\(^\text{178}\) She is certainly proud that she is a published poet (albeit an anonymous one) as well as the person responsible for the neighborhood baking.\(^\text{179}\) Along with her cakes she includes cryptic haiku-like notes to “keep them guessing”.\(^\text{180}\) Early into the play, Dickinson makes her first confession. As the town’s “local character”:

I enjoy the game…I do it on purpose. The white dress, the seclusion. It’s all – deliberate…In a way, the stories are true. I believe in truth. But I think it can be slanted just a little…”\(^\text{181}\)
As suddenly as her confession, out pours a poem:

Tell the Truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind —

No sooner are we charmed by her poetry, Emily confesses her love of words. They are her “life…There are words to which I lift my hat when I see them sitting on a page…."

Her greatest joy is reading great poets like Keats, Shelley, Shakespeare, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, or Emily Bronte – “[when] they make my body so cold, no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry.”

Emily is alternately timid, flustered, garrulous, enchanting, eccentric and a dispenser of blessings:

Do you know that every one of you is, to me, a poem…each one a rare creation…I discovered that secret along time ago about the souls of people.

Her delight at this wonderful state of affairs evokes another strange and remarkable poem. Aware that her behavior is slightly unconventional, she blasts the notion that she had been an eccentric, precocious child or teen. In fact, she had been as infatuated with beaux as her schoolmates. Unfortunately, she had not been beautiful enough to attract any interest. Even sending Valentine after Valentine brought no results. Suddenly, Emily is back at one of the balls where she had never been a belle: trying too hard, ever hopeful – a New England version of The Glass Menagerie’s Amanda Wingfield. However, Emily is too levelheaded and accepting of her place in the world to be an embittered, displaced Southern Belle:

Father’s house and my garden – this is my world…You see I’ve never had to go any place to find my paradise. I found it all right here…in Amherst, Massachusetts.
As if to reinforce her assertion, Luce gives Emily another perfect poem to share with us.\footnote{188}

With each passing moment, Emily reveals more of her character. She shares her love of words, her delight at reliving her school days, and her early rebellion. She refused to delete the “questionable” or wicked” from her Shakespearean anthology despite her headmaster’s insistence.\footnote{189} A gleefully defiant Emily launches into both Hamlet and Ophelia, from “Lady, shall I lie in your lap?” through “Let copulation thrive!”\footnote{190}

Emily’s contentment with her memories and her four walls cannot prevent the world’s intrusion. Church bells presage a funeral and inspire remembrances of those deceased. (She is incredulous at the suggestion of her own mortality: “This me – that walks and works – must die, some fair or stormy day?”\footnote{191} Her thoughts range from her relationship with her father and her astonishment that he approved of her writing poetry until the early hours of the morning despite his rule for early risings, to her first sight of the aurora borealis, to the way she and her sister Vinnie now pass the time by reading ridiculous news stories aloud from the local paper.\footnote{192}

However, early in the play Emily has confessed her obsessive need for publication through which her seclusion and indefatigable industry would receive validation.\footnote{193} Getting together her courage and her work, an offer from Thomas Wentworth Higginson of The Atlantic Monthly to evaluate new poetry spurs Emily to action. She selects some of her most original poems and sends them off. Higginson asks to see more. Now, after an eight-year correspondence, Higginson has decided to visit Emily.\footnote{194} Act One ends on this hopeful note.

At the start of Act Two an eager Emily awaits the visit of her mentor, Higginson. With little grace, he swiftly damns her verses and sends Emily into a Victorian swoon.\footnote{195} Emily rationalizes her disappointment with “my meridian has passed” and convinces herself that “publication is the auction of the mind of man…and I’m at peace with
it…My business is to sing! What difference does it make if no one listens? Dickinson’s greatest challenge is to continue to sing in anonymity:

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – Too?
Then there’s a pair of us?
Don’t tell! They’d banish us – you know.

How dreary -- to be -- Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell your name – the livelong day –
To an admiring Bog!  

“I don’t regret my aloneness” Emily maintains. She does, however, regret her plainness – “plain and small, like the wren…Plain. Now there’s a word not to lift your hat to.” Despite her plainness, though, there were suitors – even one that Emily genuinely loved, a Philadelphian, the Minister Charles Wadsworth. They had developed a correspondence that included her poems. In over twenty years, they had only met three times. Their last encounter was a spontaneous gesture on his part to see her one last time. That they were never to meet again broke her heart: the man she called “my Master” died. “Yes, I still write poetry, but not as much as I used to. There are so few listeners.…"

As Emily’s years advance, Death has become familiar. Her father’s death has left the house so quiet and there is too much time for musings such as “Hold your parents tenderly, for the world will seem a strange and lonely place when they’re gone.” Left with her spinster sister, she is nonetheless not alone because there are still words “to lift your hat to!” Luce’s portrait of a gifted, eccentric pilgrim with words reminds us that there is poignancy and valor in people who have so little and yet so much.

Bronte

Aloneness also affects Charlotte Bronte in Luce’s Bronte. She has just buried her last sibling, Anne, and life is now about caring for her distant, judgmental father in the harsh environment of Yorkshire. Set in 1849 (The Belle of Amherst was set in 1883), forty
years and an ocean separate the buoyant Emily from the dour, challenged Charlotte.\textsuperscript{203} If Emily is a resolute fifty-three-year-old spinster-cum-words smith, Charlotte has little resolve left. Only thirty-three years old, she has lost her peer family, is “doomed to be an old maid” caring for her God-fearing father, and condemned to

\[
\text{…sit in a lonely room – the clock ticking loud through a still house – [and to] open before the mind’s eye the record of the last year…I have a heavy heart. But I am not crushed.} \textsuperscript{204}
\]

Charlotte’s refusal to be crushed and why is the journey of Luce’s Bronte.

There is much that could crush her. Throughout the play, the elements of nature threaten to overwhelm her. “There is something so merciless in the heavy rush of the wind across the moors,” she laments.\textsuperscript{205} That which she cannot control she endures by finding some consolation within the bad, for example, in noting “The sky is black, but there was the most beautiful rainbow over the moors.”\textsuperscript{206} She also changes what she can control (“I hate this teapot”) and embraces the bitter:

\[
\text{You hold out your hand for a pearl, and fate puts into it a scorpion…Never mind. In time after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die and you will have learned the great lesson of how to endure without a sob.} \textsuperscript{207}
\]

With her siblings all taken by death, like Emily Dickinson in Massachusetts, the urge to write is waning.\textsuperscript{208} “Exhausted with the whole business of dying”, everything is “tragic work” and “for every smallest thing there is a sadness.”\textsuperscript{209} Like Dickinson, cooking is part of her Woman’s Work. In Charlotte’s case, there are potatoes to de-eye.\textsuperscript{210} After so much loss, her dreams are modest. Writing is still interesting; however, of greater interest is “a gentle time, a quiet time.”\textsuperscript{211}

Luce starts the play at a moment of personal drama for Charlotte. She has returned to a cold house after an arduous and emotionally-draining journey. She buried her sister, Anne, and suffered the indignity of a child becoming ill all over her only travel cloak. Back in the dank Yorkshire house, the smell of the child still upon her and with no money to purchase a new cloak, Charlotte fretting over how to remove the smell of
vomit, recalls the past and confronts the present. At first, the present has the upper hand: “There’s a sense of desolation here, of agony to be undergone, as I resume life in this lonely house with Papa as my sole companion.”\textsuperscript{212} That she still has a whiff of desire to be saved from all this and swept away by the Parson, Mister Nicholls, is more pipedream than reality. He has made no “declarations of feelings” beyond looking at her “rather fervently”.\textsuperscript{213} However, he has promised to call to pay his respects and express his regret concerning the death of her sister, Anne. Given the bleakness of her present and the paucity of a future, the thought that Mr. Nicholls might call is enough to sustain her hopes scant though they are. The “device” employed by Luce is to keep us in suspense (along with Charlotte) as to whether he will or will not call.

Meanwhile, Charlotte is alone with her memories of her dead sisters and brother. She mourns Emily:

We perambulated arm-in-arm this way, like restless, wild animals, around and around the table after everyone had gone to bed. It was here I first heard \textit{Wuthering Heights}, chapter by chapter…It was vivid and fearful, every page charged with a sort of electricity…Even today when I read \textit{Wuthering Heights}, it’s like breathing lightning.\textsuperscript{214}

Of course she misses her sister (Emily, gone like a dream.”)\textsuperscript{215} Despite her losses, however, Charlotte finds consolation in the memories of her youth that “cling to every smallest corner of this gray stone house.”\textsuperscript{216} Every corner and every object – from the toy soldiers to the ivory fan – trigger memories of her brother Branny and her Aunt Branwell and of more hopeful days gone by.\textsuperscript{217} Charlotte’s reveries are interrupted by the thunder and rain on the heath and their sounds pull her back to the present and concerns about the dogs and the servants.\textsuperscript{218} One servant, Tabby, has heard that Charlotte Bronte is the great male writer, Currer Bell. It is true:

…when we decided to publish – Emily, Anne and I – we didn’t want to declare ourselves women. We had some vague impression that authoresses were liable to be looked on with prejudice. So we decided to veil our names.\textsuperscript{219}

Charlotte is much happier reliving the past and the courageous and humorous adventures of the intrepid Bronte sisters, unafraid to be writers with male nom-de-plums, surprising
an unsuspecting publisher with the reality of their gender.\textsuperscript{220} Of course, not all the memories are happy ones. Their beloved brother, addicted to opium, never knew of the writing successes of his sisters. Charlotte concedes “his life was such a tragic waste.”\textsuperscript{221} In retrospect, Charlotte is calm, but at the time she railed against his frailties, tried every virago-tactic to shake him from his opium dream. Of course, she failed, and he finally died, ten months before Anne.\textsuperscript{222} His death gave Charlotte an enormous sense of peace: “Strange, isn’t it? Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive.”\textsuperscript{223} Objects in the old home seem to take Charlotte back to happier times, but then she finds a feather that the family had found together and it touches her heart. “For every smallest thing, there is sadness,” is her conclusion.\textsuperscript{224}

Charlotte, too, has her secrets. Branwell’s dissipation had not been the trigger for her tirades. Just as he had been attracted to the wife of his invalid employer, Charlotte had once formed an attachment for a married Belgian educator. In condemning her brother’s relationship, she was condemning her own desires. Their relationship was chaste but her affection ran deep.\textsuperscript{225} There is a knock at the door. Could it be Pastor Nicholls? No – It is merely a neighbor with something for the Sunday service and then, their cook needing help with the potatoes.\textsuperscript{226} Act One ends.

The potatoes become a talking point at the start of Act Two. Apparently, their cook is so myopic that she leaves the eyes in the peeled ones so it is Charlotte’s task to de-eye them after the cook has done her peeling.\textsuperscript{227} Potatoes are not a fascinating topic of discourse for the former Currer Bell. The memories become stale. The letters to old friends are more about what they had done rather than what they are doing or planning to do. Life, that once was an open door, feels shut and bolted. Even a return to the memories and bravery of childhood evokes fear:

Sometimes the future terrifies me. What’s to become of Charlotte Bronte? What’s to become of Currer Bell? Which taskmasters should I serve? Where is the end to this maze of turnings, to this isolation?\textsuperscript{228}

Suddenly, Charlotte is back reliving the death of her beloved sister, Emily, “the nearest thing to my heart in all the world.”\textsuperscript{229} Enviably, she finds some lesson in that anguish as
well: “We must never knit human ties too closely, or clasp our loved ones too fondly, because they must leave us, or we must leave them – one day.”

Charlotte’s challenges are not with dying but with living:

I groan, not because I’m a single woman and likely to remain single. I groan because I’m a lonely woman and likely to remain lonely. I am solace for Papa, but he is not solace for me. But it can’t be helped; therefore, it must be borne.

The woman who has “lived at the border of Death for a long time, heard the funeral bells tolling across the lane”, now has hope. Mister Nicholls might still call – “Remember the arch or today’s rainbow? - I must hope – it is my bow of promise.” At the last moment of Act Two, he does call. The audience never does discover whether Charlotte Bronte is to become Mrs. Nicholls. It is history that has shown us her hopes were in vain.

There is a tragedy in Luce’s Charlotte as in the lives of her sisters, Emily and Anne. Doomed to an isolated existence, adopting male pseudonyms in order to be taken seriously, relegated to early deaths and/or spinsterhood because of the harsh strictures of their time, to Luce, the fact that Charlotte Bronte wrote at all is a miracle.

1.3 Some Conclusions about the Nature of Biographical Drama

Because a biographical dramatist’s subject has a public persona, the playwright’s task is not to create a character but to focus on the subject’s life and to understand that life’s implications. As Kaye McDonough has the character, Virginia, ask in Zelda, “Who were these people anyway?… Why dredge them up again? What did they have to do with anything important?” The answer to that question is a subjective one for a dramatist. What a subject has to do “with anything important” depends upon what is
important to the individual writer. As has been shown, there are many different themes being explored in the seven plays considered above. However, there are certain topics that reoccur in all the works.

In all seven plays, the playwrights’ have depicted characters intent upon realizing their personal artistic vision. The degree of each protagonist’s success varies; however, they are each trying their best in their individual ways. Another common trait is that each character exhibits a willingness to let go of any misgivings and to “go for it” often despite the consequences. These are the only two factors that all seven works share. Drama has long relied on characters with strong intentions and drives. The very nature of drama is conflict. Hence, when a protagonist’s intentions are thwarted, the dramatic tension is heightened. In the case of biographical drama, because the central character was once alive the audience’s involvement is intensified.

In a majority of the plays, the idea that death and life are very close emerges. Also, the use of actual words uttered by the hero or heroine is a common feature. The nature of partnership (or the lack thereof) is considered in many of the works. The struggle to emerge from obscurity is a problem addressed by all the subjects with the exception of Zelda and John Barrymore (who are both more notorious than obscure). Linked to the issue of anonymity is the idea of being a woman artist in a man’s world. Gender, homosexuality and bisexuality are in some of the pieces as is the idea of sexual molestation. A few plays question the role of gender and sexuality in the act of creation. Another popular topic is the balancing of creativity and madness and creativity and excess (whether it be through alcohol, drugs, or destructive behavior). A number of the works consider the subjects’ Art as their children. Finally, the need for pragmatism, self-discipline and determination for any achievement as well as the singularity of memory are also common themes.

Biographical drama, by definition, deals with a life, it is not surprising that dramatic narrative arcs often follow that life’s journey. However, none of the plays considered deal with the subject’s entire life. Rather, each one focuses on a critical phase that is
emblematic of a part of that life, whether it be the early years, (the inception of a personal artistic vision and its flowering), the middle years, (the difficulty of maintaining an independence of vision once fame is attained), or the later years, (the diminishing of personal powers despite a lifetime of achievement and success.) Regardless of the scope of a work, the most important distinction I can make between biographical drama and fictional drama is that, in the former case, the audience knows, beforehand, that despite life’s vagaries, these artists do, eventually, become famous. Therefore, the focus of biographical plays becomes the journey – they are not as concerned with if the protagonist will succeed as much as when and how. (The exception is, of course, Zelda, who became infamous for her lack of success, a bit like a Jazz Age Florence Foster Jenkins.)

Beyond an attention to the subject’s journey, scope of a life, internal and external conflicts, and historical context, biographical plays about creative artists infer that there are certain needs inherent in artists. As was noted above, key themes include the importance of having one’s own artistic vision, the dedication and drive to pursue it, and the ruthlessness necessary to discard anything superfluous to one’s art. In pursuing his or her art, the artist, especially the female artist, frequently subjugates a yearning for children into her works of art and the role of a partner, whether lover or spouse, supportive or not, becomes crucial. Matters of life and death often weigh upon the protagonists. The struggle to emerge from anonymity, the polarities of creativity and madness, creativity and sexuality, as well as the singular nature of memory, are also common threads.

A number of the playwrights of the works considered above have discussed their use of the protagonist’s actual words as a part of their work, so in the section that follows I will examine the various methodologies they have adopted in the creation of their plays.
1.4 Methodology for the Creation of Biographical Drama

Of the playwrights’ works examined above, only Kaye McDonough and William Luce have elaborated upon their pre-writing process. McDonough admits to having “freely used biographical material.” That includes:

The central outline…follows Zelda’s life. The Art Critics in Part II quote reviews of her work which appeared in *Time* (1934) and *The Baltimore Evening Sun* (1933). I have paraphrased Scott Fitzgerald: “I married the heroine of my stories.” “I am the professional novelist, and I am supporting you. That is all my material. None of it is your material.” “You are a third-rate writer and a third-rate ballet dancer.” And Zelda herself: “If I had not explored my abysses in public…” “Suddenly last spring I began to see all red while I worked or I saw no colors…” “Now I am here in Valmont Sanitarium…in a situation where I cannot be anybody, full of vertigo, with an increasing noise in my ears, feeling the vibrations of everyone I meet. Broken down.” “…What the hell, Zelda Sayre.”

McDonough recommends eleven reference works for anyone interested in further reading; however, she minimizes the importance of scholarship in her play’s creation. She freely admits to having taken “enormous liberties…flagrantly and loosely based on…Zelda’s life…” That McDonough believes this is her entitlement as a creative biographical dramatist is perhaps better explained by William Luce in his Preface to his work, *Lillian*:

To transfer the private reminiscences of a public personality from page to stage requires the adjustment of intent [in order to]…create an entertainment that would retain fidelity to the character and life of the woman…and yet have an individuality and dimension of its own.

He believes to dole out biographical or chronological information to an audience is dry bones indeed. While such material can make engaging reading, it is most often ineffectual in the arena of theatre.

Therefore, some problems confronting the creative biographical dramatist include deciding how much truth supports the dramatic event and when to diverge from the researched material to make an artistic leap that might better serve the dramatic content of the play.
In order to make those choices as clearly as possible, I immersed myself in as much O’Keeffe research material as I could locate. Then, I explored “stream of consciousness” writing in the hope that this research would reassemble itself subconsciously or via dreams to something approximating a dramatic moment. Although I had had no previous experience in the realm of dramatic biography, later research supported this course of study. For The Belle of Amherst, the veteran biographical dramatist, William Luce, engaged in

...intensive methodological research. For two years I read and reread the several biographical studies of Emily, the three-volume collection of her letters, and the three-volume variorum edition of her poems. During this study, I took extensive notes; culled dramatically workable anecdotes, poems, and excerpts from Emily’s letters; catalogued them under subject headings; rearranged them in a chronological pattern; and interwove them in a conversational style, blending in my own words as seamlessly as possible, and with the cadence and color of Emily’s words. Gradually, Emily’s story emerged, as if she were telling it herself.240

Despite my earlier conjecture, it is possible that there is a blueprint for the creation of a biographical drama. Although “the strange faces of genius are enigmatic to the structured mind,”241 by immersing one’s self in as much information as is available about these creative artists, the dramatist allows creative interaction to occur between their own imagination and biography and work of the artist. The biographical dramatist juggles more than the polarities of historical facts and imagination; in my own case, I was hoping for a visitation from my subject that would provide insight into the life I was exploring.

Another curious contradiction in the creation of biographical drama is that for all our research, intuition and artistry, the subject’s motives can never be really known. William Luce, who had an ongoing dialogue with Lillian Hellman during the creation of Lillian believes Hellman’s “motive for writing was perhaps to document and justify the course of her life. Perhaps. No one knows.”242 As a biographical dramatist, I accept that I cannot know for certain what motivated Georgia O’Keeffe, but through my imaginative engagement with her, I can surely try.
Having explored the nature and properties of biographical drama as a genre, it is timely to consider other plays about the painter in order to determine where *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe* is situated within the panoply of works about Georgia O’Keeffe.

1.5 An Assessment of Other Dramatic Works About O’Keeffe

O’Keeffe’s contradictory character has, unsurprisingly, attracted other playwrights to her; since her death, not counting my own work, there have been seven plays on O’Keeffe. Like the biographies, these plays also reflect the amount of O’Keeffe material available to their writers at different times, and we can track a deepening of the work on the artist that parallels the revelation of new information over time. As a late contribution to this field, my play reflects recent developments in the study of O’Keeffe and hence, I hope, a further contribution to the field of O’Keeffe biographical drama. However, only by thoroughly examining other playwrights’ theatrical solutions to the problem of creating a dramatic event about the artist will the parameters of the biographical dramas about Georgia O’Keeffe be revealed. Then, by comparing their decisions with my own, a conclusion can be drawn as to whether *A Brush with Georgia O’Keeffe* has expanded and deepened an understanding of the subject as well as created a unique and noteworthy dramatic representation of the artist.

1.5a Constance Congdon’s *A Conversation with Georgia O’Keeffe*

Constance Congdon’s *A Conversation with Georgia O’Keeffe* was created in 1987. This brief, one-act play comprises one main scene and numerous internal “beats” that shift thought and direction, is only thirty-one pages long, has only one character, Georgia O’Keeffe, and is presented as a reminiscence. Her memories are flashbacks, which proceed in a chronological fashion. Congdon’s simple message is that one must find one’s own country. Fittingly, the play ends with the heroine in Santa Fe, New Mexico, admiring a red hill. Congdon takes a “verbatim” approach to her subject as the following extracts illustrate: “…a red hill touches my heart and I don’t suppose there’s any reason why it should move someone else the same way.” This line mirrors
O’Keeffe’s actual words in her commentary on her art: “a red hill doesn’t touch everyone’s heart as it touches mine and I suppose there is no reason why it should.”

In my introduction, I considered the question of historical veracity versus artistic license. In Congdon’s play, she has chosen to utilize O’Keeffe’s actual words. In *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe* rather than replicate O’Keeffe’s words about a red hill, I chose to give Georgia an opportunity to share her exultation in the color and majesty of the hills. She calls her dogs:

Beau! Chia! Time to greet the dawn! Yes, my babies – we’re dancing in the dawn like that Corn Dance at the Santo Domingo Pueblo – Heyyahhhah! My Beau! Heyyahhah, little Chia! – My babies! My chows! – We’re not creatures of habit—Our only habit is getting up to see the dawn – Yes it is! Owowwow! Owowwow! That’s right: howl!…We’re in Abiquiu – red-streaked cliffs, my flat-topped Pedernal Mountain, so big and blue and wise, and the molten red-orange snaking Chama River below – A world with no people in it. Just me and Chia and Beau. Heyyahhah! Owowwow!

There is no mistaking her elation or its source. My Georgia doesn’t just talk about being touched by a red hill: she *is* touched by her landscape – powerfully, triumphantly. Just as O’Keeffe had endeavored to express “the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint” through “creat[ing] an equivalent for what I felt about what I was looking at”, my translation of O’Keeffe’s words about a red hill into an emotional experience of a red hill illustrates my application of O’Keeffe’s processes to my writing as well as a successful balancing of historical duality and artistic license.

Another example of Congdon’s “verbatim” approach, is her discussion of the impetus for a painting called “The Shanty”: “Now this is the only really dirty painting I ever painted. Look at those dismal colors. But the men saw it and said, “At last maybe she really CAN paint.”

Again, these lines reflect O’Keeffe’s actual words whereas my play, although it does not discuss The Shanty, uses the same incident to explore the reaction of male artists to her work. She bemoans that they:
…call my color: “Hopeless.” “Too bright.” Arthur Dove says he likes my work, but:

[DOVE:] That girl is doing without effort what all we moderns have been trying to do.

“Without effort?!?” As a woman, the capacity to make conscious artistic choices is discounted. No one thinks very much of any of us.

My play addresses more than the men’s opinion of O’Keeffe’s art. It introduces one of O’Keeffe’s dichotomies – that of being heralded as the greatest American female painter while feeling diminished by the necessity of ascribing gender limitations to her achievements. Once again, Congdon and I are exploring similar terrain, a female artist in a man’s world, but in my case, rather than repeating a variation on the real O’Keeffe’s words, my Georgia exhibits an emotional response to the male painters’ deprecation of her art, and, in so doing, conveys the emotional equivalent of O’Keeffe’s experience using dialogue rather than paint. Here is another illustration of my adoption of O’Keeffe’s methods of making art as my own; moreover, once again, both historical fact and creative fantasy are served.

Evidently of the Edward Albee “camp” regarding biographical drama, Congdon chooses direct quotations wherever possible. I, too, have incorporated many of O’Keeffe’s words into A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe; however, they are invariably used as bridges within a bigger picture. For example, when my Georgia is discussing her mental illness with her psychiatrist, she observes, in part:

I must be getting better. I don’t want to think about that; I want to think about painting again. But I don’t want to talk about painting – words and I are not friends – too many words mean too few paintings.…

“Words and I are not friends,” an actual O’Keeffe quotation is used here to indicate the artist’s yearning to avoid distracting situations, and return to her work. The reversals within the brief dialogue presented above illustrate her pendulum-like swings of emotion and also serve the play’s theme, the exploration of “a woman of her time, place, needs, and talents, [adopting] desperate measures [in order] to live and work.” Using
O’Keeffe’s actual words to ground my Georgia in her truth, I, then, permitted them to launch my character into a dramatic situation of my own creation.

Congdon’s goals are not as lofty. Her title promises more a “conversation” than a play. Given O’Keeffe’s anti-social, ornery nature, the character she creates is neither easy nor pleasant; nonetheless, her Georgia is lively and humorous. As the following extract from the opening of her play illustrates:

[Georgia enters and addresses the audience.]
So you’ve come to see Georgia O’Keeffe.
[Standing still]
Front.
[Turns profile]
Side.
[Back to audience]
Back.
[She exits]253

This exchange is so familiar that it is even recounted in the first biography about the artist.254 Although not original material it is a fun and striking way to commence a play about a prickly character.

Indeed, after experimenting with various beginnings, I, too, settled on a similar start to A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe:

What can I do for you today? Let me guess: You want to see O’Keeffe.” (facing audience) O’Keeffe’s front. (turning sideways) O’Keeffe’s side. (faces US) O’Keeffe’s rear. Satisfied? (She exits)255

My reasoning was that I needed something startling, humorous, and indicative of her idiosyncratic personality to launch my play. Moreover, I wanted the audience to experience the real O’Keeffe early on in the play. In this instance, historical truth provided exactly what I hoped for.

When Congdon was writing, the Lisle biography, numerous newspaper and magazine articles, the nude photographs by Stieglitz published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art with its introductory commentary by Georgia O’Keeffe, as well as O’Keeffe’s own publication discussing her paintings were the only sources available to the playwright.
Consequently, her work does not seek to unmask the “public face” of O’Keeffe that the painter and Stieglitz took great pains to invent and perpetuate. Given her sources, it is understandable that most of the material in Congdon’s piece is upbeat. Her protagonist is a world-beater – triumphing over the men by painting “The Shanty” or with her oils of New York City. In *A Conversation with Georgia O’Keeffe* sorrows are minimized; breakdowns are not even mentioned.

Congdon’s play does touch upon O’Keeffe’s mother’s painful passing and Stieglitz’s heart attack and death, both devastating experiences for the artist; yet, reflecting the paucity of biographical material at the time, Congdon’s O’Keeffe comments: “My brothers and sisters handled the funeral – they buried her in Madison. I didn’t go home. It wouldn’t have done either of us any good.”

Laurie Lisle’s biography appears to be the primary source for this part of her play:

> If there was a funeral in Charlottesville, Georgia did not return for it. Her mother’s body was buried by her brothers and sisters in the Totto family plot of the Grace Episcopal Church cemetery in Madison.

Only two years after Congdon’s play was produced, Roxana Robinson’s study paints a very different picture of the young O’Keeffe’s response to her mother’s sudden demise in early May, 1916:

> The event was, for Georgia, overwhelming. For six weeks after her mother’s death, she existed in a grim, empty, and depressive state. When she finally began to recover, after mid-June, she wrote…that she had been feeling she had no existence. Her loss was so painful that until then, Georgia could not accept it emotionally: “I didn’t look at Mama – I can hardly believe she isn’t here somewhere.”

Benefiting from Robinson’s comprehensive scholarship, my Georgia’s sentiments parallel those above:

> No. I have a premonition: hills of mud; trees, wet with Spring growth; bare cupboards, unheated rooms. One of my sisters has eloped; my other sister, Ida’s been shooting squirrels for food. Why wasn’t I told? Too late!
[CORONER:] Pulmonary Tuberculosis and Suffocation.

Mama! – Gone.

[CORONER:] Face down in a pool of her own blood.

I can’t look at Mama. I can’t. I can hardly believe she isn’t here somewhere. Six weeks just washing away. Pouring rains and drowning tears and flooding memories.²⁵⁹

Stieglitz’s death was catastrophic for O’Keeffe, yet, Congdon, again, shies away from the emotional:

Alfred died early Saturday morning and I spent the day trying to find a pine coffin. I found one, but it was lined with pink satin, so I stayed up the next night tearing that out and putting in white linen.²⁶⁰

Although later discounted as possibly apocryphal, this much-told tale appears in the earlier biographies about Georgia O’Keeffe, and it works quite well in this context.²⁶¹

I, too, chose to incorporate it into my version of her story. It appealed to me that O’Keeffe would busy her hands when faced with tragedy:

No time to mourn – too much to be done. [Going through the motions] A natural pine box. Ripping out a quilted, pink-satin lining. In its place, hand-sewing a simple linen sheet. Shrouding the box: plain back muslin.²⁶²

In both these examples, I permitted factual truth to expand my artistic expression. Unfortunately, many of Congdon’s historical inaccuracies seem more the result of carelessness than artistic license. For example, her Alfred Steiglitz is described as “German-born,” and, after their marriage, she has O’Keeffe, sitting in their apartment at The Shelton Hotel with the other painters in Stieglitz’ coterie, “after Alfred had gone to bed and left me with all of them.”²⁶³ In fact, Stieglitz made much of having been born in Hoboken, New Jersey, U.S.A., and it was O’Keeffe not Stieglitz who would leave her husband to rant all night about the future of American Art with “the men.”²⁶⁴ However, these are quibbles. While A Conversation with Georgia O’Keeffe is neither a definitive work nor a comprehensive study of the artist, it nonetheless provides Georgia with a genuine voice.
Georgia O’Keeffe is one of six characters depicted in Terre Ouwehand’s 1989 one-act play The Studio. Subtitled Six Artists in One Act, it is just that: six female artists holding forth about the new territory they had to chart in order to express themselves in the visual arts. Written in overlapping statements, with little interchange between the characters, its theme explores the lives of women artists one might know, as well as considers others whose achievements are unsung.

As the most famous of Ouwehand’s characters, O’Keeffe introduces the concept that, “I’m not the only woman who’s done this,” and the playwright assigns O’Keeffe the task of moving her feminist message along. In one instance, she observes, “Congress first denied the vote to women the year I was born,” yoking O’Keeffe’s personal history to that of the American feminist movement. The other female artists in this work include Anna Mary Robertson Moses (i.e. Grandma Moses), Mary Cassat, Harriet Hosman, Dat-So-La-Lee, and Beatrice Romaine Goddard Brooks.

Another short piece, (thirty-two pages in length), this one-act play neither specifies setting nor delineates scenic breaks. It is a series of monologues or overlapping bits of non-interactive dialogue. When the lines are short, the rhythm accelerates; when the women are delivering tales of their lives and loves, there is a lingering sweetness. Each artist states her position to the audience rather than discussing it with the others.

There is wry humor in Ouwehand’s O’Keeffe, including the painter’s spiky retort to strangers: “…they ask me what I’m painting, I say ‘Nothing – because I’m talking to you’!”. Laurie Lisle’s biography chronicles this incident. Given this similarity to Congdon’s dialogue, Lisle’s book was a probable source for Ouwehand as well.

The playwright has done some research and put it to good use. Her O’Keeffe quotes Dow’s “filling a space in a beautiful way,” then, goes on to explain, “That’s what art means to me.” Her painter concedes, “I suppose one works because it’s the most interesting thing one can do”, echoing O’Keeffe’s observation, “I am so sure that Work is the thing in life.” Another member of the Edward Albee “school” of historical
drama, Ouwehand’s also tends to the “verbatim” approach; however, the quotes are put to better use in The Studio than in Congdon’s play because they serve the thematic whole.

As with Congdon’s play, there are the occasional factual errors. For example, later in the play, O’Keeffe reacts to her first glimpse of the Rodin drawings in 1908:

I saw the early Rodins that Stieglitz showed in his gallery and while the other students crowded around them, oo-ing and aw-ing and gesticulating, I sat down on a sofa and fell asleep.\(^{272}\)

In fact, Gallery 291 had neither chairs nor sofas in its exhibition areas. O’Keeffe’s actual recollection of her first encounter with the Rodin drawings tells a different tale. She and her friends

…went up the steps to the front door where we took a very small elevator and came out into a bare room – windows to the back. Stieglitz came out of a sort of dark place with something photographic in his right hand – it was dripping water on the floor…he glared at us in a rather unfriendly fashion when we said that we came to see the Rodin drawings. He glared as if too many had asked before…when they started to talk I went in to see the Rodin drawings – but I heard loud talk – louder and louder till it became quite violent. The drawings were just a lot of scribbles to me. I went in to the farthest room to wait – I didn’t want to listen to them…nothing to do but stand and wait till we finally left.\(^{273}\)

However, in this instance, Ouwehand’s decision to eschew historical accuracy makes artistic sense. A shorthand account of this visit affords the playwright a pithy segue into Georgia’s discussion of her relationship to Stieglitz: “He was my mentor. Then, my lover. Eventually, my husband.”\(^{274}\)

The purpose of my version of this event is to illustrate the young painter’s artistic naïveté as well as introduce the volatile personality of Alfred Stieglitz. Upon entering the space, O’Keeffe observes:

An empty room – green burlap walls – a pot-bellied stove – a large brass Bowl. For burnt offerings? We fill the tiny space. These must be the Rodin watercolors – Hmmm, they’re beautiful, but simple –

[EUGENE:] You’ve got to admit – they’re rubbish.
[GEORGIA:] They are just a lot of scribbles.

[ANITA:] Well, but they’re rather pretty –

[GEORGIA:] They don’t make any sense at all.

[ANITA:] Sound of a door, we swing around –

Astonished, Georgia sees:

Stieglitz! Shock of black hair, bushy gray moustache, black eyes ablaze behind small gold frames – So that’s what a Jew looks like?! – We’ve heard he’s a great talker, so the boys decide to wind him up! It doesn’t take much – Still carrying a dripping photographic plate, Stieglitz single-handedly parries their attack on the scribbles.

What follows is a bombastic tirade by the art impresario that begins, “You Americans have a vote, and therefore you think you must have an opinion,” continues with his having been “damned for practically every forward move I’ve ever made. And I knew in advance that I’d be damned!,” and finishes with a melodramatic flourish: “Lifeblood is the price!” In my case, the use of Stieglitz’s own words furthers character and situation as well as contrasts his sophistication with O’Keeffe’s innocence. Hence, the use of genuine quotations furthers my intent.

Not every biographical dramatist, however, needs to adhere to historical veracity in telling a tale or iterate the exact words of her subject. Indeed, when she chooses to write original dialogue, Ouwehand displays a gift for language. Her Georgia gets to deliver the last words on the author’s chosen topic in a lovely way:

I’ve been called the finest woman artist America has produced. I think I’m one of its finest artists, period. Art has no gender. And though I seem to tread this path alone – there are a thousand shadows on this path, of those who’ve walked before me. Not just Mary and Romaine, Harriet, Dat-So, and Anna Mary, but many, many more.

Then, the playwright has the other characters reciting name after name of other women painters, until her O’Keeffe offers this summation:
So very many, before, and since. There are shadows in the grasses of those who’ve walked before me and made the path a little wider, a little clearer – filling a space in a beautiful way. 

The scope of this play touches upon the painter’s childhood briefly but mainly considers her life from ages thirty to forty-something – the early Stieglitz years. Nonetheless, the theme of this work is not so much about O’Keeffe as it is about all women artists and their journeys. A brief, but satisfying, visit with six female painters, The Studio is successful in achieving its goal: educating audiences about the many female artists both before and after O’Keeffe, but it has little to impart concerning Georgia O’Keeffe or her legacy to future generations beyond reminding us of her success and fame.

1.5c Lucinda McDermott’s O’Keeffe!

An examination of Lucinda McDermott’s O’Keeffe!, written in 1991 and revised in 1995, affords an opportunity to consider the first important dramatic work about the painter. When I spoke to O’Keeffe’s print photographer, Malcolm Varon, he suggested McDermott’s play could guide mine: “Look at the work. Talk about the work. Lucinda McDermott did. The life isn’t important.” Given that this is the thrust of McDermott’s play, it seemed counter-productive to revisit this previously-explored terrain. Nonetheless, as an acquaintance of O’Keeffe’s and an authority on aspects of her life, Varon’s advice deserves consideration.

There is no doubt that work was a fulcrum and constant in O’Keeffe’s life. “I am so sure that Work is the thing in life”, she advised her Taos friend, Dorothy Brett. O’Keeffe considers “it…all that is, really,” and, in another instance, insists it is “good for the soul to use the hands.” To Eisler, “work…was O’Keeffe’s salvation.” O’Keeffe says as much:

One works I suppose because it is the most interesting thing one knows to do. The days one works are the best days…The painting is like a thread that runs through all the reasons for all the other things that make one’s life.

More than being a separate act apart from the self, to O’Keeffe, Work is the Self: “Art is a wicked thing. It is what we are.”
Happily, although the bulk of O’Keeffe!’s focus is on the artist in relation to her work, its author touches on her personal life as well. Unlike the previous scripts, and despite its brevity, (only thirty-four pages in length), McDermott has crafted a two act play. In it, one actress portrays all the roles: O’Keeffe, Stieglitz, Georgia’s sister, Claudia, and a classmate at Columbia Teachers’ College. Once again, there is no dialogue and, like the other two, it is a memory play. Its premise is that a deceased O’Keeffe has willed herself into a public forum to find clarity and the answer to the question: who was responsible for her being who she was, [and] she attempts this discovery by re-living scenes from her life that begin in 1915.\(^{285}\)

Examining the lengthiest period of her life thus far, a series of flashbacks are employed to permit O’Keeffe to relive experiences from 1915 until, approximately, 1949. McDermott has undertaken an impressive amount of research that includes Lisle’s biography, Anita Pollitzer’s memoir, as well as Perry Miller Adato’s excellent documentary. In addition, she made overtures to the people at The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation, (Malcolm Varon being one of them), and it is possible they proffered private information.\(^{286}\)

Early in the play, McDermott’s O’Keeffe decides to use only charcoal and paper as a method to re-connect to her inner art: “Like learning to walk again. But they are going to be my steps. Mine. Me! And it was! Or was it Stieglitz?”\(^{287}\), effectively introducing her theme and identifying the source of O’Keeffe’s art.\(^{287}\) McDermott’s device of allowing O’Keeffe to speak from beyond the grave to a contemporary audience provides an opportunity for the artist to meta-theatrically comment on her own life.

However, despite focusing upon the working artist, towards the end of her play, McDermott shifts her point of concentration and devotes six pages to the emotional tumult provoked by Stieglitz’s infidelity with Dorothy Norman and O’Keeffe’s public failure with the Radio City Music Hall project. This failure, Stieglitz’s affair and nude photographs of Norman, were catalysts for O’Keeffe’s first major nervous breakdown.\(^{288}\)
Initially, McDermott’s discussion of Norman is hands-off: “I’m sorry to say Alfred was very, very foolish with her – But I’m not going to go into that because it doesn’t matter any more.” The elderly O’Keeffe said as much regarding the Norman-Stieglitz liaison: “I don’t really know what happened, [but] I feel he was very foolish about her.” McDermott’s O’Keeffe remains unbowed by these events:

I’ve chosen not to be destroyed by the things I can’t control. There is a curious triumphant feeling to seeing life as black – and marching onward – right through your fear.

Brave words and akin to O’Keeffe’s resolve to “never let it [fear] stop me. Never!” However, Stieglitz is intent upon dampening her enthusiasm for The Radio City Music Hall project:

…Oh, Alfred, don’t, please don’t. Don’t start. Come on now! Be happy for me! No matter what you say I’m going to do it – so you might as well make it easy for both of us.

Despite Alfred’s carping, McDermott’s O’Keeffe,

…went ahead with it, but I could feel him, in his black cape, like a hungry black crow, sitting on a fence, waiting, ready to pounce at the first sight of weakness.

All the time she realized that Dorothy Norman, who she described as the “A beautiful, young, talentless, moral-less, parasitic [woman]”, was with Stieglitz and, as if to add insult to injury, “he started photographing her.” In my play, my Georgia’s anger yields to anguish at the injustice of it:

But, Alfred?! – exhibiting photographs of her? In our Gallery. In front of all our colleagues. And the critics?! She’s no artist! I had to earn that kind of notoriety! I paid for your love, stroke by stroke.

When the Music Hall project fails, McDermott’s perplexed O’Keeffe recounts:

Numbness. Noise. Noises – bother me. I can’t stop crying and I don’t want to talk – see anyone… Don’t want to be near him – There is something I have to – Is it me or is it – I just want to sleep. They take me to doctors and – doctors. Mid-life crisis says one. Cancer says another…tests – hospitals – psychiatrists – I don’t need analysis! I need time. And rest.
From an acting viewpoint, McDermott’s version of O’Keeffe’s descent into madness is eminently playable. It is also historically accurate although the playwright omits her phobia of water, something I chose to include. My own approach to O’Keeffe’s descent into madness is more abstract than McDermott’s and, I believe, more artful. I chose to explore the artist’s shattered perceptions and use them as a linchpin, that, when pulled, spins her into madness. She visits the unpainted Powder Room:

I’m inside a big white box, anticipating its visions.
There, for floating camellias. There, for skyline.
All around for stars and sky. And, there, a ghostlike tower, tilting closer – leaning towards me – It’s not the tower moving – it’s the canvas coming unglued!
The walls – not properly primed.
Touching spongy wetness – Who’s been watering the walls?!
Flowers, oozing – petals, peeling: “He loves her. He loves me not.”
Blossoms, pressing me under; buildings, pushing me down.
I’m a water lily slipping through the waves.
Past
“...Fishes
With their gold, red eyes, and green-pure gleam, and under-gold…”
I think I can hear mermaids singing:
Of treasure, buried deep. Of cooling jade and glowing pearl.
Mermaids breathe beneath the waves. Don’t wake me. Let me drown.297

The water imagery reflects O’Keeffe’s water phobia while the reference to T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” emphasizes the sense of drowning associated with her breakdown: “I have heard the mermaids singing each to each” and “Till human voices wake us and we drown.”298

Both McDermott and I have done our research; however, it has propelled us to create O’Keeffes using very different expressions of language, behavior, and emotions. Nonetheless, both of our explorations are reasonable, with one exception: toward the end of McDermott’s play, she introduces her version of one aspect of O’Keeffe’s emotional deprivation that strikes a false note. Speaking to Stieglitz about her desire for children, O’Keeffe reminds him:

Remember when we went to see Macbeth? Remember I cried when she said:
I have given suck, and know
How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.
I know that feeling. I have killed my babies because I have killed my desire for
them. I did it for the art.\textsuperscript{299}

McDermott’s focus on childbirth has a valid historical basis, but it is a stretch to insert
“Lady Macbeth” into a life of Georgia O’Keeffe.\textsuperscript{300}

A more appropriate reference would have been to \textit{Faust}, a play that several biographers
have cited as favorite play of Stieglitz’s and one that he and O’Keeffe enjoyed both
seeing and reading.\textsuperscript{301} In my play, I reference \textit{Faust} in association with Georgia’s desire
for children:

I should’ve been born a fish…
You’re having your fishes, Mrs. Norman. Baby after baby. And my husband,
the biggest baby of all.
I was sure I’d have a little one some time – that I would die if I couldn’t have a
child of my own. Then, later, I asked Alfred, but –

[STIEGLITZ:] Georgia, you’re just a kid yourself!

So now we’re playing \textit{Faust}: “I’m Eternal Empty”; she’s “Eternal-Feminine.”\textsuperscript{302}

A younger O’Keeffe had pined for a child of her own, but it was Stieglitz’s fear of
childbirth, based upon the loss of his beloved sister, Flora, during it, and the post-partum
depression and subsequent insanity of his daughter, Kitty, that ended O’Keeffe’s hopes
of bearing his child.\textsuperscript{303} Hence, McDermott is historically accurate but artistically askew.

Her play moves briskly through her episodes of artistic self-discovery, her early days at
The Art Students’ League and her first confrontation with Stieglitz, progressing to
Charlottesville, and her discovery of Dow’s exercises through Alon Bement and learning
to make “visual music” and to “fill a space in a beautiful way.”\textsuperscript{304} We meet the young
teacher in Texas, and the more-mature student who befriends Anita Pollitzer in New
York.\textsuperscript{305} She ends Act One with O’Keeffe’s impetuous and impromptu visit to New
York in 1916 and makes mention of their jaunt to Coney Island.\textsuperscript{306} These episodes
receive attention in my play as well, although my Act One ends with a determined
O’Keeffe permanently leaving Texas for a career and life in New York with Stieglitz.
Because her life changed dramatically once she yoked herself to the art impresario, I
found it a perfect act break. In keeping with my theme, my next act examines their life
together with its rewards and sacrifices.

In contrast, O’Keeffe’s second act briefly explores the dynamic between Georgia and
Alfred before it moves swiftly to the Radio City Music Hall debacle. Prior to the artist’s
breakdown, McDermott’s uses O’Keeffe’s words, with a significant alteration. In 1939,
Georgia O’Keeffe wrote:

Still, in a way, nobody sees a flower really. It’s so small. We haven’t time. And
to see takes time like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint the flower
exactly as I see it no one would see what I see because I would paint it small like
the flower is small. So I said to myself – I'll paint what I see – what the flower is
to me but I’ll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at
it.\(^\text{307}\)

McDermott takes these words and alters the fourth line as follows:

Still, in a way, nobody sees a flower really. It’s so small. We haven’t time. And
to see the special gift in a flower takes time. Like to see the special gift in a child
takes time.\(^\text{308}\)

Because the matter of children is given prominence in McDermott’s exploration, the
highlighted sentence she adds serves the theme. According to Robinson, Stieglitz had
assured Georgia she would be unable to paint “if she was puttering around with
babies.”\(^\text{309}\) In effect, her paintings became her children, hence, the inclusion of a
mention of “a child” is not inappropriate in a paragraph about her work, thus,
McDermott has altered the historic truth to serve the artistic whole.

McDermott’s work and mine share many similarities, although mine continues past
Stieglitz’s death to explore the solitary O’Keeffe at Abiquiu as an aging, blind painter.
Beyond touching on similar key events in O’Keeffe’s life, McDermott’s play has a
different thematic focus to mine. McDermott is not concerned with the painter’s
dualities, inconsistencies, or emotional upheavals, she is interested in answering the
main question about qualities of partnership and art: “Mine…Or was it Stieglitz?”
Don’t you see, when you share a life with someone, there is this thing that no one else can know because no one else can see – An overlapping of each other, edge over edge, seamless, so you can’t tell where one starts and the other ends – Do you know? But – There’s an entity. Separate from the two of you, that the two of you must take very good care of it, and respect. Because sometimes it is as soft as a Lake George cloud, as fiery as an Abiquiu sunset, or as vicious as both of your fears rolled into one. It is the very best and the very worst of you. It is the sum of the two. It’s me and it’s him. \[310\]

My play finishes very differently:

…I used to roam the desert – no hat, no gloves, no glasses – feeling and seeing my world exactly as it was and then making my sensations into a work of art. Now? I sit – in a sun that burns through to my bones – and watch the shapes and colors group and re-group in my head. In there, I’m still painting. [She listens a moment] Nothing. Just a breeze through the pinon trees that tells me about weather and things. The pinons assure me the sky is still \textit{BLUE}. And that “That \textit{BLUE} will live forever.”\[311\]

1.5d Julian Barry’s \textit{A Marriage: Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz}

The same year \textit{A Conversation With Georgia O’Keeffe} premiered, Julian Barry’s telefilm, \textit{A Marriage: Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz} was screened. If McDermott’s approach is a simple, cleanly-executed exploration, Barry’s could be subtitled “the official, celebrated story”. Enhanced by big-name stars portraying Georgia and Alfred, (a talented, but miscast, Jane Alexander and a wonderful Christopher Plummer), \textit{A Marriage} is an interesting example of television’s predilection for reductionism. Relationships are explained through economically dramatized distortions of historical facts seemingly justified by television’s time constraints.

The piece begins, promisingly enough, with the young artist mistakenly credited as “Virginia” O’Keeffe demanding Stieglitz take down her drawings, in much the same way as a number of biographies recount.\[312\] However, the very next scene is pure fiction. In it, Stieglitz’s current wife, Emmeline, is shown cooking and serving dinner to O’Keeffe, who is not only dining with them but also with their daughter, Kitty. This scenario is highly improbable as Emmy was a beer-heiress who preferred “society and possessions” and left the domestic duties to the servants. Moreover, in actuality, Kitty
had purposefully refused to meet with O’Keeffe even after her father and O’Keeffe had become husband and wife.\textsuperscript{313} In addition, it was Stieglitz’s photography session with O’Keeffe in the family home that became the catalyst for his separation.\textsuperscript{314} Nonetheless, in this tele-play, O’Keeffe is in their home, dining not only with Stieglitz and Emmeline, but also their daughter. What is clever is the way Barry uses this dinner table interaction to reveal Emmy’s resentment of Stieglitz and his artists as well as the photographer’s exultation that he had found “a woman on paper!” In this same scene, Emmy snidely derides O’Keeffe: “if a woman your age hasn’t found a husband,” conveniently foreshadowing that the “husband” O’Keeffe would eventually find would be Emmy’s.\textsuperscript{315}

The next scene jump-cuts to a German restaurant: another inaccuracy considering Stieglitz was married to a woman of German descent who encouraged her cook to prepare heavy, middle-European meals at home; thus, he rarely frequented German-style establishments. However, this is how Barry expediently introduces Stieglitz’s preferences for German culture. The inaccuracies continue when Barry has Stieglitz’s daughter, Kitty, accompanied by her niece, Elizabeth, and Paul Strand’s wife, Rebecca, (“Beck”), a woman who had not met or married Paul until several years later, visiting Stieglitz at this same restaurant where all the artists are dining. Stieglitz’s companions are praising O’Keeffe’s work, whereas, according to O’Keeffe, the men “couldn’t take a woman artist seriously.” Beck comments that it is a “rare occurrence” that a woman is allowed to join the sanctum sanctorum with the men.\textsuperscript{316} When she and Kitty are refused a place at the table, an irate O’Keeffe moves to leave as well unless the other women are permitted to join the meal. This inappropriate gesture of sisterhood was inconsistent with O’Keeffe’s character: not only did she prefer to be the only woman at a gathering, she often remarked that “the only people who ever helped me were men.”\textsuperscript{317}

Thus far, although the tele-film is entertaining, it has little to do with O’Keeffe’s life, its lessons, or its journey. Happily, in Scene Four, the writer’s economy of style comes into its own. Using only three lines of dialogue, Barry skillfully has Stieglitz baiting O’Keeffe by using her own ambition to manipulate her:
[STIEGLITZ:] What do you want to do?

[GEORGIA:] What I’m doing.

[STIEGLITZ:] I was thinking of a show of your own, but if you’re not interested in being an artist.\footnote{318}

I adopt a similar strategy when I have Stieglitz “making an offer she couldn’t refuse”:

[STIEGLITZ:] What would you like to do more than anything? To teach?

[GEORGIA:] I would like a year to paint.

[STIEGLITZ:] I will see that you get it.\footnote{319}

In my version, Stieglitz also baits the painter with “to teach?” knowing full well that she is a teacher only because she has no means of becoming a full-time artist. What I admire in Barry’s dialogue is that he has a self-protective Georgia rebuffing Stieglitz’s prying, and Stieglitz, seeing through the defense, mocks her with it.

Although televised material does not have traditional theatrical act breaks, with a running time of 1 hour and 27 minutes, Barry’s tele-film can be considered the equivalent of a full-length play. His story employs forty-one separate scenes and takes full advantage of television’s capacity to portray exterior and interior scenes. For example, Barry uses three scenes with O’Keeffe and Stieglitz rowing on Lake George, to map the evolution of their relationship.

In the first lake scene, Scene Ten, Stieglitz is manning the oars; in Scene Twenty, which immediately follows Stieglitz’s first heart attack, the writer has Georgia rowing, ingeniously and wordlessly telling the viewer that she is now at the helm of their marriage. By Scene Thirty-four, both Stieglitz and O’Keeffe have recovered sufficiently (he, from his heart spasms; she from her indignation over the rumors concerning Stieglitz’s infidelity with Dorothy Norman) to be together, and for the husband, again, to be in control of the rowboat and of the marriage.
In the last lake scene O’Keeffe, who has recently returned from New Mexico, is interrogated:

[STIEGLITZ:] Who did you sleep with?

[GEORGIA:] Tony, Cal, Rebecca, very romantic. (A pause, then:) There was a campfire and marshmallows.

The context of this discussion of O’Keeffe’s affairs is Stieglitz’s own philandering. In an earlier scene, O’Keeffe remarks that “Your niece and daughter resemble each other,” suggesting the possibility that his niece, Elizabeth, was more closely related to her uncle than was officially acknowledged. Stieglitz’s possible paternity of Elizabeth, as well as O’Keeffe’s actual affairs with Tony Luhan (Mabel Dodge’s Indian husband), Cal (a character of Barry’s creation representing the many cowhands who attracted O’Keeffe during her times in New Mexico), and Beck Strand (who, along with Mabel Dodge, had been O’Keeffe’s lover during her initial visit to Taos, New Mexico) are only alluded to in Barry’s script. Again, the long arm of the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation is apparent in the film’s acknowledgement of its assistance together with O’Keeffe’s friends and colleagues. In return for information supplied by O’Keeffe’s intimates, it is conceivable that a restrictive code of decorum was imposed upon Barry’s script.

Perhaps the greatest curiosity is Barry’s glossing over of an event ripe for dramatic exploration, O’Keeffe’s breakdown. An exhausted O’Keeffe returns from another difficult day painting the Powder Room at Radio City Music Hall. Looking for an aspirin, she discovers Stieglitz’s nude photographs of Dorothy Norman.

[GEORGIA:] When did you pose for these?

[DOROTHY:] When you were in Arizona.

A pained O’Keeffe accuses Alfred: “You posed her the way you posed me.” Jump cut to Scene Thirty-nine, a drawn O’Keeffe is “resting” in a hospital. Alfred arrives with flowers. She flees. Here Barry’s visual economy cheats the viewer of a deeper understanding of two multi-layered personalities. Ironically, the event is historically accurate; however, it is artistically anemic.
Because my own work is created for theatre, in contrast, I deal with this event more expansively. Recovering from her breakdown, my Georgia attempts to unravel the knots of their mutual dependence with the assistance of her psychiatrist, Dr. Janusch, to whom she relates a dream:

There’s this pause between light and dark, then, clear as the visions I see in the crystal ball he gave me: I’m a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I’m laid out in a Model A Ford which has no roof – this black shape away somewhere in some desert place. There’s a phrase: “indignant desert birds.” Black crows are swooping down on me from a great height and picking my flesh clean, like those sky burials in India. They put them on a mountain, (the person that died), and the birds eat the flesh ‘til there’s no one left and the spirit is free. It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you so I must be getting better. I don’t want to think about that; I want to think about painting again. But I don’t want to talk about painting – words and I are not friends – too many words mean too few paintings. I used to beg – “I can’t work with these visitors. Their words cast shadows on my shapes.” (Like surface seaweed shrouds the bottom of the sea.) No, I won’t think about water – and I can’t talk about him.

The speech reveals O’Keeffe’s preference for visual symbols – blackness, crows, the desert, death, her distrust of language, her disquiet about water, as well as her dismay at her lack of productivity. Finally, her efforts toward self-control culminate in a refusal to discuss her husband. The poetry of the language allows me to communicate her sophisticated visual appreciation, the situation she is in, that underlines the theme of paying a high price for fame, and to reveal a nature at odds with itself.

However, Barry’s piece is made-for-television; because he understands that the screen is chiefly a visual medium, some of his best scenes are wordless exchanges. In Scene Eight, Stieglitz arrives at the door to O’Keeffe’s studio, unannounced:

[ALFRED:] I’ve left my wife and have nowhere else to go.  
(He enters)  
(She is painting)  
(She covers the canvas, takes off his cape, hangs it, wordlessly)  
(She looks at him, starts to undress herself, moves to him)

[ALFRED:] Oh, I love you!  
(They kiss)
This is one of the most effective moments in A Marriage which is at its best when depicting wordless, visual exchanges or brief dialogues. Although the scene is an inaccurate depiction of the beginning of their relationship, Barry and his actors convey the intimacies of Stieglitz and O’Keeffe beautifully. Unfortunately, these moments are all too few, and when Barry attempts to encapsulate manifold events from various times into a simplistic whole, the work falls short. Perhaps it only disappoints those aware of the extraordinary permutations of O’Keeffe’s story; however, I suspect a fuller, more accurate rendering of the artist’s life, in cinematic terms, could prove more affecting than Barry’s A Marriage.

1.5e John Murrell’s The Faraway Nearby

Whereas the previous dramatizations focus primarily on O’Keeffe’s early years and her middle period with Stieglitz, Canada’s John Murrell and Australia’s Jill Shearer both explore O’Keeffe’s twilight years in their respective plays. Murrell’s The Faraway Nearby, first produced in 1994, is divided into three parts and is fifty-nine pages in length. There are two characters, the aging artist, O’Keeffe (“in her sixties through nineties”) and the young sculptor, Juan Hamilton (“in his twenties and thirties.”) Of all the scripts thus far, his is the most skillful, drawing a strong portrait of the aging O’Keeffe in an insular world, and the impact of the itinerant Juan Hamilton, on this isolation. Original in its form, creative in its exploration of the developing dynamic between the elder O’Keeffe and the considerably younger Hamilton, it is a kind of love story.

In Part One, O’Keeffe is, as the subtitle suggests “Alone”. Spanning a period from 1948 to 1973, Stieglitz is dead, and O’Keeffe is embracing her romance with The Faraway, both in her home at Abiquiu and at her favorite New Mexican landscape, The Black Place.
Part Two (1973 to 1984) explores the first meeting of Hamilton and O’Keeffe, the elder artists initial distrust, and their evolution to sharing a mutual dependency and camaraderie. By subtitling it “Days With Juan” (echoing the name of a work O’Keeffe had painted after an outing with Hamilton to The Washington Monument, “A Day With Juan”) the writer presages how important the young man will become to the elder O’Keeffe. That he was important, there can be no doubt: the ultra-private painter rarely named her artwork after friends.328

Part Three, covering the two years prior to the painter’s death (1984-1986) is also subtitled “Alone.” Their relationship has shifted yet again; Juan now has a wife, Anna Marie, someone who O’Keeffe refuses to acknowledge. Meanwhile, O’Keeffe’s world has become more and more internalized. She can no longer explore her beloved country except in her mind’s eye, and she is only consciously present a part of the time. This time, “Alone” refers to her final transition, the one that can only be undertaken on one’s own, the journey from life to death.

Each of the Three Parts has four scenes that follow the same blueprint: Scene One is “Afternoon at Home;” Scene Two is “Night at Home;” Scene Three is “Morning at Home,” and Scene Four is “Noon at The Black Place”. Murrell uses the play’s structural symmetry to explore the relationship of Georgia O’Keeffe in decline contrasted with an ascending Juan Hamilton. By examining the variations played out within each of the “Afternoon”, “Night”, “Morning”, and “Noon” scenes, each character’s arc and the play’s journey are revealed.

Apart from its marvelously symmetrical structure, Murrell has chosen recurrent themes and imagery: the challenging “Red” of her hills, the seductive danger of the Jimson weed, the passion of the singing, self-flagellating Penitentes on their processionals, the balancing of independence and partnership, the tension between art and life, as well as the challenge of a timely release to death. The way these and other repetitions are used further illustrates changes within the characters.

I was fascinated by Murrell’s play because it focuses on an aspect of O’Keeffe’s life only briefly touched upon in my work. At one point soon after the completion of the
Hogrefe biography, I had considered making Juan Hamilton a main character in my work, but I chose to continue my experimentation with my “one woman opus,” reasoning that my exploration had just commenced and should be permitted to grow in its own time and in its own way.\textsuperscript{329} Then, as my themes began to manifest, the need for Hamilton receded. Indeed, in my 2004 play, he is no more than a postscript.\textsuperscript{330}

Murrell’s play, in contrast, considers a fiercely-independent woman who must forge a partnership as her powers fail, and it is grounded in solid research. Even before Hamilton actually appears, in the first scene, O’Keeffe is already aware of his presence: “I saw a boy out here, a while back, looked a lot like my old man. Like my old man must’ve looked before I ever met him.”\textsuperscript{331} This line suggests that Hogrefe’s biography was a probable source for Murrell’s play. Jeffrey Hogrefe remarks upon the physical similarities between the young Stieglitz and the young Hamilton and even publishes photographs of the two men when each was in his twenties to reinforce their resemblance.\textsuperscript{332} Hogrefe became close to Hamilton while researching his book on O’Keeffe, and as Hamilton is portrayed sympathetically in \textit{The Faraway Nearby} it is conceivable that Hogrefe’s portrayal of him has influenced Murrell’s.\textsuperscript{333}

Murrell begins his play with the memorable 1948 Philippe Halsman photographic image of O’Keeffe, wearing a black gaucho-type hat to shield her from the sun, sitting on the steps of her patio, and holding a steer’s skull:

\begin{quote}
Take the damned thing. Take it quick. I don’t know why I ever said “Yes” to you in the first place, but I did say “Yes”, so do the merciful thing at least and snap it quick…I know what you’re thinking: once in a while a photograph turns out to be art. Maybe. In certain hands. But that is not because it’s “life like”. That is not life either, that is art.\textsuperscript{334}
\end{quote}

Continuing to admonish the photographer, O’Keeffe refuses to discuss her past and present life:

\begin{quote}
You are like all these people who think, “If only I knew more about her, about her education, about her family, then I’d understand her painting better. If only I had a few more details of her diet, her favorite tunes, her dogs, her love life, her bathroom fixtures.” Stupid people.\textsuperscript{335}
\end{quote}
Deftly, Murrell establishes her orneriness, penchant for privacy, and introduces a central O’Keeffe theme: the tension between life and art. The device he uses, aptly enough considering her relationship with Stieglitz, is photography.

This opening scene is echoed in Part Three, Scene Three, but now O’Keeffe’s mind has wandered. She imagines there is a photographer present and believes it her duty to pose although she feels impelled to chastise the imagined source of her discomfort:

Take the damned thing. You’re just wasting your time, and mine, trying to make it “life like”. It’s not life; it’s a mockery of life. And I want people to be able to see that, no matter how stupid they are.\textsuperscript{336}

O’Keeffe’s words ambiguously suggest either that the imagined photographer’s efforts at art are a “mockery” or, perhaps, it is her own, severely limited, attempts at life.

My O’Keeffe also mocks her attempts at life by mocking her inability to create art. After her nervous collapse, she wryly observes to the Doctor: “I’m here because I want to paint. And function. And I guess I’m not doing either too well, am I?”\textsuperscript{337} My Georgia, although weakened, is younger than Murrell’s protagonist, and she still has her eyesight. Therefore, her “mockery” is less pronounced, and her despair is less severe. As I have her note soon after her recuperation from her breakdown, “I’m forty-six years. There’s almost no time left for hope.”\textsuperscript{338} Yet, “hope” is something my O’Keeffe still possesses.

Early on in Part One of \textit{The Faraway Nearby}, the painter’s quest for artistic exactitude becomes another thread in this play. The photographer leaves, and an alone O’Keeffe rails at her terrain and the challenge it presents:

..red, that red, this red. You, Red, although I have tried for a quarter of a century now, I have never gotten you right, have I? But I will. You’re tricky. You’re fast. You only stay for a moment, this time of year, this exact time of day. And only here...I will get you right. I can live until then.\textsuperscript{339}
Murrell imparts her passion for color, determination to achieve a true artistic expression, and doggedness to live long enough to achieve her goal, to capture the desert’s “Red”, precisely, in paint; a goal that, in Part One, seems achievable.

There is only a brief reference to “Red” in Part Two when the painter’s eyesight is failing and an enraptured Hamilton reminds her of the time he helped her paint and suggested she name the painting “Red”: “And you got that look on your face, like a seven-year-old defying her first grade art teacher. “Black.” You said. “Black.” Her is still enthralled by the aging painter.

By Part Three, however, Hamilton is distancing himself from the artist, and O’Keeffe is facing the inevitable: “Red. Red. Red all around. I still haven’t gotten you. And so I never will. I won’t try again.” Her emotional shifts in relation to her pursuit of “Red” shows the character arcing from defiance to despondency.

O’Keeffe’s refusal to name her painting “Red” in favor of “Black”, introduces another theme. The Black Place is a powerful recurring. Image that Murrell includes as the locale for Scene Four, in each of the three parts of his play. Whereas in Part One, Scene One, an at-home O’Keeffe has gotten rid of her visitors and exults that she “…is so glad to be. From now on. Alone. I am glad. I am proud.” By Part One, Scene Four, in The Black Place, her passion for her solitude flags:

I am as famous as God or death, and just as alone, and I earned that on purpose, by keeping my life clean of people and hobbies and biographies and appointments. And people. Keeping especially The Black Place, inside me empty… Except I’m not proud. Not any more today… And lonely. I’ll say this – I’ll say it in a whisper softer than a jimson weed offering herself to you in the blur of the moonlight: “I am not glad. Alone. I’ve come to the end of that pride in myself. I am only alone. I am no longer glad.”

In Part Two, Scene Four, O’Keeffe explains the significance of The Black Place:

The Black Place is where you come to set yourself a test. Can you be that alone? Can you be there with only your insides for company? Your insides which take you more by surprise, scare you more, than they do anybody else. Every person has to set herself, himself that test. I have passed it with flying colors. I have passed it again and again.
In Part Three, Scene Four, “Noon at The Black Place”, in her last observation at the end of the play, a blind, almost-deaf O’Keeffe voices wonder as well as frustration that even her impending death fails to silence the pulsing insistence of her art:

…I am here. No matter where they take me. And the old eye. The huge and beautiful and young old eye is still working somehow. It smells and hears and tastes and penetrates the shape, the simple terminal light-giving life-changing beautiful hard shape of The Black Place at last. I see it with my new insides. And that shape goes like this. (She raises the pad of paper, takes up the charcoal pencil, and draws a strong clean line.)

To see “with her new insides” is a gift of hope for someone who has lost her external sight. Murrell’s Black Place provides O’Keeffe with a challenge to her living and an embrace for her dying.

Blackness is a recurring trope throughout my play: “black crows”, “a corpse dressed in black”, “a black shape away somewhere in some desert place;” however, my black does not represent death as much as it does a raging against the dying of the light. As a maverick artist, her resistance to using “color ‘til it’s impossible to do what I want to do in black and white” is a method she uses to express life, not death. “Red,” on the other hand, is not an image in A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe. As has been noted, my color of choice is “Blue.”

Murrell relies upon more than imagery to chart the O’Keefe and Hamilton relationship; through their interactions, the characters reveal themselves to the audience and each other. As the partnership progresses, its tone shifts: initial stiffness evolves to banter, and uncertainty yields to trust. Prior to Juan’s arrival in Part Two, O’Keeffe reveals her aching loneliness: “I am only alone. I am no longer glad,” confessing her yearning for human contact.

In Part Two, Scene One, O’Keeffe is playing a recording of Pablos Casals interpreting the Bach “Sarabande” when she is disturbed by Hamilton:

[GEORgia:] Who are you? Who is that?
Deftly, the playwright shows us how a musically aware Hamilton disarms a defensive O’Keeffe and we soon learn they share an artistic sensibility. The painter accuses Hamilton of being just another celebrity seeker with little knowledge of her work. He disagrees: “That’s where you’re wrong. If I close my eyes right now I can see half a dozen of your paintings clear as anything....” Not only does Hamilton appreciate her work; they share the same attraction to the mystery and danger of the desert.

By Part Two, Scene Two, Hamilton has progressed from an odd-job man to a secretary/confidante. They banter about funerals and death. O’Keeffe wants someone to take “my ashes out and sift them into The Faraway, out there.” Juan assures her, “I’ll see to it,” presaging his domination of both the life and death of the artist.

The pivotal moment in their relationship occurs exactly in the middle of the play, Part Two, Scene Three. Having let him into her world, O’Keeffe has developed a possessive jealousy of Juan, the potter. He prefers to work on his pots rather than dance attendance on an aging, no longer productive artist. Juan attempts to reason with her:

[JUAN:] I’m into this one piece of my own right now. Something just for me...This is something of my own...Can’t you let me have that much?...

[GEORGIA:] You didn’t always talk to me like I’m seven years old, did you? Like a willful, ignored child, she punishes Hamilton by rescinding the friendship she proffered. Proudly, Juan insists upon packing his things and leaving. Shrewdly, Georgia, relents: “Don’t be stupid...don’t be crazy. I was just trying to get your attention.” At issue is not that Hamilton likes her less; it is that he has grown to love something in her that he fears she can no longer embody: “a kind of freedom, and a search, and a true craziness I didn’t even know was on the menu, before you.” The real Juan Hamilton admits as much in Adato’s documentary about the painter.
Contrary to the Georgia O’Keeffe which I had in my fantasy imagination, she’s one of the most lively, energetic human beings I have ever met, and, I’m sure, I will ever meet. Sometimes I thank God.\textsuperscript{356}

In \textit{The Faraway Nearby} Hamilton’s problem is that O’Keeffe has ceased to be the remarkable person and artist he came to work for in Part Two, Scene One; now, she is “just a lonely, confused, goddamn-difficult old woman,” and her confusion has confused Juan, too.\textsuperscript{357} O’Keeffe senses it:

\begin{quote}
You’re moving…out of the search. Back into the other the ordinary world with all the rest of them. God, oh God, you came for a visit, and then you went away again so quickly.\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

Despite their articulated fears in the previous scene, by Scene Four of Part Two, Hamilton and O’Keeffe are attempting a semblance of normalcy by heading off for a picnic at The Black Place. They buoyantly sing together until an astonished O’Keeffe breaks off her singing, noting that the waterfall, which had roared though The Black Place when she first moved to New Mexico – and then, had, mysteriously, disappeared – has returned. Unmindful of her footing, Georgia slips into a pool formed at the base of the re-born torrent. There is no disguising Juan’s anguish and concern for his elderly charge, but the pool is only a shallow one, and Georgia, in contrast to Juan, is laughing so hard she cannot speak. He methodically removes her wet clothing and hangs them, piece by piece, on a nearby juniper bush. When she is left in only her undergarments, in an unexpected shift to the erotic, he removes his own clothing and joins her in the pool. They splash, laugh, and, then, are silent.\textsuperscript{359}

This scene could have gone in many directions, but Murrell knows life is never far from death for someone of O’Keeffe’s advanced years. Musing on the inevitability of her final test, a journey she must make without Hamilton, she shuts the door on unvoiced possibilities:

\begin{quote}
I won’t come to The Black Place again. This was a good, fun, last visit…The Black Place is where you come to set yourself a test…I only have to pass it once more, in my own mind, in my own time, and then I can go out and swirl through The Faraway forever. And you can’t help me pass that final one, can you, Juan? You can’t help me with that.\textsuperscript{360}
\end{quote}
Then, she makes Juan a gift, her gratitude:

It was lucky, though, for both of us, to have felt we had each other these several years. Feeling that we actually have each other puts the beauty into people’s days and nights.361

This is perhaps the last lucid observation Murrell’s O’Keeffe makes.

In A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe ninety-seven-year-old, blind Georgia recalls a time when

I used to stare straight at the sun. Pinwheels and starbursts and violent strange shapes imprinting themselves on my retina as if it were a photographic plate. I used to roam the desert – no hat, no gloves, no glasses – feeling and seeing my world exactly as it is and then making my sensations into a work of art. Now? I sit in a sun that burns through to my bones and watch the shapes and colors group and regroup in my head. In there, I’m still painting.362

Murrell’s characters observation is not that different: “I am here. No matter where they take me. And the old eye. The huge and beautiful and young old eye is still working somehow.”363

The Faraway Nearby is, first and foremost, a beautifully realized play about the later years of the painter. Murrell has crafted a thoughtful delineation of the frustration of aging and its accessory, a loss of powers, as well as the perplexity of devolving responsibility for one’s self to loving caregivers. Based upon solid research, Murrell has selected just the right balance of fact and fiction to create a new point of view about O’Keeffe’s life. By reading The Faraway Nearby, I understood, empathically, what Georgia O’Keeffe’s final years might have been like for her and her associates. It is this understanding, together with his skillful use of language, rich imagery, and how he structured his play, that strikes me as Murrell’s greatest achievement.

1.5f Jill Shearer’s Georgia

Jill Shearer’s Georgia was first produced at Brisbane’s La Boite Theatre in 1999.364 It, too, focuses on the dynamic between O’Keeffe and Hamilton; however, other characters, in the present or from the past, are also featured. They include Anita Pollitzer, Alfred
Stieglitz, a Navajo cook named Ruby, O’Keeffe’s last nurse, Marion, and Stieglitz’s lover, Dorothy Norman.

Although also concerned with the latter years of the artist’s life, rather than employing Murrell’s technique of paralleling O’Keeffe’s meticulously controlled approach to art through a richness of language and symmetry of form, Shearer embraces its antithesis. Her exploration of the chaotic and haphazard circuitry of O’Keeffe’s degenerating thought processes highlights the loss of control and dementia overwhelming the once fastidious painter. The play’s style, according to its director at La Boite, Sue Rider, is “…surreal…[away from] naturalism and into the world of Georgia’s memory…[with] the play as a journey towards death…”

A seventy-five page, full-length two act play, Shearer’s Georgia eschews order, preferring unconventional and unexpected shifts in time, rhythm, and mood, that reflect the emotional and mental state of Georgia herself.

Act One, Scene One, is set in 1946, on the evening before Stieglitz’s funeral. O’Keeffe is busy replacing the pink satin lining of his coffin with white linen when her longtime friend, Anita Pollitzer arrives to offer solace and refuge:

[ANITA:] Pick you up tomorrow, have you over to dinner. Eli, both of us, we’d love to have you…

(Georgia…shakes her head)

After, after it’s all over, are you going back? Down there?

[GEORGIA:] Of course.

(The lights go down)

Suddenly, Scene Two, jumps to Abiquiu, New Mexico, 1973, begging the question, “Was Scene One a real event or a Proustian “recherché” within the artist’s mind?” Juan Hamilton arrives. The real O’Keeffe was impressed by him:

I thought, “Well, he isn’t like the people I usually have here in Abiquiu who have spoken Spanish all their lives and have a little difficulty with English.” I said, “Well, you’ve gone to school, haven’t you?” He said, “Yes, I’ve had two years of graduate college work.” So I said, “Can you type?”…I found out in time that he was a potter.
Contrary to this, Shearer depicts him as semi-illiterate: “They didn’t loan me no pickup this morning.” Perhaps the playwright has fashioned a “Kowalski”-like Hamilton to juxtapose against a once meticulous O’Keeffe, thus, reinforcing the extent of her decline. In an attempt to insinuate himself into her life, he praises the red of one of her paintings precipitating O’Keeffe’s free-association to a time when her fellow student, Anita, owned a red coat, and they had shared a youthful correspondence. Juan pulls her back to 1973, until Georgia, commenting upon the eerie stillness of the land, senses “too many ghosts about,” initiating another mental leap, this time recalling her most significant ghost, Stieglitz. Juggling both realities and characters (the present Juan and the imagined Stieglitz) her responses are interchangeably appropriate for a conversation with either of the men, the living or the dead. Once again, bringing her back to the present, a grateful Hamilton, hired by O’Keeffe to crate her paintings, thanks “Mrs. Stieglitz”, which triggers more memories, this time of Anita’s first meeting with Stieglitz at his gallery, 291.

Going back to those days in her mind, the artist and her friend relive Pollitzer’s transgression of showing O’Keeffe’s charcoals to Stieglitz. Suddenly, Georgia is back and confronting Stieglitz for displaying her work without her permission. Even after the ghost of the photographer exits the painter remains transfixed in 1916, Stieglitz’s powers of attraction as strong for the elderly O’Keeffe as they were for the younger. In her reverie, the lights fade.

By Scene Three, another instability in O’Keefe’s world is introduced, the inexplicable efficacy of American Indian magic. While the semi-blind O’Keeffe is out walking at dusk in dangerous terrain, the Navajo, Ruby, and the itinerant, Juan, bond over tales of Indian rituals and a mutual concern for O’Keefe’s sight. Juan reveals that his fascination with O’Keeffe is part of a larger quest for a more “structured” existence, ironically, unaware that the painter’s “structure” is being blasted apart by the tyranny of her insistent memories. Georgia returns and comments on the purification ritual that the Navajo medicine men are performing upon an out-of-balance tribal member:

(The sound of the drums come up)
[GEORGIA:] They’ll be leading him in now.

[JUAN:] (wryly) The sick one?

[GEORGIA:] The betrayer. That’s what it’s often about
(In memory) Betrayal.
(The lights go down)\textsuperscript{377}

In this way, another of Shearer’s themes is introduced, the dynamic of trust and betrayal. The first betrayal is explored at the end of Scene Three. Anita Pollitzer has been hard at work on what O’Keeffe deems to be an untrue portrayal of herself in a biography of her life, “…a dream. Her dream of me.”\textsuperscript{378} To stop its publication is a betrayal of her friend; however, to permit it to go forward is a betrayal of herself. She decides to betray her friend.

If the first three scenes establish O’Keeffe’s peripatetic mental state, thereafter, the concept of betrayal assumes thematic importance. In Scene Four, Juan’s drunken allusion to her flower paintings evokes images of voluptuous blossoms for O’Keeffe that transmute to remembrances of sensuality and love.\textsuperscript{379} Through her seduction by Alfred, the man, and Stieglitz, the photographer, we are privy to her first betrayal:

[GEORGIA:] Showed me, made love to me with your camera.

[STIEGLITZ:] Explored every inch. [Gently] Such a neck.

[GEORGIA:] Called me your wondrous white…trapped…

[STIEGLITZ:] Swan.

[GEORGIA:] Gloated. Said I was yours, dependent. Under bolt and key at last. [Heartbreak] Then why…?\textsuperscript{380}

“Why”, indeed, did Stieglitz betray her by giving her nude images to the critics, the public, thus skewing their view of her work for always? In Act One, Scene Five, concerning this betrayal, Alfred, cruelly, provides the answer:

[GEORGIA:] …That first exhibition?
[STIEGLITZ:] What do you mean?

[GEORGIA:] It marked my work for –

[STIEGLITZ:] “Marked it?” You knew what I was doing. [Shouting] No one had ever heard of you!

[GEORGIA:] Don’t you think my work could have stood on its own?

[STIEGLITZ:] No, I do not! ...New York [is]...full of the best from all over America, all out there, hustling, hungry. No, Georgia! It would not have been enough.381

Even before this revelation, more betrayals by Stieglitz spill out, among them, his refusal to permit her to have a child of her own. He dismisses her needs with “…My swan wants a cygnet?”382 Soon, a further betrayal surfaces: he is bringing his soon-to-be lover, Dorothy Norman into their private world.383 In yet another breach of faith, Stieglitz subverts O’Keeffe’s decision to paint a mural for the Ladies Powder Room of Radio City Music Hall because she undertook the commission without his involvement. The parading of his new love, Dorothy Norman, the exhibition of his nude photographs of Norman, the lack of his public support for O’Keeffe’s efforts, result in the painter’s nervous breakdown.384 Commenting on her collapse, one word escapes her lips: “betrayed.”385

Nonetheless, O’Keeffe gives as good as she gets. Initially encouraging of Juan, (much as a hyper-critical parent indulges a child), when he despairs because a pot exhibited at the Whitney Museum receives the tepid evaluation, “merely decorative”, she reassures him with: “One. A pot you hadn’t put your heart and soul into?”386 However, later in Act One, her true opinion is disclosed. Juan senses it at the end of Scene Five:

[JUAN:] I’ve got work to do.

[GEORGIA:] Your pots.

[JUAN:] Yes, my…pots. Yes, I haven’t got much talent.

[GEORGIA:] I never said that!
Hell, you implied it.\textsuperscript{387}

By Scene Eight, she seditiously dismisses Juan’s artistic efforts:

You have talent. Of course you have some. I couldn’t live with anyone who didn’t.

Some. Some?

If only you’d applied yourself more. If you’d worked from dawn to dusk.\textsuperscript{388}

This is O’Keeffe’s way of repaying his betrayal of her: earlier in Scene Eight, O’Keeffe resents Juan’s confession that he has met a woman named Anna Marie:

…I need young company…

How old?

(Silence)

How old is this woman?

Twenty-six…

And you want to marry her?

I don’t know. Maybe it’s just messin’ around…

So I’m expected to pay for this…”messing around.” Am I?\textsuperscript{389}

In Act Two, there is, literally and figuratively, a calm before the storm. Its first two scenes are almost prosaic in their normalcy. In Scene One, it is 1984; O’Keeffe has had a coronary, and Hamilton and Anna Marie, now his wife, have brought the painter to live with them in their rambling house in Santa Fe. The artist appears to be just another cantankerous old woman, resentful of her relocation to Juan’s home and her loss of independence. Meanwhile, Juan has wearied of his role as caretaker:

…It’s been a long day.

If you’d left me where I was it wouldn’t have been. Such a long day. With the old duck.
[JUAN:] I’m not playing that game.

[GEORGIA:] Why not? It’s the only game I’ve got left.\(^{390}\)

By Scene Two, O’Keeffe has made peace with the place and the pinon tree in the courtyard: both of them being “stuck here. Might not like it. Can’t run away. Stuck.”\(^{391}\) Her former cook, Ruby, comes to visit, and O’Keeffe confides “they’re asking me to sign bits of paper…too much money, Ruby.”\(^{392}\) Feigning concern for an over-tired O’Keeffe, Hamilton spirits Ruby away from the painter. Finally, Georgia voices her frustrations:

I hate it! This grayness. Drifting in and out. One minute, like now. The next? Clouds, mist, scudding like they used to up there. Across the face of the canyon, through the cottonwoods. (Pause) One minute walking with Papa…or Stieglitz…and suddenly it’s gray, cloudy and you’re reaching out to hold…something. A rock, a branch…anything. (Pause) Dementia….\(^{393}\)

Another important topic for Shearer is O’Keeffe’s withholding of herself. Soon after bemoaning her impending dissolution into a “dementia”, O’Keeffe itemizes her many masks.\(^{394}\) Because Shearer’s Georgia needs to hide, it is only when she sheds her masks that we begin to hear O’Keeffe’s genuine voice.

By Act Two, Scene Three, there is a storm brewing. Paralleling the elements is the tempest within O’Keeffe’s mind; memories haunt her, the dead taunt her. Stieglitz, Pollitzer, Norman take her to task for her transgressions and betrayals. Their litany of overlapping accusations builds to a cacophony that culminates when the exterior storm uproots the pinon on the patio. O’Keeffe lurches towards it. Seeing herself in the uprooted tree, superstitiously, she believes she can silence the voices if she can hold on to the trunk of the fallen tree.\(^{395}\) A concerned Hamilton arrives. Georgia explains the consequence of the downed tree:

It could be seen as an omen … I heard it. It cried out, like a human in pain. Wind stripping the leaves, rain loosening its soil. Suddenly a big gust came. It toppled slightly, hung on. Then another gust shook the room. Up it came, screaming, wrenched from the earth. Dead. Finished … Should have left me. That’s how some tribes used to get rid of their old. Left them out in the snow…stuck the body in a crevice.\(^{396}\)
O’Keeffe believes she “should have gone with the tree”, but Hamilton weaves an Indian tale and calms her. His story of a Changing Woman in the form of an eagle coming to bear the Spirit of Fallen Tree away on wings, “up into the black heart of the sky”, evokes a yearning for a similar release within the elderly painter.\footnote{397}

O’Keeffe is relaxed now. She has removed all her masks. Hamilton senses his declaration of love will finally be acknowledged:

Written in stone, in mud, adobe. Whatever I said, whatever I did, whatever you hear, Georgia Totto O’Keeffe I… love… you. You, your paintings. The part you kept hidden. (Pause. Wondering) Like something glimpsed in the sky. Just for a moment. A flash of … I don’t know. I don’t know! But it’s why I came to see you that time. The only reason, I swear. Do you believe me?\footnote{398}

Her reply, “Yes. Yes,” is their completion.\footnote{399} Now, O’Keeffe is free to release to death. Meanwhile, the external storm is over even as the chaos within her mind has been calmed. There are no more betrayals to exhume.

In the last two scenes, the playwright introduces a new character, the gracefully-drawn Marion. Ostensibly, O’Keeffe’s last nurse, Marion is the ferryman for the painter’s passage on her River Styx. Through their exchanges, which are some of the loveliest in the play, Shearer explores her final theme, O’Keeffe’s path to Death:

[GEORGIA:] …What will they make of me? Nothing.

[MARION:] The paintings, Miss O’Keeffe, will always live.


[MARION:] I’m an imperfect Buddhist.

[GEORGIA:] Still searching, huh? Always. I was.\footnote{400}

I have analyzed Shearer’s play at some length because its subject echoes that of Murrell’s. However, its thematic focus on betrayal of trust, as well as its atomizing of the mentally degenerative process of aging, with its arbitrary and erratic forays into a
past peopled by ghosts, make Georgia a very different work to The Faraway Nearby. It also has little in common with A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe, as my elderly O’Keeffe is lucid. My Georgia experiences greater anguish due to her blindness because, to a visual artist, that seems a larger tragedy than the loss of one’s intellectual powers, even for someone with a history of mental illness. Indeed, if I have any quibble with Shearer’s Georgia it is that the playwright overlooked the possible resonance to an elderly O’Keeffe facing dementia of the breakdowns she had suffered when she was younger. Nonetheless, Shearer, like Murell, has permitted some verifiable facts about O’Keeffe’s life to serve as the impetus for her forays into the painter’s declining years and powers. Both plays are significant contributions to a biographical dramatic exploration of Georgia O’Keeffe.

1.5g Doris Lynch’s Shooting in Texas with Georgia O’Keeffe

The last play to be considered is Doris Lynch’s Shooting in Texas with Georgia O’Keeffe (1999). Set in Canyon, Texas, in 1917, it is more of a sketch than a finished work. Only eleven pages in length, it focuses on young Georgia’s efforts to carve out a personal and artistic identity. Now that their mother has died, O’Keeffe is guardian to her younger sister, Claudia. The two O’Keeffe girls are walking at sunset in the Texas Panhandle. An expert marksman, Claudia is intent upon shooting anything she spies. Georgia, however, has another focus, that of “developing an eye, learning to see, the world around you, every single thing you pass each day. In detail.”

One theme in Lynch’s work is O’Keeffe’s early efforts to understand the correlation between sight, creation, and comprehension. The young painter decides to explore subjects that make you see and want to keep on seeing. Something you can look at forever and never really know the inside of. Something you can only really learn on canvas. Within this brief one act study, the two sisters touch upon their mother’s death, the difficulty for a woman artist to be taken seriously, the impracticality of women’s fashion, and men and their impact on women’s lives.
Claudia goes off-stage to shoot, and we soon hear her in conversation with a man. Harriford Thomas Wells, a barrister, has been following the girls, ostensibly, to caution them about the danger of walking into the sunset, unescorted by a protective male. The girls find him ridiculous and mock him. Claudia even takes a shot at him. Affronted, he threatens to report O’Keeffe and her sister to the president of the college where Georgia is teaching. An innocent Claudia asks her elder sister

[CLAUDIA:] Why won’t they let us do anything, Georgia? Even simple things like walking and shooting?

[GEORGIA:] Maybe they’re afraid.

[CLAUDIA:] So what should we do? Stay in town, sit on the verandah in pointy-toed ladies shoes, run needles up and down some little rectangle of canvas?

[GEORGIA:] No, you prick them with your gun; I, with my paintbrushes.

A gentle, unassuming meditation on the young O’Keeffe’s possible concerns, Shooting in Texas with Georgia O’Keeffe is not yet a play; nonetheless, Doris Lynch has introduced some topics worthy of her further exploration: the carving out of artistic identity, a need to understand and overcome society’s mores and limitations (particularly as a woman). Given that the work is only eleven pages in length, it hardly seems fair to compare it to in-depth studies like A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe, The Faraway Nearby, Georgia, or O’Keeffe! Lynch is historically correct in how she addresses the female stereotypes of the time, as well as how she touches upon the (true) tale of O’Keeffe “mothering” Claudia for a year; but there is little imaginative transformation of these topics. Doris Lynch has made a nice start; however, until she undertakes the challenge of expanding her work, her play does little to further our understanding of the painter or the nature of biographical drama.

1.6 Some Conclusions on the Nature of Biographical Drama

O’Keeffe’s contradictions are central to my play and inspired me to juggle the twin poles of historical accuracy and artistic invention. The other works, too, explore dichotomies. In Virginia it is art versus madness and life versus death. Modigliani’s
poles are art versus death and immortality versus anonymity. As in Virginia, Zelda considers the dichotomy of creativity and madness and life versus death against a backdrop of dreams of lofty achievement battling a mediocre talent. Barrymore’s issues include the desire for artistic excellence being undermined by alcoholic excess and self-destructive impulses. Lillian Hellman’s contradictions include her distrust in acknowledging achievement even when she is an acclaimed success. Hence, an important aspect of Lillian concerns the disparity between truth and memory. For Emily Dickinson, there is a yearning for publication and public recognition despite her disdain for self-promotion. The clarity of expression by the poet celebrated as The Belle of Amherst might be sullied by too public a forum. Lastly, Charlotte Brontë’s duality concerns the sweetness and sorrows of the past in contrast to the emptiness of her present and future. Bronte is a dance of hope and despair, of yearning-for-union and loneliness, and, of course, the memory of the living played out against the reality of those who have died.

Contrasts abound also in the many works about O’Keeffe pre-dating my own play. Being a woman in a man’s world is a theme in Lynch’s Shooting in Texas with Georgia O’Keeffe. Ouwehand’s The Studio explores similar territory with its juxtaposition of the anonymity of women artists against the easier road traveled by men. Betrayal versus trust and chaos versus control feature in Shearer’s Georgia. Life versus death contrasted with partnership versus solitude are explored in Murrell’s contradictorily titled The Faraway Nearby. The contradictions within relationships are examined through the polarized themes of marriage versus independence and trust versus betrayal in Barry’s A Marriage and in McDermott’s O’Keeffe!, it is inner direction versus guidance from a spouse and mothering versus childlessness. The main thematic dichotomy explored by Congdon’s A Conversation with Georgia O’Keeffe is the significant geographical contrast between New York and Santa Fe. These thematic variances are explored through the interactions and disputes of the characters in each of the plays as well as each character’s response to upheaval. Moreover, as these works have revealed, biographical dramatization appears to manifest thematic dichotomies as contrary impulses within the play’s main protagonist.
In addition to exploring O’Keeffe’s contradictions, plays about the painter have focused on aspects of her journey. **Shooting in Texas with Georgia O’Keeffe**’s concern is her time on the Texas Plains. **The Studio** is a posthumous examination of her life’s impact as a celebrated female artist so its core revolves around O’Keeffe’s achievement. **O’Keeffe!** is mostly concerned with the celebrated artist and her mid-life relationship with her husband, Alfred Stieglitz as is Barry’s work. Shearer’s **Georgia** and Murrell’s **The Faraway Nearby** examine the artist in decline. Finally, Congdon’s work is a slice of an afternoon in Texas before the painter had been touched by fame.

Unlike these plays about O’Keeffe, **A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe** represents an exploration of the entire arc of her life. Consequently (and arguably) it provides a more satisfying and informative journey for theatre-goers because of its greater sweep. However, because one of the main themes of **A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe** concerns her passage from anonymity to icon as well as exploring many of her contradictory impulses, I find my narrative conforms to the genre.

O’Keeffe championed truthful expression; however, like Luce, she realized that a painted rendering of an object (just like a dramatic depiction of a life) required the creator to endow the work with a personal “fantasy…[that can] keep one’s whole consistent….”

In an effort to remain true to my own vision and O’Keeffe’s, I could be said to be juggling disparate elements in an effort to find the consistent whole that expresses both O’Keeffe’s truth and my own.

In Part II that follows, many of the themes considered intrinsic to biographical drama will be seen to exist within **A Brush with Georgia O’Keeffe**. Moreover, the evolution of my play might be said to parallel O’Keeffe’s growth as an artist: the initial monologues mirror her early charcoal sketches. The staged reading might correspond to her original watercolors from The Plains. The later full-length work for three actors represents art on a scale similar to O’Keeffe’s enlarged, sumptuous oils. Like O’Keeffe’s painting, my ambition was to allow the audience to really “see” O’Keeffe in the same way that her
enlarged blossoms insisted that her viewers really see flowers and watch them grow.

Tracing the growth of my play will be the major concern of Part II.


4 Cited in Lisle 302.

5 Hogrefe 293.

6 Hogrefe 261.

7 Hogrefe 327.

8 Hogrefe 327.

9 Museum guard cited in Georgia O’Keeffe Museum visit, 1 June, 2007.

10 Robinson 300.

11 Robinson 179.

12 Lisle 369.


14 Cited in Lisle vii-viii.


16 Cited in Robinson 505.


18 Lisle ix.

19 Lisle viii.

20 Pollitzer 283.

21 Cited in Pollitzer xxi.

22 Cited in Pollitzer xxi-xxii.

23 Pollitzer 33.

24 Cited in Pollitzer 12.


26 Cited in Pollitzer 41.

27 Pollitzer 46.

28 Cited in Pollitzer 168.

29 Robinson ix-x.

30 Robinson, x.

31 Robinson 609-615.

32 Eisler 493.

33 Hogrefe ix-x.

34 Hogrefe x.


39 McIntyre 14-15.

40 McIntyre 25.

41 McIntyre 28.

42 McIntyre 33-35.

43 McIntyre 35.

44 McIntyre 45.

45 McIntyre 46.

46 McIntyre 49.

47 McIntyre 51.

48 McIntyre 56.
McIntyre 66.
McIntyre 66.
McIntyre 67.
McIntyre 70.
McIntyre 72.
McIntyre 76-78.
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O'Brien 9.
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McDonough Author’s Preface.
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McDonough 95.
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Luce, The Belle of Amherst, Preface.
Luce, The Belle of Amherst, 3.
Luce, The Belle of Amherst, 2, 4-5.
Luce, The Belle of Amherst, 6.
Luce, The Belle of Amherst, 7.
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McDonough 19.
McDonough Author’s Preface.
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Sara Edlin (personal 14, 40, communication, April 9th, 2007).
O’Keeffe, opposite Plate 25, unpaginated.
Natalie Mosco, A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe (unpublished, 2008).
O’Keeffe, opposite Plates 88; 62, unpaginated.
Congdon 3.
Mosco 2004.
Mosco 2004.
Congdon 1.
Lisle 316.
Mosco 2008.
Congdon 12.
Lisle 67.
Robinson 154.
Mosco 2008.
Congdon 29.
Hogrefe 239, Eisler 479, Drohojowska-Philp 418.
Mosco 2004.
Congdon 13, 21.
Robinson 244, 141.
Ouwehand 26.
Ouwehand 10.
I acknowledge that a creative writer is entitled to reference whatever material she feels appropriate. McDermott’s inclusion of the Shakespearean interlude remains a mystery; it is one false note in an otherwise fine piece of work.

I, Robinson 168, Hogrefe 156.

I, Mosco 2004.

I, Lisle 106, Robinson 236, 258.

I, McDermott 4-5; 6-8; 9-10.

I, McDermott 10-12.

I, McDermott 17-19.


McDermott 24.

McDermott 29, 30.

Mosco 2004.


Cited in Eisler 494.

Cited in Cowart, Hamilton, Greenough 200.

Mosco 2004.

Cited in Robinson 364, cited in Hogrefe 255.

Eisler 480.


Cited in Eisler 494.


Although, given my experience with the “docent” at the O’Keeffe Museum and his fanciful explanation regarding the creation of “Black Abstraction,” I would question the value of their intelligence.

McDermott 4.

Robinson 371, 379, 385.

McDermott, 25.

McDermott, 411.

McDermott, 28.

McDermott, 28.

McDermott, 29.

McDermott 29, 30.

Mosco 2004.

McDermott 31.

Mosco 2004.


McDermott 26.

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I, Robinson 168, Hogrefe 156.

I, Mosco 2004.

I, Lisle 106, Robinson 236, 258.

I, McDermott 4-5; 6-8; 9-10.

I, McDermott 10-12.

I, McDermott 17-19.


McDermott 24.

McDermott 259.

McDermott 34. [Interestingly, in a telephone conversation in August, 2004, Lucinda McDermott, with gracious candor, confided that her marriage had been going through a challenging period during the creation of her play on O’Keeffe, and she had used the O’Keeffe-Stieglitz partnership as a model for a further exploration of her own relationship. Moreover, she indicated she might have written a very different play had she approached the subject in 2004 rather than in 1991.]

Mosco 2004.

Robinson 148, 258.
Robinson 208.
Robinson p. 291.
Robinson 509, cited in Hogrefe 208.
Barry Scene Four.
Mosco 2004.
Barry Scene Thirty-four.
Barry, Scene Five.
Hogrefe 163-169.
Barry Scene Thirty-eight.
Barry Thirty-nine.
Mosco 2004. [Note: For the 2008 script, the doctor is named Dr. Janks, the real name of her attending physician.]
Barry Scene Eight.
Hogrefe 311.
Mosco 2004.
Murrell 14.
Hogrefe plate 41.
Hogrefe xi.
Murrell 11-12.
Murrell 12.
Murrell 53.
Mosco 2008.
Mosco 2008.
Murrell 13.
Murrell 35.
Murell 49.
Murrell 15.
Murrell 26.
Murrell 47.
Murrell 59.
Mosco 2004.
Mosco 2004.
Murrell 27.
Murrell 29.
Murrell 31.
Murrell 31.
Murrell 38-39.
Murrell 39.
Murrell 40.
Adato VHS
Murrell 40.
Murrell 42.
Murrell 42-47.
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Mosco 2004.
Murrell 59.
Shearer ix.
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Shearer 6.
Shearer 4.
Shearer 5.
Shearer 5-7.
Shearer 9-10.
Shearer 11-12.
Shearer 12.
Shearer 12-15.
Shearer 15.
Shearer 19.
Shearer 18-19.
Shearer 22-25.
Shearer 25.
Shearer 32-33.
Shearer 27.
Shearer 28.
Shearer 30-34.
Shearer 34.
Shearer 29.
Shearer 36.
Shearer 43.
Shearer 40-41.
Shearer 46-47.
Shearer 49.
Shearer 50.
Shearer 51.
Shearer 53.
Shearer 57-64.
Shearer 65.
Shearer 66.
Shearer 67.
Shearer, 67.
Shearer 73-74.

Lynch 11.
Lynch 3-4, 3, 1, 4-5.
Lynch, 7.
Lynch 10-11.
Lynch, 11.

Part II: Writing A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

2.1 Introduction to Part 2

In this Part, I explore the inception, creation, and evolution of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe. The impetus to commence writing came from two unique dreams. Therefore, the two finished dream monologues are presented and, then, deconstructed as a means of understanding how they attained their present forms. In addition, this play began as a mono-drama (the reason for which is explained below) so this part considers the development of several of the work’s monologues. As these monologues were not dream-inspired, other methods for their creation are also discussed. I came to the creation of the play with few preconceptions, and it was only after I had a series of monologues that I engaged in a formal examination of the written material to determine what it was I was trying to say. Consequently, the play’s theme emerged fairly late in the writing process, which led, then, to a re-working of the piece (in an exploration paralleling O’Keeffe’s practice of repetitive study and distillation as a means of unearthing and expressing the essence of a subject.) This part also delineates the shifting shape of the play – through explaining how I selected the key incidents in O’Keeffe’s life for dramatization and then grouped them into the four rhythmic modes (which became an organizing principle for the play.) In addition, the play’s present form, involving three actors, is also considered. Moreover, as noted in the preceding part, dramatists concern themselves with numerous elements in the creation of a play; they include: the selection of a subject, the arc of the play, its characters, choice of imagery, type of language, conflicts evoked, rhythm and tempo, and theme. However, the genre of biographical drama introduces two additional considerations: the need to historically contextualize the subject, and to decide how much of the subject’s life will be included in the work. An important factor distinguishing biographical drama from drama based on a fictional subject emerged: because the subject of biographical drama is
well known, the realization of goals is rarely the central question. The underpinning of biographical drama is the journey rather than the outcome: The Way rather than The Result. Also evident from the study of the nature of biographical drama (in Part One, above) are certain recurring challenges to each play’s protagonist as well as specific methods for a dramatist to approach the inner life of his/her character. Therefore, this part re-examines the various means whereby a writer might gain access to a subject. In addition, the decision to expand upon biographical material rather than holding fast to historical accuracy is also explored.

2.2 That “Dream Thing I Do”

O’Keeffe sometimes referred to her creation of paintings as the “dream thing I do.”¹ Two dreams spurred my desire to create a drama about Georgia O’Keeffe.

The Corpse Dream Monologue

In the 2008 version of my play, there is a scene in which Georgia’s therapist, Dr. Janks, encourages her to recount her dream as a means of reconnecting the painter to her art and her life after O’Keeffe has suffered a period of severe breakdown:

There’s this pause between light and dark, then, clear as the visions I see in the crystal ball he gave me: I’m a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I’m laid out in a Model A Ford which has no roof - this black shape away somewhere in some desert place. There’s a phrase: “indignant desert birds”. Black crows are swooping down on me from a great height and picking my flesh clean, like those sky burials in India. They put them on a mountain, (the person that died), and the birds eat the flesh ‘til there’s no one left - the bones are bare and the spirit is free. It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you so I must be getting better. I don’t want to think about that; I want to think about painting again. But I don’t want to talk about painting - words and I are not friends - too many words mean too few paintings. I used to beg - “I can’t work with all these visitors. Their words cast shadows on my shapes.” (Like seaweed shrouds the bottom of the sea.) No, I won’t think about water - and I can’t talk about him. My mind creates these shapes, see? Sometimes I know where they come from and sometimes I don’t. Lines go straight ‘til they can’t help but turn, cutting away because they have to. No. I don’t want to think about that either. I’m here because I want to paint. And function. And I guess I’m not doing either too well, am I?²
This monologue contains many of the elements that I wanted to incorporate in my portrayal of O’Keeffe: a clearly-defined personality; striking visual imagery; language of both my invention as well as words uttered by the real subject; inner and external conflicts; irony/humor; rhythm and tempo; reinforcement of theme. (Why I chose to focus upon these elements is considered below.) It also concentrates on one portion of the arc of her journey, includes literary allusion to place her in her time, adopts heightened language in moments of emotional excitation, and depicts the pendulum of her mood swings. However, this finished material is the culmination of many years of creative layering. In order to trace its growth, it is necessary to return to its inception.

One evening in early 1995, I had my first O’Keeffe dream. Though I had no such intention at the time, my Journal notation of that dream was to become the seed for my first monologue:

I dreamed last night I was a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I was laid out in a Model A Ford, which had no roof – this black shape away in some desert place – all tan and pink and red and rust. Black crows were swooping down on me from a great height and picking my flesh clean.\(^3\)

In 1997, I was still seeking a window into her world, though I had read enough about O’Keeffe to recognize her need, post-breakdown, for some kind of death to effect regeneration. I was primed to work in a less-unorthodox, more-intuitive way. The question that challenged me was “how?” I stepped aside in the hope that O’Keeffe would delineate the parameters of my dramatization of her life. Adopting a stream-of-consciousness openness to the historical material, I began to explore free-associative writing:

Symbolism – black crows and rocks (stones?) round and feathered things, bones and dreamscapes…there’s so much rock-crow sorrow. Death…the extremes – the emotional swings against a wide, flat prairie….\(^4\)

Recalling my 1995 dream of O’Keeffe’s corpse, I reasoned that a psychiatrist, treating a broken O’Keeffe, could attempt to use her dream as a means of unlocking her subconscious. In addition, because I guessed that O’Keeffe’s emotional hook was a visual one (both to herself as well as to admirers of her work) I wanted to integrate
traditional O’Keeffe imagery into the material. Sensing that O’Keeffe’s need was to free herself from the emotional shackles of her past pain, I decided to introduce the painter’s desert bones arguably symbolizing death (referred to by the critic, Barbara Rose, as “a vanitas or memento mori motif common in O’Keeffe’s work.”) I wanted the imagery of death to guide her to a relinquishing of her old Self as a means toward regeneration. In 1997, my solution was to fuse my dream with O’Keeffe’s imagery within a hypothetical situation:

I dreamed last night. I was a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I was laid out in a Model A Ford which had no roof – this black shape away somewhere in some desert place – all tan and pink and red and rust – wonderful colors! Black crows are swooping down on me from a great height and picking my flesh clean. Like those sky burials in India. They put them on the mountain, you see – the person that died – and the birds eat the flesh until there’s no one left and the bones are bare …but the spirit is free. It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you. So, I must be getting better….6

I selected desert bones as a symbol of O’Keeffe’s return to sanity because of the painter’s own words. As recorded in Perry Miller Adato’s 1977 documentary, when she first visited New Mexico, O’Keeffe admitted she started collecting bones for subjects, “because there were no flowers”; however, that trip to the Southwest returned her to her Self: “I had never seen anything like it before, but it fitted to me exactly.”7 The bones were a concrete manifestation of the landscape’s meaning for the artist: the bones were her Desert Self. Seeing them and feeling the New Mexican terrain were her restoratives. Meanwhile, Adato’s documentary also introduced me to the Georgia O’Keeffe of wry humor. By including “It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you. So, I must be getting better”, I found just the right note of ironic self-deprecation and her desire for reassurance.

The monologue also reflects O’Keeffe’s need for self-control and, in 1999, I expanded it to have O’Keeffe trying to self-censor her stream-of-consciousness retelling of the dream and its significance, [the self-controlling reversals are in italics]:

It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you. So, I must be getting better. I don’t want to think about that. I want to think about painting again. But I don’t want to talk about painting. There are too many words and too few
paintings. I used to beg Stieglitz. I couldn’t work with all those visitors. But he
thrived on them. They pumped him up. Set his heart racing! His heart! But
their words floated in front of my shapes and cast shadows. Their words eclipsed
my shapes. And I couldn’t see to paint them. Shadows on shadows -- My mind
creates these shapes. Sometimes I know where they come from, and sometimes I
don’t. I tried to explain – All that talk – I couldn’t see my shapes. Couldn’t feel
my cutting edge. To me, a line goes straight ahead – until it can’t help but bend.
It cuts away because it has to. Inevitable. No – I don’t want to think like that.
I’m here because I want to paint. And function. And I guess I’m not doing
either too well. Am I? 

The words in red are Georgia O’Keeffe’s own. The rest is how I imagined O’Keeffe in
the unknowable circumstances of her private therapy session. I chose to use this
O’Keeffe quote because her source of inspiration is within her mind. In this
circumstance, she had lost her mind; consequently, she had lost her art. Moreover, the
catalyst for this breakdown was her husband’s infidelity, so she had lost her husband as
well. Beyond that, O’Keeffe was aware that Alfred “has been very important to
something that has made my world for me.”

By 2001, the beginning of the monologue shifted slightly, following the mention of
Stieglitz. Now, rather than simply “thriving” on his visitors, the stakes had been
increased to emphasize his need for an audience:

I used to beg Stieglitz. But he has to have an audience; he’s just that way. I
can’t work with all those visitors. Their words float in front of my shapes and
cast shadows. Like surface seaweed clouds the ocean depths. No. I
won’t think about water…. 

O’Keeffe’s “he’s just that way” hints at the affection that still binds her to him despite
their conflicts. In later years, O’Keeffe explained their mutual need as, simply: “I was
interested in what he did and he was interested in what I did.” In the finished version
of the monologue, “he’s just that way” was omitted because, as an actress, I was able to
convey O’Keeffe’s longtime affection for Stieglitz without having to verbalize it.

An important inclusion is the phrase “like surface seaweed clouds the ocean depths.”
Here, the “s” of “surface seaweed clouds” and “depths” is employed to suggest the
eddying whirlpool of her subconscious dragging her down beneath the water. Indeed,
the idea of liquid submersion and O’Keeffe’s determined, “No, I won’t think about water,” was added after I had written a version of the Radio City Music Hall breakdown, (considered below). The real O’Keeffe had an aversion to water at that time in her life: it was a reminder of the sponginess of the wet walls of the Music Hall’s Powder Room which caused the canvas to became unglued, thwarting her efforts to meet the deadline for her mural, thus precipitating her emotional collapse. In my play, references to works by T.S. Elliot, Shakespeare, and, D. H. Lawrence enhance the depiction of an emotionally-drowning O’Keeffe slipping beneath the waves. The use of heightened language and allusion brings a poetic intensity into her world reinforcing moments of extreme emotion.

During the 2004 performances, considerable additions were made to the text. A crystal ball introduces Stieglitz’s and O’Keeffe’s interest in mysticism, thus adding another piece to the O’Keeffe-Stieglitz partnership puzzle. In addition, as noted in my Journal, I included a phrase from William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming” – a poem redolent with apocalyptic forebodings:

…when I permit myself to sleep, there are real dreams. I sense resonance with Yeats’ “The Second Coming” in all of this. It’s grouped with a series of poems dated 1916-1921 – World War I. “Indignant desert birds” – I found that phrase and incorporated it into the first dream in …O’Keeffe – it’s important to introduce the literary allusions early on.

Through the addition of references to mysticism and the other contemporary, literary allusions, the layering within this monologue began to approximate the finished piece introduced at the start of this section. Moreover, in this version, when pushed by the Doctor to recount her dream, O’Keeffe does not launch into it immediately:

*There’s this pause between light and dark, then, clear as the visions I see in the crystal ball that he gave me:* I’m a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I’m laid out in a Model A Ford which has no roof – this black shape away in some desert place – all tan and pink and red and rust. *There’s a phrase: “indignant desert birds”*.14

The “pause between light and dark” in the first sentence is a new phrase that refers to Arthur Wesley Dow’s concept of Notan meaning “not dark/not light.”15 Dow’s theory
of composition, as taught to the young O’Keeffe by Alon Bement at the University of Virginia’s summer school, returned the discouraged artist to her art. Moreover, the “pause between light and dark” introduces the first thematic reference to O’Keeffe’s duality.

By 2004, I had a completed script that commenced with this monologue. As it was very near the beginning of the play now, another O’Keeffe quote was introduced (“Words and I are not friends”) because I wanted to incorporate more of the real-life O’Keeffe early on, as well as introduce possible themes and images. The only other change in the monologue is the addition of her aversion to discussing her husband with the Doctor: “No, I won’t think about water – and I can’t talk about him”, she pleads. The real O’Keeffe became so upset by Stieglitz’ visits to her while at the Sanitarium that the doctors restricted him to ten-minutes per week until she was stronger.\textsuperscript{16} It seemed important to add that layer to her grief process as well.

This lengthy examination of one monologue delineates the multi-layering that is a part of the biographic-literary process. The reasons for the inclusion of each aspect are detailed; however, my rationale for diverging from historically-recorded material is supported by the approaches of other biographical playwrights like William Luce and Kaye McDonough. As was seen in Part One, they contend that every playwright selects pieces of their subject’s life and expands upon those experiences to support his or her play’s theme. In the case of the above monologue it is irrelevant that so few actual words spoken by the painter are included because the essence of the character is revealed through her visual imagery, emotional responses, contemporary references, and historically-observed patterns. I concur with Luce that the biographical dramatist’s role “requires the adjustment of intent…[in order to] retain fidelity to the character and life…and yet have an individuality and dimension of its own.”\textsuperscript{17} (His contention will be explored further below.)

The Feather Dream Monologue
A second dream-inspired monologue merits consideration at this time. Towards the end of my play in its present version what was once a lengthy soliloquy has been précised to:


The source for this fragment was another dream I’d had in 1995, just two months after the Corpse dream, recounted above:

I’ve been dreaming again. This time, I’m housecleaning. Collecting grapefruit-sized balls of soft gray dust. Also, shiny black feathers. A collar of black feathers encircles my neck….

However, this second dream, set in Abiquiu, O’Keeffe’s ranch in New Mexico, took place after Stieglitz’s death, when she had moved to New Mexico permanently. In the monologue, the black feathers imply O’Keeffe’s continued entrapment by Stieglitz, even after his death.

It was not until 2001 that I expanded the imagery and intimations of my second dream into a meditation by my aging protagonist:

I’ve been dreaming again. This time, I’m housecleaning. A bed has been moved away from the wall and out into the middle of the room. But it obviously doesn’t belong there – it’s at a jarring angle. The bedcovers are askew – all haphazard – not like me at all: that’s how I know it’s a dream! I’m collecting grapefruit-sized balls of soft gray dust that seems to have settled in the corners, along the baseboards, and even on the floor of the room. There are also many shiny black feathers littered about – singly and in clumps of two, three, or more. I’m gathering those as well. I notice I’m wearing a collar of black feathers. Even though I’m working, I’m decorated in some way – Possessions are such a headache. I’ve often thought how wonderful it would be to simply stand out in space and have nothing. To live in a tent, just open the flaps and let the wind blow through – blow it all away – the feathers and the dust – maybe even the bed covers and the bed itself?! – That would be some wonderful kind of wind! – But there’s this Room full of dust and feathers to clean.
Because this second dream came so late in the development of the play, it was considerably edited. It introduced the finality of the now-blind O’Keeffe and her visual dreaming. O’Keeffe’s words (in red above) eventually were excised from the second dream and became the final words of the play. Although the second dream monologue was severely abridged, both dream monologues remain in the working play-script. To pay due respect to my own imaginative engagement with my subject and because O’Keeffe’s act of creation was a “dream thing” she did, it was important to me that the dreams that had instigated the work remained, in some way, a part of it. However, I could not rely on dreams alone; therefore, other methods to gain access into my subject’s life needed to be explored.

2.3 An Overview of Methodology
A playwright -- simply awaiting the next inspirational dream -- is neither scholastically-focused nor motivationally-geared. Had I had access to the insights regarding methodology expressed by the biographical-dramatist, William Luce, I would have followed his template and engaged in

...intensive methodological research...read[ing] and reread[ing] the several biographical studies,...letters...[taking] extensive notes; cull[ing] dramatically workable anecdotes, poems, and excerpts from...letters; catalogu[ing] them under subject headings; rearrang[ing] them in a chronological pattern; and interw[eaving] them in a conversational style, blending in my own words as seamlessly as possible, and with the cadence and color of... [the protagonist’s] words [until] gradually,...[the character’s] story emerged, as if she were telling it herself.22

I had not encountered Luce’s methodology when I began writing A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe’s so I was forced to create my own template for approaching the creation of a biographical drama. My methods, however, were not dissimilar to Luce’s and included the utilization of a number of different procedures (many of which occurred concurrently.) Apart from dreams, there was formal research that involved reading books, magazine articles, old newspaper archival material, museum and exhibition catalogues and also consulting O’Keeffe specialists. Early on, a meeting with an O’Keeffe biographer, Jeffrey Hogrefe, spurred my efforts. Later, another (non-O’Keeffe) biographer, Thomas Hauser, impressed upon me the importance of framing
my subject within her period. He encouraged me to consider incorporating additional material to place O’Keeffe firmly within her time as well as entreated me to expand upon her humor.²³ Apart from including actual historical events linking O’Keeffe to her time, I decided to insinuate flavors from literary figures of her period in history because I reasoned that the subtlety of these allusions would provide a scent of her time rather than a didactic historical document. As an artistic endeavor (rather than an academic treatise) I wanted the times to inform about O’Keeffe without dictating parameters of her being understood. The importance of framing O’Keeffe within her time was stressed by the painter herself, who observed: “I could have been a much better…painter and no one could have heard of me at all. But I was in touch with my time.”²⁴

With an eye aimed at O’Keeffe’s place within her time, early in the process, I realized the importance of chronologically noting key events in her life. This supplied me with an overview of the shape of her actual journey. I reasoned that moments, important to her, could be topics worthy of dramatic exploration. Some of these events were expanded (at first, as monologues, and, later, as either monologues or dialogues.)

Prior to cataloguing her chronology and the possible topics for dramatization, as noted in the examination of the dream monologues above, I made forays into streams-of-consciousness using journals and “found objects” (the latter, explained below) and experimented with O’Keeffe’s approach to making art (which included the abovementioned dreams as an inspirational source as well as a refinement of expression through repetition and experimentation.) Another means of accessing entry to the life of the painter was instigated by my first director, Lisa Parkins, who encouraged me to select “objects that are suggestive of the painter to see what comes up.”²⁵ One item I chose was a curved kitchen knife with an unusually-sculpted handle. It represented, for me, the O’Keeffe I was discovering: functional, unique, and intrigued by beautiful shapes. Although the knife itself yielded no dramatic material, it represented a physical expression of how I (subconsciously) perceived the artist. The discovery of this subconscious connection emboldened me to dare to try to write as O’Keeffe in the first person despite having misgivings about my complete understanding of her persona. In fact, O’Keeffe resisted painting until she had something to express.²⁶ Interestingly, I did
not begin any writing until my subconscious provided the visual imagery for the initial monologues through those two dreams that seemed to give me permission to proceed. Soon thereafter, having become aware of O’Keeffe’s emotional pendulum as well as her interest in music, I began to explore varying rhythmic styles. Then, by refining the language, by giving particular emphasis to the painter’s unique form of expression (often using her own words) I was able to heighten my character’s verisimilitude to its historical subject. When the play went into production, further development occurred through the dramaturgy of its first two directors: Lisa Parkins and Rae Allen. In addition, the advice of an independent director, Michael Blakemore, helped clarify the shape of the finished script. Finally, analytical consideration of the work for the purposes of the doctorate evoked further insights that led to more improvements. The reasons for the inclusion of each of the elements that became layered into the final play as well as my choices to artistically extend and enhance factual material are examined below.

2.4 Evolution of Monologues

I was aware of O’Keeffe’s many contradictions, so I thought that balancing historical accuracy and artistic creativity might generate tension within the creative process and was interested in how this paralleled the painter’s experience. My plan was to ground myself in facts about her through extensive research, then respond emotionally to the factual material using a stream-of-consciousness, first-person narrative. I adopted this method from the system of research and imaginative engagement used by many actors and which I, too, as an actor, had also used. Of course, writing in the first-person would result in only monologues; however, because my initial impressions of O’Keeffe were that she was a kind of desert pilgrim, I did not think the monologic focus would be a problem. Because monologues were the initial building blocks of my play, it is appropriate that this study discusses the development of several monologues as a means of examining the larger consideration of what end diverging from historical fact could serve in the creation of my work as well as in the world of biographical dramatic writing. As was noted above, the frisson of historical accuracy and artistic creativity was not the end but the beginning of my engagement in the dance of Georgia O’Keeffe.
The “Snake” Monologue

My current script contains a monologue concerned with resurrection. O’Keeffe discusses her discharge from the sanitarium, her healing at Lake George, then, traveling to Santa Fe, in order to regain:

…my sanity in my “mad country”? – Here I am in a land I call “The Faraway”. And, I’ve got to kill this rattle snake… There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Striking – or being struck. The instinct to survive. Snakes are charming. Magically, they shed their skin. The lesson is to shed mine. Gotcha! My first summer in New Mexico, lying on a weathered carpenter’s bench under a tall thick tree, by D. H. Lawrence’s Pink House, remembering his words while looking up through the branches to the glittering stars --

[LAURENCE:] Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.

Be alone, and see the moonlight, white and busy and silent.
But not quite alone. I’m here with Paul’s wife, Beck Strand. We were meant to stay at the Pink House – where Lawrence stayed – but the light’s not right for painting, so we’re back at The Big House, under the roof of our hostess, Mabel Dodge Luhan, the most feminine person I ever met, and her fourth husband – the Pueblo leader, Tony Luhan, – tall, strong, black braids to his waist, turquoise jewelry on his hands and chest. Tony’s brothers come, wearing only loincloths and feathers: glistening bodies, rippling muscles – dancing to a throbbing drum – Wine! Peyote! – I dance, too! - Tony chants:

[TONY:] We are all birds in the same nest.

- Giving me an actual physical thrill! Throwing caution to the winds - when Tony goes to Santa Fe, I go to Mabel. When he returns, I share a bed with Beck. And when Mabel isn’t around – well, - Next to my Steiglitz, I’ve found nothing finer than Mabel’s Tony.
It’s this place! - wonderful – nobody ever told me how wonderful. “The dawn of the world!” - Freezing in the mountains in rain and hail, sleeping out under the stars, - So alive, I could crack at any moment! – Not a cleft in the waking day or night that isn’t full-to-brimming-over with completeness! But, where to place Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, and how to deflect Mrs. Dorothy Norman? Oh, she’s tracking shiny things – circling, like a crow lured by the promise of reflected sunlight. But I have the sun itself and a land I call “The Faraway” – it’s a love affair I know better than to try to be free of. So, here I am – caught between two landscapes: New Mexico and New York. No. I won’t go back. My snake has shed its skin.
This version of the Snake Monologue, with its inclusion of Beck Strand, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and Tony Luhan, came into being in 2003 in response to Allen’s request to expand upon O’Keeffe’s sexuality. Prior to then, the impetus for this idea came through stream-of-consciousness Journal explorations. At that time, imagery of rocks and crows, and her associated fascination with death, began to surface. In addition, in thinking about O’Keeffe’s emotional oscillation, passion for color, her need to reconnect to the passion she had first felt for her art, as well as her need to reclaim her Self, I considered another symbol, the snake, which yielded gold: “I wrote a monologue yesterday – about being a snake and shedding one’s skin….” It began like this:

There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Slithering along on our bellies, through the scrub brush of our lives, striking – or being struck.

Of course, it was not a monologue yet. It was a scrap of an idea, but it represented a start.

Then, later in 1997, I played with a fragmentary notion about a snake and composed this monologue concerning the killing of a snake that I subtitled, “This Is My Country.” [As with the previous monologues, variations are identified by italics; O’Keeffe’s actual words are printed in red]:

There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Slithering along on our bellies, through the scrub brush of our lives, striking – or being struck – but, at some point, you have to shed your skin. Take the scales from your eyes. And see…, 1929. Even my doctor said so. Everything I’ve painted up ‘til then was dead to me. Petals, enfolded. Seashells, enclosed. Lake George. Manhattan. Still Life in a frame. I needed to break free.

Who needed to paint like “the men”? Who wanted to be his woman on paper”? Who needed me…? *My art is about making my unknown known – to me – you see? Lines and colors meet to share my secrets with myself.* If I was his woman on paper, I couldn’t be my own. So the scales fell from my eye and I saw: A sea of sage the likes of which you have never seen… The saucer-of-alfalfa field beside the Lawrence House…. That first summer in New Mexico, I used to lie on a weathered carpenter’s bench under a tall thick tree and look up through the branches to the glittering stars. *Had he been lying there too when he wrote*:

Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.
Be alone, and see the moonlight, white and busy and silent.
Be quite alone, and feel the living cosmos softly rocking…

I felt it rocking me. My cradle. My rebirth.
The idea behind this soliloquy was O’Keeffe’s need to be born anew, and the image of a snake, shedding its skin, seemed to express this. She gives voice to her frustration, with its source in Stieglitz’s oppression. In addition, O’Keeffe waxes poetic, using Lawrence’s words as she is lying at her vantage point, on a carpenter’s bench under “The Lawrence Tree” (the subject of one of her paintings.) This literary allusion provided historical context and enabled her to express her passion through enhanced language. On the subject of “the men,” O’Keeffe reveals her ambivalence concerning her place within the Stieglitz coterie, and her frustration at being pigeon-holed as a “woman” artist; talking about them permitted me to include some back-story. It is important to remember that, in 1997, there was no play. All I had was a series of independent monologues; at that stage, no effort had been made to shape them into a cohesive whole. Consequently, until I knew which piece would open the play, backstory information was inserted wherever possible. The shaping and paring would come later.

By 2001, my efforts to structure my material into a full-length play had me position the Snake monologue at the start of Act Two:

There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Striking – or being struck. But, at some point, you have to shed your skin. Take the scales from your eyes. And see…. Everything I’ve painted up ‘til now is dead to me. Petals, enfolding. Seashells, enclosing. Manhattan. Lake George. Living a Still Life in an airless frame. So – I’m cutting free. Who needs to paint like “the men”? Who wants to be his woman on paper”? If I’m his woman on paper, I can’t be my own. It’s taken more than four years for me to shed my skin. A skin of his creation. But when the scales fell from my eyes, I saw:
A sea of sage the likes of which you have never seen…
An alfalfa field – like a large green saucer – beside the Lawrence House…
That first summer in New Mexico, I would lie on a weathered carpenter’s bench under a tall think tree, look up through the branches to the glittering stars, and remember words David Herbert Lawrence wrote:
Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.
Be alone, and see the moonlight, white and busy and silent.
Be quite alone, and feel the living cosmos softly rocking…
Its rocking was my cradle, my rebirth…. 31
Both the monologues I had written contained some of the physical landscape that O’Keeffe herself describes:

Mabel’s house was much larger and a little higher and between the two was an alfalfa field like a large green saucer… I spent several weeks up at the Lawrence ranch that summer. There was a long weathered carpenter’s bench under the tall tree in front of the little old house that Lawrence had lived in there. I often lay on that bench looking up into the tree – past the trunk and up into the branches. It was particularly fine at night with the stars above the tree. 32

The use of the snake imagery and the inclusion of a piece of Lawrence’s poem heightens O’Keeffe’s rather quaint “schoolmarmish” language to become the linguistic equivalent of her painting, “The Lawrence Tree”, which expressed her emotional state more inspirationally. With its upward-sweeping trunk, black mass of leaves and brilliant, dark blue sky, replete with intensely-white stars, the drama of the painting encouraged me to use words that reflected its poetry and passion.

An examination of the 1999 and 2001 versions of the monologues reveals a few disparities. A comparison of italicized phrases in the more recent draft indicates several edits or changes from the 1999 version. I felt that a woman, reborn, would not consider herself “slithering along through the scrub brush of our lives”, so that was excised. Other changes include altering her observations from the past to the present tense in order to give the material greater urgency. The phrase: “I needed to break free” in the second paragraph of the 1999 version evolved to “I’m cutting free” in 2001, and provided O’Keeffe with a more empowering verb. I heightened the poetic stakes by turning 1999’s “Still life in a frame” into 2001’s “Living a Still Life in an Airless Frame”, and by reinforcing “Take the scales from your eyes” in the later monologue with its echo, “But when the scales fell from my eyes, I saw,” I created a more fluid transition to the Lawrence poem.

In the 2003 version of the script, prior to the snake monologue, Georgia had had a healing winter interlude at Lake George with the writer Jean Toomer. Consequently, a reintroduction of the Doctor was unnecessary; O’Keeffe’s idyll with Toomer had supplied her with sufficient strength to tell her own story:
Then, 1935, soon after that winter at Lake George, I made my trip to New Mexico: Regaining my sanity in what I still call my “mad country”?! – “My Faraway”. It’s so easy to go back there. I feel I’m there already. And I must kill this rattlesnake…
There’s a bit of snake in each of us. Striking of being struck. The instinct to survive. Snakes are charming. Magically, they shed their skin. The lesson is to shed mine. Who wants to paint like “the men”? Who needs to be his “woman on paper”? Living a Still Life in an airless frame, confined within a skin of his creation, as his woman on paper, I couldn’t be my own. Four days of darkness for the snake that sheds its skin. Four years, blindly groping – ’til the scales fell from my eyes to see:
A sea of sage the likes of which you have never seen…
[catching the snake] Gotcha! An alfalfa field – like a large green saucer – beside D.H. Lawrence’s Pink House – That first summer in New Mexico, lying on a weathered carpenter’s bench under a tall thick tree…
Looking up through the branches to the glittering stars…
Remembering words by David Herbert Lawrence:
- Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.
- Be alone, and see the moonlight, white and busy and silent.
- Be quite alone, and feel the living cosmos softly rocking,
  Soothing and restoring and healing.

There were a few significant differences between the earlier pieces and this latest one. I had been looking for something special to say about the snake. The ironic “charming” plays on the idea of a “snake charmer” which led me, in turn, to the word, “magically” prior to “they shed their skin.” Also, I decided to permit O’Keeffe to catch the snake with a “Gotcha!” In the 2004 performance, as directed by Rae Allen, the snake Georgia “gets” with her “Gotcha!” is not a real reptile at all. Instead, “Gotcha!” is a jubilant stretch and release of a pent-up soul: the “snake” she “gets” is the shedding of her old persona and her expansion within her new skin.

In the 2003 version, the D. H. Lawrence poem is continued to its fourth line: “Soothing and restoring and healing.” I had two reasons for this decision: it seemed richer to use the actual D.H. Lawrence phrase than to repeat his word “rocking” within my own phrase. The image of a cradle and the idea of birth and rebirth are inherent in the word “rocking,” and, consequently, its repetition was a redundancy. In addition, Lawrence probably knew, better than I, the phrase that would best complete his poem. Interestingly, only two of the four sentences, were incorporated into the 2004 playing
script: the rocking cradle of the cosmos became inherent in the playing of the moment, so, the unnecessarily repetitive “I felt it rocking me” was also deleted.\textsuperscript{34}

Also excised is O’Keeffe’s commentary on her condition, that is: “Still life in an airless frame.” The actor’s emotional color was suffused with an aura of suffocation; therefore, the dialogue about it became unnecessary. In my most recent script (2008) I discovered the idea of letting Georgia as D.H. Lawrence recite his own words as it seemed a nice opportunity to introduce another “voice”, thus giving an aural, rhythmic, and textural variance to a long Georgia recitation.

After 1999, subsequent versions of the snake monologue proceeded with a modification of a letter written by Georgia O’Keeffe on 24 August, 1929, while traveling by train back to New York from New Mexico:

It has been like the wind and the sun – there doesn’t seem to have been a crack of the waking day or night that wasn’t full… I feel so alive that I am apt to crack at any moment – I have frozen in the mountains in rain and hail – and slept out under the stars and cooked and burned on the desert…\textsuperscript{35}

It could be useful to examine variations on the above as it appeared in several earlier monologues.

Compare 1999:

I have frozen in the mountains in rain and hail – and slept under the stars – and cooked and burned on the desert. It has been like the wind and the sun – and just what I needed. There doesn’t seem to have been a crack of the waking day or night that wasn’t full and brimming over with completeness…\textsuperscript{36}

with an early 2001:

I freeze in the mountains in rain and hail – and sleep\textit{ out} under the stars – and cook and burn on the desert. \textit{I feel so alive that I am apt to crack at any moment} – \textit{It’s like the wind and the sun} – \textit{and} there isn’t a crack of the waking day or night that wasn’t full and brimming over with completeness…\textsuperscript{37}

There was a second version in 2001:
Freezing in the mountains in rain and hail –
Sleeping out under the stars – and
Cooking and burning in the desert.
So alive, I could crack at any moment!
The wind! The sun!
Not a cleft in the waking day or night that wasn’t full-to-brimming-over with completeness.\(^{38}\)

The reasons for each of the subsequent alterations to the text was a quest for fewer qualifying and connective words as well as a wish to enhance the rhythm via an increase in drive and passion. As a consequence, each version became more visceral than its predecessors.

By 2003, added to Georgia’s list are two important Taos tourist destinations of the twenties and thirties. I reasoned that specific places and images might serve as contrapuntal ballast to her emotional disorder as well as locate the protagonist in a popular tourist destination of her time. Therefore, I inserted the line “The Holy Lake! – The Sacred Mountain!” after “So alive, I could crack at any moment!”\(^{39}\)

As has already been noted, in each new version, the language and emotion was intensified; however, the 2003 version benefited from the addition of another “color” for Georgia: her sense of sexual adventure. There had been lovers apart from Stieglitz: men, such as Jean Toomer and Tony Luhan, and women: Mabel Dodge Luhan, Leah Harris, and Rebecca Strand, (Paul Strand’s wife.) I decided:

\[
\text{If I’m telling the truth, I’m telling the truth [about Jean Toomer] – just as I really need to consider Leah and Mabel and Tony. I don’t know what’ll come up – but I’ll let the people tell their own stories.}^{40}\]

Therefore, from 2003 onwards, the snake monologue segued from D.H. Lawrence’s admonition to “be alone” to Georgia’s coy admission:

\[
\text{But not quite alone. I’m here with Paul’s wife, Beck Strand. We were meant to stay at the Pink House – where Lawrence stayed – but the light’s not right for painting, so we’re back at The Big House, under the roof of our hostess, Mabel Dodge Luhan, until she can set up a studio for me. Mabel is the most feminine person I ever met – flowing diaphanous garments, bold colors, Sphinx-like in her gold turban. Her fourth husband – a majestic Pueblo leader, Tony Luhan – tall, strong, black braids to his waist, turquoise jewelry on his hands and chest.}\]

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Tony’s brothers come, wearing only loincloths and feathers – glistening bodies, rippling muscles – dancing to a throbbing drum – Wine! Peyote! – I dance, too! – Tony’s voice -- giving me an actual physical thrill -- chants: “We are all birds in the same nest.” And it’s true! There’s something about the air here! Throwing caution to the winds -- when Tony goes to Santa Fe, I go to Mabel. When he returns, I share a bed with Beck. And when Mabel isn’t around – well, next to my Stieglitz, I’ve found nothing finer than Mabel’s Tony. This place! – wonderful – nobody ever told me how wonderful! Mabel calls Taos “the dawn of the world”.

At this point, as was seen above, the monologue returns to the section concerned with “freezing in the mountains.” The pre-production script of the 2004 monologue received more of an edit than a rewrite. The basis and shape from the 2003 script remained; it was simply rendered more economical and, consequently, more playable. For example, the dialogue discussing an “actual physical thrill” was removed when it became apparent that the actor could depict that.

Interestingly, from 1999 until the present 2007 script, after the section about “freezing…burning…and brimming….”, all the monologues veer off and allude to the unwholesome influence of “the other woman”, Dorothy Norman. In 1997, under the dramaturgical guidance of Parkins, it reads:

The snake in me had to shed its skin. And that meant shedding Stieglitz. Oh, she’s there for the shiny bits. Like a crow, attracted to the promise of reflected sunlight. But I have the sun itself and the land of “The Faraway” – it’s like a love affair one knows better than to try to be free of – So here I am poised between two landscapes: the “Where I’m Going” and the “Where I’ve Been”…and wondering what took me so long.

By late 2001, independent of Parkins, I had developed it to:

The snake in me, shedding its skin.
But where to place Stieglitz? And how to deflect Norman? – Oh, she’s tracking shiny things. Circling, like a crow, lured by the promise of reflected sunlight. But I have the sun itself. And a land I call “The Faraway”. It’s a love affair I know better than to try to be free of – So here I am – caught between two landscapes: New Mexico and New York. No. I won’t go back. The snake has shed its skin.

The most striking difference between the two versions is the latter O’Keeffe’s empowerment: she refuses to return to the subservience and limitation of a life with her
husband. In addition, the verbs of second paragraph are more active, (for example, the “shedding” of the first version is now echoed with “tracking” rather than the tepid “attracted to.”) Moreover, the evocative “she’s tracking shiny things, lured by the promise of reflected sunlight” is a palpably more-sinister reference to Dorothy than “Oh, she’s there for the shiny bits. Like a crow, attracted to the promise of reflected sunlight.” The second version is identical to the one used in the 2004 performance, and it remains in this form.

These variations of the Snake Monologue illustrate how I developed powerful images in order to express Georgia’s mental state as well as employing enhanced language and rhythmic variation to reflect her response to a new experiential palette. In this way, the Snake Monologue, an offshoot of a stream-of-consciousness musing, became one of my play’s major evocations of O’Keeffe’s character, and it also marked a moment when I introduced what later became one of my recurring sub-themes: the “Bad Georgia! Naughty Georgia!”, who dared to explore her sexuality.44

In 2003, Rae Allen suggested I had been sanitizing O’Keeffe, and she wanted me to show the protagonist’s sensuality, promiscuity, and bisexuality. My identification with Georgia O’Keeffe resulted in an initial resistance to go in this direction. O’Keeffe would not have wanted her memoir to include such private matters. Nonetheless, I considered Allen’s advice:

Reading it [the play] last night[,]….it seems a bit thick with details but thin on not exactly sensuality – Rae [Allen] is right though – it’s thin on her spirit – it is missing an aspect of her essence…45

It was soon evident that the inclusion of her Taos escapades within the Snake Monologue introduced a sub-theme rich for exploration. Soon after, I found ways to enhance other personal interludes. In the following, I consider the O’Keeffe-Stieglitz relationship, O’Keeffe’s affair with Leah Harris, and O’Keeffe’s affair with Jean Toomer.

The “Molly Bloom” Monologue
In depicting O’Keeffe’s early intimacies with Stieglitz, I decided to expand what I had in
the style of James Joyce’s “Molly Bloom.” \(^{46}\) This would reinforce the sensuality of the
moment for Georgia. In February, 2003, I had resolved to include intimate episodes of
O’Keeffe’s life: “If I’m telling the truth, I’m telling the truth,” and I mentioned doing “a
rough sketch of ‘Molly Bloom’/‘Georgia’…to parallel ‘Bloom’….” \(^{47}\)

I had not written anything on the relationship between O’Keeffe and Stieglitz until 2001,
apart from an indignant confrontation wherein the young painter upbraids the impresario
for showing her artwork without her permission. Then, in sequences I created depicting
image after image etched onto consciousness, and presented in rapid-fire succession, I
began to explore O’Keeffe’s and Stieglitz’s early love. I referred to these moments as
“Time Frames,” an expression inspired by the title of a book, *Time In a Frame,*
*Photography and the Nineteenth-Century Mind,* by Alan Thomas. \(^{48}\) Eventually, there
were a number of these Time Frames throughout the play. The first Time Frame to deal
with the burgeoning O’Keeffe-Stieglitz romance covered a period when their lives
fluctuated between summers and family at Lake George, and the critical milieu of the
city, with an escape to York Beach, followed by another return to New York. The
earliest version of this Time Frame episode, evoking their first summer at Lake George,
included this rather tepid depiction of their sex life:

After the daily family lunch, we escape the table before the others and race to our
room for our “nap.” No one is fooled: Alfred, undoing my buttons as we
scramble up the stairs like greedy, eager children. After the evening meal, we
row out on the lake and watch the light disappear behind the mountains. We’re
very happy here. I was never so happy in my life. Every woman should have
Stieglitz for a lover. \(^{49}\)

James Joyce’s “Molly Bloom”, however, inspired a transformation that revealed the
urgency and passion of Stieglitz’s and Georgia’s sexual relationship:

After lunch, escaping the table - fooling no one - for our “nap”, yes - Alfred,
undoing my buttons, yes - racing each other up the stairs - intensely sane - mad –
children, yes, oh yes – delicate arching filigree of the cool iron bed, a breeze,
billowing the white lace curtains, yes – Alfred, caressing me as if I were a
butterfly’s wing, yes, yes – run with a pine branch next to my ear and I can hear
the pine trees singing, um, yes - sunsets in Texas – flowers that grow, the
courage to make Art – a miracle, and a total light! -yes – Oh, yes! – Life! - Oh!
Oh! Yes! – After dinner, rowing on the Lake, the light, disappearing behind the mountains. Being…? - Very happy. [a discovery] The happiest six months of my life. Every woman should have Stieglitz. For a lover.

O’Keeffe’s “Molly-Bloom”-style orgasm resonates with the expressive and experimental energy of the post-World War I period in which O’Keeffe and Stieglitz lived. I had also incorporated a number of important experiences for O’Keeffe within “Molly Bloom” to make the moment uniquely hers. They included the phrases: “a butterfly’s wing”, “run with a pine branch next to my ear and I can hear the pine trees singing, “sunsets in Texas”, and “flowers that grow.” Other phrases, in the original monologue, but deleted by Rae Allen, because she felt the longer monologue did not serve the overall shape of the piece included: “[sunsets in Texas], like the ocean but wide, wide land”, “the barn of my childhood”, and my favorite, “a mystery and a total light”.

In editing my original “Molly-Bloom” soliloquy to a more manageable length, the overall journey of the play may have been served, but, personally, I missed some of the rich imagery, in particular, towards the end of the speech. My particular affection for this phrase stems from O’Keeffe’s first visual memory of “the brightness of light – light all around.” In the current script that phrase is, once again, in the speech.

The Leah Harris Relationship

Another of O’Keeffe’s intimacies that I dramatized was a lesbian relationship with a fellow teacher in Texas, Leah Harris. According to the biographer, Benita Eisler, “by early spring, 1917, Leah and Georgia had become intimate friends; however, they were probably not lovers until Leah confessed her homosexual attraction for O’Keeffe the following year.” It was only then that “Georgia grasped the meaning of incidents, hints and behavior that had earlier eluded her.” In a letter to Strand, in March, 1918, she revealed her own change of heart, brushing his overtures aside with “I don’t seem to be me – I seem to be someone else – or something else,” and, by April, another letter warned Strand that “she and Leah…were two of a kind…both cold women.”

As early as July of 2001, I had been puzzling over Leah Harris’s role in O’Keeffe’s life:
I believe I can use a quote from O’Keeffe regarding two women walking alone and being safe as segue into Leah Harris. It mustn’t be trite – it must have a quiet dignity as befits Leah, herself.\textsuperscript{58}

A few days later, I continued, “I’m even clearer on Leah Harris. She’s going to be honorable and pure in her love for Georgia.”\textsuperscript{59} I believe I did, eventually do justice to Leah Harris. What began as a small paragraph in 2001 (quoted below) progressed to a series of scenes and letters as a part of The Kaleidoscope Series One and Two.\textsuperscript{60}

The 2004 script gives the Harris-O’Keeffe relationship a chance to develop gradually. Initially, O’Keeffe left teaching because the local doctors feared she had contracted influenza (and possibly even a touch of the tuberculosis that had killed her mother) and Leah is her willing nurse.\textsuperscript{61} The next moment, Georgia remarks:

\begin{center}
\textbf{There’s no wind – so still and so light – Two women, walking alone at night, nothing to be afraid of because there’s nothing out here. And no one else in the world, but me and Leah Harris, the finest girl in Texas.}\textsuperscript{62}
\end{center}

Several of O’Keeffe’s separate utterances have been strung together to comprise this moment. [Original words are, again, noted in red.] During this quiet, stillness Leah chooses to declare her love, and the two begin their sexual relationship:

\begin{center}
[LEAH:] Crackling campfire, sparkling stars.

[GEORGIA:] And Leah, eyes like diamonds reflected in flame.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{center}

Early in the play’s creation the Leah Harris material evolved into a dialogue. The only monologue that remains is the paragraph quoted above. The reasoning is obvious: a relationship requires two people, two points of view and two voices.

The Jean Toomer Liaison

Another relationship that warrants examination is her healing liaison with the Negro poet and novelist, Jean Toomer. In the 2003 version of the play, Georgia first mentions Toomer in a dialogue with the Doctor after she has recovered from her nervous breakdown. She is heading up to The Hill at Lake George, where she will be joined by “a friend”: 
[GEORGIA:] Jean Toomer is coming. He wrote the novel CANE. Such a quiet gentle man.

[DOCTOR:] Toomer is a Negro?

[GEORGIA:] Toomer is a friend. A French, German, Welsh, Dutch, Indian, Negro friend.

By 2008, the above started as a monologue:

Alfred and his New York ways: too many people too much talk. Why is it people make me feel like a hobbled horse? So I’ve escaped for a winter at Lake George. All alone, and I need it that way --Well, not quite alone – there’s my gift from Anita – my new kitten, Long Tail– all soft and white and secure in my love. Maybe I love her too much – maybe it’s something in me that I have to spend on something alive that is beautiful to me. Once upon a time there was the painting. Now? Nothing worth putting on canvas.

[JEAN:] Hello?

I’ve asked Jean Toomer to visit. Jean is a friend. A French, German, Jewish, Welsh, Dutch, Indian, Negro friend. Such a quiet, gentle man. He wrote the novel, Cane. Jean understands loss. His wife was my friend. She died in childbirth last year...

Then it too became a dialogue:

[GEORGIA:] Jean. You came.
[JEAN:] Of course. (a pause) The Hill is so different in winter.
[GEORGIA:] I like it better.
[JEAN:] Fire, inside. Snow, outside. Quiet all around. I like it better, too.

Only then does the play revert to a monologue:

In the white house, at the edge of the frozen lake with Jean – we don’t talk – just listen. To the snow falling thick and fast – real winter snow. Not talking seems to give a great quiet that makes the whole house feel good. The world here is a lovely white. All white - seems so quiet and nice.
The above paragraph had been edited from letters written by O’Keeffe in the winter of 1933-1934 from Lake George. As a consequence, it is an accurate rendering of O’Keeffe’s own voice; however, by 2004 and later, 2008, the play had been opened up into a three-person piece. The above monologue ended with “makes the whole house feel good”, the Toomer-O’Keeffe exchanges benefited from being expanded into a dialogue. However, in both instances, O’Keeffe’s voice is still preserved.

In the interchanges between O’Keeffe and Stieglitz, Harris, and Toomer, my decision to explore the painter’s sensuality supplied an additional layer to an already-complex character. In addition, it afforded me an opportunity to enhance the use of imagery, utilize literary allusion, heighten language, experiment with rhythms, and display O’Keeffe’s contradictory impulses. Also, as noted in the examination of the evolution of the Leah Harris material from monologue to dialogue, relationships are better served as two-person exchanges thus affording the viewer a glimpse at both points of view.

The Breakdown Monologue
The last monologue whose evolution warrants detailed consideration is O’Keeffe’s Radio City Music Hall breakdown. The problem it presented me was how to create a plausible, playable, artistic catalyst for what might very well prove to be the climax of the play. By 1999, I had not yet attempted to solve this riddle, but I continued to puzzle over it. For example, on 18 June, 2001, I noted: “Ironic, isn’t it? A tumor, a breakdown, a Toomer – there’s symmetry.” By July, I mused:

I’m toying with [some kind of] Jump Cut from “He’s the only man who dares to love me” to “I’ve found a lump in my breast”…straight through to breakdown…can the Critics be included in the breakdown? Or is that too late?

However, it was not until September, that I was able to report, “I wrote the breakdown and Act II until page 51”.

The section I had written was captured in a Time Frames sequence: in rapid succession, Georgia displays her flower paintings and experiences her first brush with critical disdain. A lump is discovered in her breast and she has “named it Mrs. Stieglitz.”
chronicles its operation and paints her memory of it. Jump-cut: “Another lump. This time I’ve named it Dorothy Norman.” Onward, to Alfred’s indignation at the idea of her painting a mural:

Murals?! – That Mexican disease? Don’t presume I would trivialize my own investment in our “team” and deign to mirror the complicity of Diego Rivera and Freda Kahlo! You can prostitute your art for the politics of workers and peasants without me!\footnote{70}

In 2001, the first version of Georgia’s breakdown monologue was massively overwritten with its over-use of descriptive phrases slowing down the back-and-forth momentum of the piece and rendering it almost unplayable. I needed to find a better way.

I had used a portion of a D. H. Lawrence poem in the Snake Monologue, so I considered the possibility of including a few more literary allusions to flavor this moment. This is how lines from Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” were adapted for the monologue. The lines: “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. I do not think that they will sing to me”, and “‘Til human voices wake us and we drown”, in my monologue, became “I think I can hear mermaids singing…Mermaids breathe beneath the waves. Don’t wake me. Let me drown.”\footnote{72}

In 2004, as a part of the build up to The Breakdown, I had incorporated references from Stieglitz’s favorite play, Faust. Georgia, wryly comments on her lack of self-worth in comparison to Alfred’s lover, Dorothy Norman, a woman of fortune who had recently given birth to the child that Stieglitz refused O’Keeffe: “So now we’re \textit{playing Faust}: “I’m Eternal-Empty”; she’s Eternal-Feminine.”\footnote{73}

I had still not solved the problem of why the Radio City Music Hall mural project provoked Georgia’s breakdown, as I noted in my \textit{Journal}:

…If there are no blossoms, no running paint – what is the visual catalyst for the madness?! The blank canvas like a box crushing her beneath its whiteness? – the multi-images she has projected onto the canvases of her life?…it has a forced quality which doesn’t correlate to all that “Full Fathom Five” [from Shakespeare’s \textit{Tempest}] imagery which has been integrated throughout the text – birds, snakes, and fishes – the Biblical two-by-two; the Darwinian Genesis…\footnote{74}
Happily, with the insertion of one more “shard of a poem” by D. H. Lawrence, I came upon this eminently playable solution:

I’m inside a big white box, anticipating my visions.
There, for floating camellias. There, for skyline.
All around, for stars and sky. And, there, a ghost-like tower, tilting closer --
leaning towards me – It’s not the tower moving – It’s the canvas, coming unglued!
The walls -- not properly primed.
Touching spongy wetness -- Who’s been watering the walls?!
Flowers, oozing – petals, peeling: “He loves her. He loves me not.”
Blossoms, pressing me under; buildings, pushing me down.
I’m a water lily slipping through the waves.
Past,
“….Fishes
With their gold, red eyes, and green-pure gleam, and under-gold…”
I think I can hear mermaids singing:
Of treasure, buried deep. Of cooling jade and glowing pearl.
Mermaids breathe beneath the waves. Don’t wake me. Let me drown.75

Interestingly, this most personal of moments includes no direct quotations from the real O’Keeffe. With the concise imagery of blossoms, water, stars, jewels, mermaids, I felt the material was strong enough to stand on its own. I had devoted a great amount of the play to the incorporation of her exact words. By the time I came to writing this monologue, I had sufficiently imbued her spirit to be able to experiment with the hypothetical “if” (i.e. “If I were O’Keeffe in the powder room of Radio City Music Hall and all the experiences to date had befallen me, what would I see, think, feel?”) There is no written documentation to inform us what she actually said or did during her emotional unraveling. Hence, it was necessary to imagine her state and responses. This conjecture formed the basis for one of the most visually-striking monologues in my play.

2.5 Answering Hogrefe’s Questions

In Part One I considered a series of questions posed by O’Keeffe’s biographer Jeffrey Hogrefe. Now I wish to return to these questions.

1. How did a mad schoolteacher from the Texas Panhandle become the best-known American woman artist of this century?
This question, more than the others, concerns itself with the over-riding arc of my play. My enquiry was into the “how” of the icon and artist, O’Keeffe. Consequently, no specific monologue or dialogue addresses this question; however, many of the monologues examined above include partial answers. The Corpse Dream Monologue shows a troubled woman of strong imagery willing to try almost anything to regain her vision and art. Her reversals and editing portray someone of steely will and self-control. Her wry admission that “I guess I’m not doing either too well, am I?” regarding her ability to paint and function shows an uncompromising honesty. Her reluctance to discuss Stieglitz suggests a woman desperately trying to protect the purity at the core of her art.

The Feather Monologue is a hindsight evaluation of her life. “Hindsight” is ironic because the artist is now blind. Apart from the blindness, “the mad schoolteacher” has found ways to make peace with her life’s confrontations. She has wisdom and acceptance. She is fond and even a bit amazed that Stieglitz continues to “haunt” her dreams. Her strongest regret, though, is her loss of sight and her inability to translate her inner visions to canvas any more. Thus, a picture emerges of someone who loves making art and being unable to do so is a great sorrow.

The Leah Harris and Jean Toomer exchanges illustrate the sacrifices of people she was willing to make to get to her Art. In the former case, she relinquishes creature comforts and a caring heart for a chance to go to New York for a year. In the latter, although there’s “nothing worth putting on canvas”, O’Keeffe hopes her time with Jean Toomer will heal her. Indeed, after he goes she writes him “I’m even painting again, so everything is very nice.” These two monologue/dialogues show the lengths O’Keeffe was willing to go for her art.

The Breakdown Monologue exemplifies O’Keeffe’s distress at her loss of control in her ability to create art. Once again, the importance of her art to her life is paramount.

2. What connected her madness to her art?
The Corpse Dream Monologue illustrates O’Keeffe’s attempts to keep her madness at bay in order to return to her art. The Molly Bloom Monologue flirts with the edges of madness and ecstasy. The Snake Monologue shows O’Keeffe pushing her personal limits and, by doing so, risking exploring the edges of madness in order to regain her sanity. Finally, the Breakdown Monologue illustrates the extent her art drove her life. By losing it, she also lost her mind.

3. Was she a lesbian?
Her experiences with Leah Harris and, later, Mabel Dodge Luhan and Beck Strand (as illustrated by the Leah Harris exchange and the Snake Monologue) suggest that O’Keeffe enjoyed sexual experiences with both men and women.

4. What connected her sexuality to her art?
The Molly Bloom Monologue, more than any other, shows a direct correlation between her imagery and image-making and the fecundity of her sexual experiences with Alfred Stieglitz. Although not considered above, the play also contains a critical commentary on Stieglitz’s nude photographs of the painter and O’Keeffe’s indignation and self-protectiveness regarding their fantastic interpretations.

5. From what was she running?
In the Corpse Dream Monologue, she is running from anything that will separate her from recovery and a return to her artistry. The Feather Dream Monologue has her both running from her blindness and facing it squarely. The Leah Harris Exchange and the Jean Toomer Monologues/Dialogues have her running from (once again) anything that interferes with her experiencing her artistic expression to its fullest. But they are also a “running to” any ends that will serve her needs. In the Snake Monologue she is running from madness, oppression, anything that will sever her from her True Self, and again, she is also running to experiences that will return her to sanity, freedom, and her true essence. Lastly, the Breakdown Monologue has her using madness as an escape from the pressures of her artistic perfectionism and the oppression of an unsupportive, philandering spouse.
6. What were her inner sources of strength?

All the monologues/dialogues above contain elements illustrative of her tremendous self-control, will, determination to make her art at any cost, self-honesty, purity of intent, and passion for life and experience. Where and how these originated can be traced to her farm upbringing, steely mother, religious schools, formal art training, and the personal hardships that she chose to overcome again and again. However, finally one must conclude that her strength was a part of her essential Self and the truer she remained to that Self the stronger she became. All the monologues considered above (and others within the play) include aspects of this commitment to Self.

Monologues are pieces of the puzzle. The protagonist reveals herself through confiding in the audience: sharing her insights and concerns, puzzling over issues; however, they represent parts of the whole picture. The entire puzzle reveals itself only when all the pieces are put into place. This “connecting of the dots” is the result of an entire play and not simply a monologic recounting of isolated experiences. For the audience to fully understand O’Keeffe’s trajectory, the complete play’s arc requires examination.

2.6 Uncovering the Theme and Sub-themes

Having examined the monologues (some of which evolved into dialogues) it would be appropriate to study the shape of the entire play and its evolution thereto. O’Keeffe could be notoriously elliptical and contradictory about her approaches to her work. In an interview with Perry Miller Adato she commented: “It’s as if my mind creates shapes that I don’t know about…I get this shape in my head, and sometimes I know where they come from and sometimes I don’t.”76 I had wanted to approach my own work with a similar unknowingness; however, I had, on a contrary impulse, compiled a tremendous amount of information about the painter and her life. Now, I needed to make some decisions about what I wanted to say. As early as 1994, I had noted some thematic possibilities:

Shattered by a dominant male’s cruelty despite her clinging to a life raft of individuality and artistic identity [O’Keeffe] did the best she could within the limitations of their time and society, a theme, which interests me.77
One of my initial engagements with O’Keeffe was through her self-stated quest of “making my unknown known.” My idea was to consider her making her unknown known… “[as it] plays itself out against the backdrop of her place in history…[and reveals] a woman of her time, place, needs and talents….”

This became an important sub-theme in my play. Indeed, as I observed in Part One, her special “kind of nerve” helped her forge ahead despite her fears. In support of this “pressing onward” stance, the real O’Keeffe had cautioned students of her life: “Where I was born and where and how I’ve lived is unimportant. It’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest.” This statement suggests a stoic acceptance of life and the sub-theme of the choices she made on the journey to “making her unknown known.” Pursuing this sub-theme led me to my principal theme in 1999:

The dominant theme, of “making her unknown known” in A Brush with Georgia O’Keeffe plays itself out against the backdrop of her place in history: For a woman of her time, place, needs and talents, desperate measures were needed to live and work, and these measures extracted certain penalties not discernible when distanced from the Legend, O’Keeffe, but experienced by those near to her and by O’Keeffe herself.

Finally, I had articulated my theme (highlighted in red.) In addition, other sub-themes were surfacing:

- the artist as subject and celebrity, woman as artist, the subject of patronage, female sexuality in turn-of-the-century America, the responsibility and challenge of originality, the edge of madness and perfection, [the need for] “A Room of One’s Own”, [and] the impingement of family (including a husband)…

Once again, as has happened numerous times in this process, I found justification for these choices in how O’Keeffe herself described her success:

I think that what I have done is something rather unique in my time and that I am one of the few who gives our country any voice of its own – I claim no credit – it is only that I have seen with my own eye and that I couldn’t help seeing with my own eye… I do not know why I am so different.

This “difference” was another aspect I endeavored to incorporate into my work.
An evaluation of the 2008 script shows a very clear thematic presence. O’Keeffe, at the end of Act One, is a determined and desperate woman who journeys to New York for Stieglitz’s assistance in enabling her to “make her unknown known” through her art. This reinforced the first part of the theme I had articulated back in 1999. Certainly, the act of a penniless schoolteacher, who risked penury and opprobrium by throwing away employment, and security, and entering into an illicit arrangement with a married man, suggests a willingness to take “desperate measures” to achieve her goal.

If Act One represents O’Keeffe’s trajectory to a perceived freedom, any illusion of a “free ride” is quickly shattered. Stieglitz is a demanding, patriarchal, autocrat. She loses her autonomy and independence in a collusive liaison:

We made a pact, you see? I get my “year to paint”; he gets me for eternity. His favorite play is Faust. And my consolation? Well, I don’t like being second or third or fourth. That’s why I get on with Stieglitz: with him, I feel first. I’m where I belong: with the only man who dares to love me.84

This paragraph and all that has preceded it in Act Two reinforced the darker portion of the second part of the theme “desperate…measures extracted certain penalties not discernible when distanced from the Legend, O’Keeffe, but experienced by those near to her and by O’Keeffe herself.”85

There are “penalties” exacted with the public opprobrium wrought by the nude photographs, the tedium of uninspiring “summer and summer and summer[s]” at Lake George, and her husband’s manipulation, discouragement, and control over her work.86 More “penalties” followed: misinterpretations of her art, bouts with cancer, Alfred’s public infidelity with Norman, and, then, a nervous breakdown.87 It was only after her breakdown and treatment that a wiser O’Keeffe had the courage to face a problem that had probably been secretly plaguing her, even as she endured her “penalties”:

I know my career, as it has become, I owe to Stieglitz and his power and influence upon contemporary art in America – but I also wonder…[about] Paths. Choices. When I was out there on the Plains – living my landscapes – alone with my own “music”…my work crystallized – because my vision was crystalline. And the form took care of itself because I kept my vision focused. On seeking to
make my unknown known, I felt almost capable of catching – crystallizing – a clearer vision of life….

Indeed, what greater sacrifice can an artist make than the relinquishing of her own vision? Realizing the only way she can survive is to reclaim that lost legacy (and using The Snake Monologue as her vehicle) a healed O’Keeffe “sheds her skin” to be re-born in New Mexico. Reconnected to her essence in a land she calls “The Faraway”, she has declared her independence.

After Stieglitz dies, a ruthless O’Keeffe verbally lashes the usurper, Dorothy Norman, and unexpected visitors to her ranch in New Mexico experience a similar reception. The non-malignant brushes with cancer in the 1920s, as described in my play, in real life eventually resulted in a double mastectomy in 1955. In spite of subsequent trials, once Stieglitz was gone, O’Keeffe was free to live in “her mad country” and be “a woman of her time, place, needs and talents…making her unknown known,” on her own terms.

These are the themes and sub-themes explored in A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe.

2.7 Shifting Shape of the Play
What had begun, back in 1997, as a series of disparate monologues, eventually became a three-person multi-layered play. Several factors need to be considered in tracing the metamorphosis of those early drafts into a script. These are the importance of rhythm to the emotional texture of the work; and how I chose to dramatize particular life events and how these contributed to the arc of the play, which was not always linear, and did not always parallel O’Keeffe’s actual life journey. The shaping process was also affected by the decisions I made in respect of the starts to both acts and to the end of the play, as well as the important decision to enlarge the piece from a mono-drama to a three-character work.

As discussed earlier, my original stimuli for the monologues were dreams. Realizing that dreams were a far-from-predictable source of inspiration, I found it necessary to chart the events of O’Keeffe’s life, and, then, use this time line as a basis for ten exploratory monologues. The number ten was arbitrarily chosen: I simply needed a
starting point for my work. Although I realized that this method would not produce a finished play, I reasoned that the monologues could become incorporated into a completed script sometime in the future. My topic selection was based upon the research I had done to date as well as stream-of-consciousness promptings. Considered below are rationales for the selection of those first ten monologue topics back 1997, and an exploration of the way they have been expanded and incorporated into the play’s current script.

2.7a Initial Ten Monologues

Monologue #1
The first monologue was inspired by the idea that, for an artist, her first memory of seeing might have been a profound one. Indeed, O’Keeffe commences her book about her work with “My first memory is of the brightness of light – light all around.” In my current script, the first Time Frames has an eight-month-old O’Keeffe, noting “Bright, white, light – all around! Bright is not dark.”

Monologue #2
Darkness, however, was the inspiration for the second monologue about how O’Keeffe retreated, like a wounded animal, during moments of great trauma. The “wounded animal” idea sprang from my reading about O’Keeffe retreating within during her bouts with cancer and when Stieglitz flaunted his affair with Norman. Even prior to these upheavals, O’Keeffe confessed: “I have to keep something of myself or I wouldn’t have anything left to give.” The Corpse Dream is the current manifestation of this early idea.

Monologue #3
O’Keeffe’s constant return to her own resources was reflected in her approach to her art in the third monologue. Her rigorous refusal to be influenced by anyone else’s ideas enabled her to develop her unique artistic expression. How she arrived at this approach I thought was an important moment in the play, and I have her write a letter to her friend, Anita, during a stultifying teaching stint in South Carolina, that she wants “to
start over new with my work – using ideas in my head that aren’t like what anyone has taught me, with only charcoal and paper.”

Monologue #4
Being loved by Stieglitz changed O’Keeffe’s life; therefore, their relationship was an obvious choice for a fourth monologue, as was the exploration of the early love and partnership. O’Keeffe’s relocation from Texas to New York at the end of Act One, and her pact with Stieglitz, commencing Act Two, are very much a part of the current script.

Monologue #5
Yet the relationship with Stieglitz also provoked a conflict between O’Keeffe the woman and O’Keeffe the artist, and this was the subject of the fifth monologue. The Stieglitz-Norman liaison was particularly galling to O’Keeffe because Alfred was captivated by the socialite’s post-partum, Madonna-like glow, a condition Alfred had denied the painter by refusing to permit her to conceive his child. The Time Frames concerned with O’Keeffe’s pre-breakdown cancer surgeries, with its radical jumps, reflects O’Keeffe’s embitterment and emotional turmoil in the 2008 version of my play.

Monologues #6 and #7
The sixth and seventh monologues portray O’Keeffe at her lowest ebb and needing help to become strong again. They were introduced as a contrast to the image of the indomitable, public icon. Both O’Keeffe’s breakdown and the Corpse monologue explore aspects of this subject. After her plea for help, she retreats to regenerate. The solitude of Lake George in the wintertime, the nurturing by Jean Toomer, and her journey to Santa Fe to “shed her skin” like a snake are based upon this idea.

Monologues #8 and #9
O’Keeffe’s final years in the desert evoked the eighth and ninth monologues which became incorporated into a jubilant Indian dance with the chows celebrating her New Mexican solitude. Her solitude was something she was fierce in protecting, as the new
opening of my play, wherein an “ornery” O’Keeffe rides roughshod over trespassers, attests.\textsuperscript{105}

Monologue #10
The final monologue is concerned with her blindness, of which O’Keeffe was neither proud nor denied, as I originally imagined. She accepts her Fate, although regretful that the wonderful shapes she once transmuted onto canvas and paper are “grouping and regrouping in my head.” Reassured by her companion, Juan Hamilton, that her sky is still BLUE, with the wisdom of age, she informs us “that BLUE will last forever.”\textsuperscript{106}

2.7b More Monologues
Within two months, I had applied myself sufficiently to expand the list to include many more events. Jeffrey Hogrefe had suggested I start the play in New Mexico, then deal with her break with Stieglitz, Lake George, and Norman.\textsuperscript{107} Consequently, I experimented with the play’s opening: “Instead of a laid-back beginning, I’ve got Georgia killing a rattlesnake while talking,” and I created a new list of dramatic episodes.\textsuperscript{108}

In subsequent drafts, from 1999 onwards, the list remained basically the same. What varied from version to version was the degree of importance given to each episode as well as the order in which events occurred. Usually, changes to the amount of information supplied within each topic reflected editing within an episode rather than the total excision of it. Invariably, the play was over-long and over-written, and too much weight had been given to her formative years. Consequently, it was the earlier material that was truncated. Meanwhile, the actual shaping of the script, discussed at greater length, below, was a result of input from my directors/dramaturges, advice from informed professionals, and changes I explored to improve the work’s arc and flow.

2.7c More Shifting Shape of the Play
Seeking a key to re-shaping the piece, in July, 2000, I examined:

…the structure of the work – see if the shape supports my supposed theme – “her time, her place exacted a huge price and demanded extreme choices”…\textsuperscript{109}
However, the issue was not thematic: many of the themes were already supported within independent monologues. What the play had yet to demonstrate were O’Keeffe’s contradictory impulses and erratic mood swings. Sensing this was my next problem; I sought its solution in a variance of rhythmic styles.\textsuperscript{110}

As early as 1997, I complained: “O’Keeffe lacks drive. What do I do about that?”\textsuperscript{111} I had not yet discovered the importance of rhythm to the play. Nonetheless, my instinct to group the monologues under various headings expressed an early intimation of the importance of the work’s rhythm.

Having established the device of the Time Frames, I began referring to the landscapes, the slower, lingering monologues, as “spots in time”, a phrase I recall from Carl Woodring’s commentary on Wordsworth’s epic poem, “The Prelude.”\textsuperscript{112} Wordsworth observed, “there are in our existence spots of time”; however, to Woodring, they could more appropriately be called “spots of timelessness…occurrences that elicit moral associations.”\textsuperscript{113} Later adopting Wordsworth’s approach, Woodring believed “Marcel Proust practiced similar associations of patterned sense-impression for the recovery of time past.”\textsuperscript{114} My reason for choosing this phrase was that, to an artist, a painting was a “patterned sense-impression” frozen in space, hence, a likely place to begin. I found the concept of “spots in time” a particularly useful designation for the landscapes that gave the visually-galvanized O’Keeffe a reason for pause.

Meanwhile, I was searching for a means to articulate the emotional equivalent of another form of her seeing. I was at a loss as to how to depict experiences that were beyond her ability to assimilate at the time, images “moving so fast I can’t see the spokes;” however, I felt confident that another form would reveal itself:

The challenge is to discover a mode of expression that parallels O’Keeffe’s abstract vision. In short, if, to O’Keeffe, “a painting isn’t any good unless it’s good in the abstract sense,” neither is a play of her life. But what abstraction would serve?\textsuperscript{115}

It was then that I remembered the importance of music to her world: O’Keeffe believed that painting was “visual music.” Moreover, she was an accomplished pianist, and, at
one point in her life, she had been torn between becoming an artist or a musician. The rhythm in music could have a real impact upon the shaping of this work. When looking for “found objects” as possible windows into O’Keeffe’s psyche, I selected a violin as the instrument that resonated with her: pure, capable of variation of rhythm and expression, demanding of its practitioners, expressing melancholy or jubilation, as required. My impression of a violin’s multiple aptitudes and styles prompted me to explore the juxtaposition of non-traditional rhythms as an expression of O’Keeffe’s erratic energies. Then, because I began to suspect the “drive” that seemed to be lacking might have to do with the necessity for variance in rhythmic approach, I revisited the monologues. I discovered that I had been using four main writing/playing styles, each with its own rhythm:

Naturalistic exchanges – between O’Keeffe and her psychiatrist, in her letters, interactions with Stieglitz, Anita, Ida, Jean, and other characters providing a grounding in reality and, often, the jumping-off point of the less-traditional portions of the play.

The Time Frames -- segued images etched onto the consciousness of the artist. Each Time Frame sequence bridges years like a separate snapshot and moves us forward to the next important moment. They are visual haikus akin to cinematic jump cuts.

The Landscapes -- (freeze-framed “spots in time”) creating moments of pause for O’Keeffe. They are lingering paintings-in-words of places. They are invariably moments for pause, reflection, and rejuvenation.

The Kaleidoscope series -- depicting a “world going so fast I can’t see the spokes” – life experiences moving too quickly for immediate assimilation.

Happily, the idea of making her ultra-swift experiences “Kaleidoscopic”, (that is, rapid, inexplicable, unpredictable), variations in rhythm fell into place, reflecting the gamut of O’Keeffe’s different moods. The final question was, “What juxtaposition of these scenes, Time Frames, “Spots in Time”, and Kaleidoscopic adventures would best serve my thematic telling of a biographical dramatization of Georgia O’Keeffe?”

Equipped with a series of (mostly) sequential monologues that had been grouped in varying rhythmic styles, I was in a position to lift and rearrange these clumps of experience. Indeed, by 2001, I was concerned that the play’s somewhat linear
structure was “too easy, too one-dimensional,” and I puzzled over “how to increase her instability...while not confusing the audience?” The problem with a linear approach was its predictability: O’Keeffe’s behavior was erratic; therefore, a play about her life should be unpredictable.

I had initially been drawn to the idea of “rock-crow-sorrow. Death...[and its] extremes – the emotional swings against a wide, flat prairie.” I began to experiment with a re-sequencing of the material, adopting the “zig-zags of Texas...the zig-zags... – the swinging kaleidoscope.” Within weeks, I found that “the play is writing bits of itself...demanding its own shape.” After I had mixed up her story into its new non-linear form the Australian director, Michael Blakemore, offered concrete suggestions:

...take out the stage directions, use only the words. The stage directions cloud the arc of the piece, [and, as a director,] I prefer to see what comes up from the words.

I took Blakemore’s advice so that only the spoken text remained. Blakemore also noted “the chronology is confusing” and he advised that I needed to “assume that the audience knows nothing about her.” Following his advice, I reordered the sequences in order of occurrence and rewrote part of Act I, and all of Act II. My intention was to recover the clarity of a linear journey, but find places for the “zig-zag” that spoke of O’Keeffe’s contradictory impulses. I wanted to embrace the:

many shocking experiences (blindness, incest, traumatic ostracism)...[that] have forced her to reshape the framing of her life...So much of O’Keeffe’s story suggests a reinvention of Self. There’s a need to break free and feel the wind blow the life clean and away...there have been shattering illnesses, including temporary blindness, baldness, emotional exhaustion which required a rebirth and renewal...[yet] despite the shocking occurrences, she managed to integrate her life and art until it became almost a noh drama in its simplicity and its consciousness of the full meaning of form and action....

Meanwhile, it was becoming clear that a linear structure needed to be retained for continuity and sense; however, the play still needed some variation to its structure. Its clearest jumping off points were the beginnings and ends of acts, so I began to consider different ways to commence the play.

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In 1999, one of my many attempts included a blind O’Keeffe, awaiting Perry Miller Adato and the film crew for her documentary. Unfortunately, starting with a camera crew’s pending arrival suggested the play was going to be about the making of the documentary rather than about O’Keeffe’s life, so this opening was abandoned that same year in favor of above-noted suggestion from Hogrefe to begin in New Mexico. Hence, for a time, the Snake Monologue was the jumping off point for my play. What dramatic purpose could the “breaking free” serve for a celebrated “free-spirit”? After a snake-killing O’Keeffe, and a blind O’Keeffe, I decided to see if the Corpse Monologue, inspired by that first dream I had had back in 1995 was a better option. I reasoned that a broken and lost O’Keeffe would pique the curiosity of those only familiar with her indomitable and legendary status.

Consequently, by 2003, the play started in darkness, with a voice: “Georgia, 46, 1933.” Still in blackout, a testy-though-bruised O’Keeffe snaps, “What?”, a cue for the lights to come up, and the scene between Georgia and the Doctor began. The dialogue proceeded to badinage regarding the pros and cons of Freudian dream theory wherein O’Keeffe displays her familiarity with the popular Freudian symbolism of the day, until her need for assistance outweighs her need for a protective defense. Then, and only then, does she begin to tell how she saw herself as in my 1995 dream, “as a corpse, dressed in black.”

2.8 Lessons Learned from Public Exposure
In August, 2004, as a formality to being granted space for a full-scale production, a sit-down reading of the current script was presented at The WorkShop Theatre Company. A production was scheduled for later in the year, but given Allen’s and my instinctive need for a further restructuring of the play, I began toying with how much shaking up the opening could handle:

There has been a shift in the framing of …O’Keeffe…stretching the canvas of the play…it needs a new paradigm…the quest is for original unique singular self-expression – she came close to achieving it…how to include this overlay, this frame?
I liked the idea of a low-key beginning; however, Allen worried that the opening was too abrupt. She asked for quotations from “pertinent” sources that could possibly serve as a framework and springboard for the Doctor/Georgia exchange. One solution we tried was to commence with quotes by Athur Koestler, Thomas Grey, Wassily Kandinsky, Webster’s Dictionary, and O’Keeffe. After the lights came up, the dialogue proceeded as per the 2003 Doctor/Georgia exchange. For me, however, this solution was not a happy one: it seemed too esoteric, remote, and rarified.

By 2006, I tried starting with an unknown O’Keeffe: passionate for Truth about Art, uncertain about her future, perplexed about the meaning of Art, but determined to at least attempt to find an answer. The 2006 version, encouraged by Allen, who had suggested I mix up the life’s events even further, began with the “Dear Anita” letter, flashed back to meeting Anita, flashed back to three years earlier, when O’Keeffe had given up painting, moved forward, one year, to her resuming painting, etc. Understandably, my third “expert”, the biographer, Thomas Hauser, expressed concern because this back-and-forward chronology proved too confusing to follow. Eventually, bearing in mind Blakemore’s and Hauser’s counsel and disregarding Allen’s, I returned to a mostly sequential format; however, I still needed a good starting point. I was seeking an interesting and/or unusual way to introduce the protagonist, perhaps in a way unfamiliar to those who knew her art or her reputation. Yet, I also wanted to remain true to my idea of O’Keeffe.

I continue to puzzle over the opening of the play to this day, although I believe the current (2008) version comes very close to the ideal entry point into her life. I decided the play needed to have a bold opening with humor, historical grounding, and information about the kind of person O’Keeffe was. Returning to Jeffrey Hogrefe’s suggestion that I begin in New Mexico, I decided to borrow the episode recounted by Lisle about O’Keeffe’s response to unwanted visitors. The current opening goes like this:

It’s always the same: They want to see Georgia O’Keeffe. (facing audience) O’Keeffe’s front. (turning sideways) O’Keeffe’s side. (faces US) O’Keeffe’s rear. [a shrug] They won’t understand my art any better if they see how I live: It’s all there on the canvas. If people don’t get it, I don’t
care. Where I was born and where and how I live is unimportant – it’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest. You know, I’ve got wild turkeys in Abiquiu, New Mexico smarter than some of those folks that come barging into my world. I keep the birds in for pest control. Too bad they only eat grasshoppers! Monteverdi. I put a record on the stereo and those birds sit perfectly still on my window ledge until the piece is over. Imagine having wild turkeys who appreciate the genius of Monteverdi? Now you’ll tell everyone: “That O’Keeffe is a queer one!” Tell ‘em – Fuel my myth! Didn’t think I knew? I live in a desert not a vacuum! Hell, I’ve been through Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland again, McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, FDR, “Give ‘em Hell” Harry, “I like Ike”, and now JFK, (thank God because we almost got stuck with Nixon!) – Christ, Nixon?! - This country is going to the dogs! – Know how I know? I’ve got my radio. And my breeze through the pinon trees. That’s done it - Now you’ll tell everyone: “She’s as mad as a snake. Not only does she talk to the trees – the trees talk back!” Well, they do. I might like people better if they were trees. A world with no people in it: my pinons whisper and my mind makes shapes – sometimes I know where they from and sometimes I don’t. (stopping, to herself) What made me think of that? – When did I last think of that?

[Blackout]

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 44, The Sanitarium, Doctor’s Hospital, 1932.

[lights up]

DR. JANKS:

Miss O’Keeffe? [silence] Miss O’Keeffe, I asked about your dream…?

Georgia is back with her Doctor and poised for “The Corpse” Monologue.

Deciding on a way to start Act Two was less of a problem than finding a way to commence Act One. Because of the chronology established in Act One, the only requisite for the opening of Act Two was that it depict a point of change in O’Keeffe’s
existence. In the 2001 version of the script, this change was the Snake Monologue and her rebirth in New Mexico. By 2003, however, the return to a more-chronological script made for an overly-long first act. Thereafter, Act Two commenced with O’Keeffe’s journey to New York for a “year to paint” under the auspices of Alfred Stieglitz, which was, of course, a significant life changing event for her. Beginning a new act with her new life with Stieglitz seemed stronger than beginning her new life without him.

Other requests by Allen were to increase the various, repetitive, rhythmic segments:

Rae wants the Kaleidoscope to implode: each to build upon the previous to create a greater whole – as much could be said for Time Frames....

I addressed her concerns regarding the internal dynamic, finding ways to truncate subsequent repetitions, which resulted in an acceleration of emotional drive and pace. In the original (2001-2004) playing scripts, there were many repetitive images, and even some litanies: “I copy lace for advertising, lace for collars, lace for cuffs,” and “I am a puppet, Stieglitz puppet, trapped within a color wheel,” are examples. By the 2006 version, even before we hear from O’Keeffe, “society” is commenting on a woman of self-determination at a time when women were still considered chattels. “Bad Georgia. Naughty Georgia. Bad Georgia. Naughty Georgia” is admonition, encouragement, celebration, and condemnation, and, in its defiance, it introduces another sub-theme: the necessity of becoming a woman of independent action. I credit my second director with the vision to request the expansion of this phrase to a thematically repetitive utterance.

Consideration must now be given to the development of my play from a series of disparate monologues to a full-length work for a cast of three. As has already been noted, the decision to select important events in O’Keeffe’s life to serve as the basis for a series of monologues predisposed me to envision my play as a one-person piece. Nonetheless, by 2001, I realized that I needed a voice other than Georgia’s to give the Doctor/Georgia exchanges more dramatic thrust. I contemplated the idea of recording the Doctor and the other characters on tape.
Allen and I discussed the drawbacks of performing with pre-recorded material: there was the lack of spontaneity, the possibility of technical mishaps, and a danger of becoming “recording-like”, myself. Then, I learned that the Catskill Arts Society, for whom I was to do a staged reading, had no sound system. Although Parkins, and not Allen, was the director for the Catskill Arts Society production, this logistical “hiccup” compelled me to consider expanding the play into a work for three characters: Georgia, one woman as all the other women in O’Keeffe’s life, and one man portraying all the men. Interestingly, a mutual friend of Allen’s and mine, the Broadway director, Robert Kalfin, had made a similar suggestion as early as January, 2001, although Allen had initially vetoed the concept.

Allen organized a private reading of the draft for three actors on May, 2004; as a result of that, a public reading was performed on 14 August, 2004 at The WorkShop Theater Company’s Jewel Box space. Based upon audience interest and the flexibility afforded by the three-person format, The WorkShop Theater Company penciled the play in for a full-scale production in December that year.

Some final inclusions warrant discussion. I had initially employed literary allusion as a way of locating O’Keeffe in her time; however, this device proved too subtle. Following Thomas Hauser’s suggestion, I am inserting more historical and political references. This change is a recent one, and I am shocked that it came to my attention so late in the creative process. One of the crucial quotes from O’Keeffe that became central to the theme of my play, demonstrated her awareness of an artist’s relationship to the time she lived in:

…the things that I have done, the things I’ve been doing, have been in touch with my time, so that people have liked it, but I could’ve been much better [as a painter] and nobody noticed it….

My oversight of this crucial factor arose from the way in which the play was developed. As my initial explorations were in the first person and in a stream-of-consciousness style, the question of historically locating the character was not a consideration. However, following Hauser’s observation, I have included more actual historical facts
and names to assist audiences in placing O’Keeffe within her period. For example, the partial list of Presidents whose terms started and ended during her lifetime (see Appendix D) is a simple way to depict the scope of her life. The play’s impact is strengthened by this inclusion and other relevant historical pointers. I have even begun incorporating popular songs of the day. An ironic “Hello, my baby, Hello, my honey, Hello my goodtime summertime gal!” is sung by a defiant young Georgia after acknowledging her father’s abuse and a bit of “Row, Row, Row, Your Boat”, excised by Allen, has been reinserted preceding O’Keeffe’s “I should’ve been born a fish” in the breakdown.

2.9 Selecting a Title
Finally, a word should be said regarding the choice of title. Even O’Keeffe admitted, “Oh, it doesn’t just come.” Prior to picking up her brush, there is “a great deal of looking, seeing, and thought: I don’t start until I’m almost entirely clear [, otherwise,] it’s a waste of time and paint.” Initially, I romanticized O’Keeffe’s exodus to the desert and used the working title Desert Flower, (an homage to a phrase from a poem by Thomas Gray: “…full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness in the desert air.”) However, additional research revealed a woman neither “mute inglorious Milton” nor blushing maiden. Indeed, a play about O’Keeffe demanded a title that reflected her ambivalent desire to protect a private quest for self-expression balanced against her pursuit of a high-profile career in art. Happily, despite O’Keeffe’s assertion that artistic inspiration “doesn’t just come”, in this instance, it did. I had another of my dreams and awoke to: “A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe. I love it! It conveys the style and essence of the work.” Rather than my selecting the play’s title, through my final dream, the title selected my play.

2.10 A Consideration of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe Within the Genre of Biographical Drama
As noted in Part One, there are certain topics universal to many biographical dramatic works.
2.10a Conclusions Regarding the Nature of Biographical Drama

Invariably, the playwrights have depicted characters intent upon realizing their personal artistic vision. The degree of each protagonist’s success varies; however, they are each trying their best in their individual ways. Another common trait is that each character exhibits a willingness to let go of any misgivings and to “go for it” often despite the consequences. Because of this go-for-broke attitude, the idea that death and life are very close emerges. Also, the use of actual words uttered by the hero or heroine is a common feature. The nature of partnership (or the lack thereof) is a popular theme. Another is the subject’s struggle to emerge from obscurity. Linked to the issue of anonymity is the idea of being a woman artist in a man’s world. Natural consequences of this consideration include explorations of gender, homosexuality and bisexuality and even sexual molestation. A few of the plays studied in Part One question the part played by gender and sexuality in the act of creation. Another popular topic is the balancing of creativity and madness and creativity and excess (whether it be through alcohol, drugs, or destructive behavior). A number of the works consider the subjects’ artistic output as a substitute for children. Finally, the need for pragmatism, self-discipline and determination for any achievement as well as the singularity of memory are also common themes. In addition, because biographical drama, by definition, deals with a life, it is not surprising that dramatic narrative arcs often follow that life’s journey. Most works do not deal with the subject’s entire life. Rather, they often focus on a critical phase that is emblematic of a part of that life, whether it be the early years, (the inception of a personal artistic vision and its flowering), the middle years, (the difficulty of maintaining an independence of vision once fame is attained), or the later years, (the diminishing of personal powers despite a lifetime of achievement and success.) Regardless of the scope of a work, an important distinction between biographical drama and fictional drama is that, in the case biographical dramatic work, the focus of the play becomes the journey – not as concerned if the protagonist will succeed but when and how. Beyond an attention to the subject’s journey, scope of a life, internal and external conflicts, and historical context, biographical plays about creative artists infer that there are certain needs inherent in artists. To recapitulate, as noted above, key themes include the importance of having one’s own artistic vision, the dedication and drive to pursue it,
and the ruthlessness necessary to discard anything superfluous to one’s art. In pursuing his or her art, the artist, especially the female artist, frequently subjugates a yearning for children into her works of art and the role of a partner, whether lover or spouse, supportive or not, becomes crucial. Matters of life and death often weigh upon the protagonists. Other popular common threads include the struggle to emerge from anonymity, the polarities of creativity and madness, creativity and sexuality, as well as the singular nature of memory.

2.10b A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe As Biographical Drama

A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe exhibits many of the characteristics ascribed to biographical dramatic writing. Although my play focuses on the entire life of the painter, it is very much about her journey. My self-stated aim was to explore “what she has done with where she’s been” to paraphrase O’Keeffe. As my play makes clear, the choices she made were necessary to her artistic and personal survival. Preserving her personal artistic vision and the gift to translate that vision through the purest artistic expression corresponds to the common thread exhibited in the examined biographical dramatic works in Part One. In addition, my O’Keeffe shares the passion to proceed in her quest despite the consequences. With so many physical dramas (parental abuse, personal illnesses, her mother’s demise), another quality common in biographical drama is also exhibited: the twins poles of life and death. In exploring the relationship of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz, a sub-theme of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe is the nature of partnerships (both artistic and personal). O’Keeffe’s struggle to emerge from obscurity was also, in her case, a desire to remain obscure – as a means of preserving the precious and true within. Issues of gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and sexual abuse are considered in my play. In addition, as has been seen, the balancing of creativity and madness and art and sexuality are other topics in my play. Certainly, my O’Keeffe exhibits a pragmatism, self-discipline, and determination. She also yearns for children of her own. When these are denied her, her paintings become substitutes for those children. Through the use of flashbacks, musical and visual imagery, the singularity of memory is explored in A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe. Finally, I have borrowed the painter’s own words to provide a flavor and authenticity to her utterances. Having
examined my play in the light of criteria revealed in Part One to be common to many biographical dramas, I believe *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe* exemplifies the genre.

2.10c  **A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe** Within the Realm of Other Dramatizations About Georgia O’Keeffe

Also in Part One, I considered seven other works about the painter’s life. All of those works exhibited qualities recognized as inherent in biographical dramatic work. The themes they explored include madness and art, sexuality and art, the role of partnership, the quest for a pure artistic expression, the desire for recognition and success versus anonymity and penury, the determination to press onward despite opposition. Often, they have tried to weave the subject’s own words as seamlessly as possible so it is difficult to discern which are the subject’s and which the playwright’s. Most of the O’Keeffe dramatizations concern themselves with a part of the painter’s life. The most effective (in their true depiction of the artist, use of language and imagery, and successful exploration of themes and sub-themes) are *O’Keeffe!* by Lucinda MacDermott, *Georgia* by Jill Shearer, and *The Faraway Nearby* by John Murrell. MacDermott’s work focuses on the artist in her middle years (the difficulty of maintaining a purity of vision in the light of fame as well as the double-edged sword of partnership). The other two plays consider the artist’s later years (the loss of powers, control, and autonomy). My play is concerned with the journey of the painter’s entire life as a way to make sense of her trajectory. Moreover, although all the plays examine the contradictory impulses inherent in the capricious painter, mine has chosen to underpin the shape of the work with the zig-zag dance of O’Keeffe’s own energy. Because of its larger scope, focus on similar themes evident in all seven works, a greater use of mined biographical research and the painter’s own words, and the utilization of O’Keeffe’s ambivalence to assist in the creation of the monologues and structure of the play, I believe *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe* represents an advance upon previous biographical dramatic work about the artist and a welcome addition to the pantheon of plays about O’Keeffe.
2.11 Some Conclusions Concerning the Writing of Biographical Drama

In endeavoring to analyze the process of writing A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe, I have an impulse to repeat an observation I made early on in my playwriting efforts: attempts to diagram the artistic process are “like watching snow melt.”\textsuperscript{151} Indeed, this sentiment later made its way into a Georgia/Doctor exchange. O’Keeffe observes “tracking an artistic journey is like framing a snowflake.”\textsuperscript{152} At one point during my research, I noted: “O’Keeffe says things which seems sideways, at first, but, with time, become incomprehensible any other way.”\textsuperscript{153} Much of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe feels that way, too: “incomprehensible any other way.” One summer in 1984, the almost-blind painter confessed: “I wish I had kept a diary…I think now that my life is never going to look right.”\textsuperscript{154} As a playwright I did my best to get her life “right”.

2.12 In Praise of Dreaming Art

Before I could evaluate my writing process some writing had to have begun. The first actual work on the script commenced after an intensely-vivid dream I had soon after commencing my research. Indeed, O’Keeffe too referred to her painting as that “dream thing I do”.\textsuperscript{155} Neither O’Keeffe nor I are unique in receiving artistic promptings through dreams. In The Secret History of Dreaming, Robert Moss cites many examples of dream-inspired work in the Arts and Sciences.\textsuperscript{156} Moss devotes whole chapters to documented accounts of well-known writers like Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Milton, Mark Twain, Graham Greene, Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoyevsky relying upon dreams to fuel their art and inform their stories.\textsuperscript{157} He also touches upon the Surrealists in both literature and art as having been dream inspired.\textsuperscript{158} Among the insights in his study, Moss substantiates his belief that “dreams exhibit the same kind of creativity and poetic consciousness that is at play in art and literature” and he refutes Freud’s insistence “almost to the point of monomania that dreams are all about sex.”\textsuperscript{159}

Jerrold Morris, referring to a pre-conditioning to project one’s expectations on a work of modern art rather than evaluating it on its own terms, coined the phrase “fashions of
In his study, On the Enjoyment of Modern Art, he is referring to an audience’s insistence on seeing what isn’t actually on the canvas. Nonetheless, despite all the misconceptions stirred up by Freudian analysis of early-twentieth century artwork, Morris attributes “psychiatry and the exploration of the subconscious” as a major influence in the development of modern art.

The revelation that below the level of consciousness there are unrealized impulses which control our behavior and affect our personalities [made] artists... immediately intrigued and [they] began to explore the possibilities of metaphysical expression and surrealist painting, in which dreams were given figuration and the subconscious plumbed for images.

Because Georgia O’Keeffe’s career burgeoned soon after the emergence of Freud’s theories and her work spanned a large portion of the twentieth century, a consideration of Freudian interpretations of her work as well as a contextual positioning of O’Keeffe’s art within the various movements of the twentieth century are explored.

2.13 O’Keeffe and Freud

When O’Keeffe’s voluptuous, dream-inspired charcoal abstractions were first exhibited, both the public and the critics (recently exposed to the new ideas of the science of psychoanalysis) attempted to use Freud’s theories to understand O’Keeffe’s art. O’Keeffe biographer Jeffrey Hogrefe creates a picture of the climate just prior to the years when O’Keeffe’s art was first exposed to the public:

…New ideas were coming to fruition all over the world. Igor Stravinsky was changing the course of music with The Rites of Spring. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were dancing an artistic pas-de-deux in Paris. In Vienna, a physician and neurologist by the name of Sigmund Freud was seeing his ideas about sex accepted in languages other than German. At the University of Virginia…a spritely man with bright red hair was teaching a group of women the principles of modern art.

The man was Alon Bement and one of the female students was an artistically-disillusioned Georgia O’Keeffe. The exercises Bement shared were created by Arthur Wesley Dow and they explored spatial relationships and the Oriental concept of beauty in which “less was more”. The philosophy behind these simple line studies became the basis for O’Keeffe’s original charcoals. As such, their inception could not have been
further from Freud than Virginia was from Vienna. Nonetheless, the world was developing a new “fashion of seeing”. Roxana Robinson expands upon this trend:

In bohemian circles, the radical theories of Freud were welcomed in a spirit of boisterous permissiveness. Attempts at amateur psychoanalysis generated parlor games of free association and dream interpretation, in which inner meanings were deciphered according to the “Freudian formula.”

Sensing the public’s mood, O’Keeffe tried to prevent Stieglitz from displaying the nude photographs he had taken of her the summer before, but as usual Stieglitz had his way and Stieglitz’s naked portraits of O’Keeffe went on display in February, 1921. The photographs were a sensation, but they had the unfortunate result of having “launched O’Keeffe as a personality before she was seriously regarded as an artist…[thus] hampering her future reception in artistic circles.”

Robinson explains:

The nude portraits in 1921 gave a retrospectively erotic tone to the show in 1917, and from then on, O’Keeffe’s work would be viewed from that perspective.

Alfred Stieglitz supported this public myopia and encouraged sexual interpretations of O’Keeffe’s art. His insistence that “The woman receives the World through her Womb. That is the seat of her deepest feeling” did little to dispel the notion that O’Keeffe’s work represented “Freudian suppressed desires in paint.” Male critics persisted in connecting her art “to her femaleness…most specifically…her body.” The women were just as misguided. When confronting O’Keeffe works depicting Nature-inspired forms, Helen Appleton Read speculated

Psychoanalysis tells us that fruit and flowers when painted by women are unconscious expressions of their desire for children. Perhaps they are right.

The critic, Hutchins Hapgood, encountering an irate O’Keeffe supplied her with a defense against all their psychoanalytic posturing. He told the painter that the critics were “only writing their own autobiography”, a consolation to which O’Keeffe clung through her old age. However, her ability to distance herself from a Freudian-obsessed public came with age. While Stieglitz was alive, and
…for nearly every opening for the rest of her life O’Keeffe took to her bed like a Victorian consumptive, suffering from what appears to have been an acute attack of shame.174

2.13 O’Keeffe and Twentieth-Century Art Movements

Rather than “receiving the World through her Womb”, women like O’Keeffe (as well as men) received artistic inspiration through their subconscious. That O’Keeffe opened herself to imagery derived from dreams, natural forms, and the “shapes” within her mind to inspire her work before it became the fashion to do so is just another example of her maverick determination to make her own way.175 That O’Keeffe was unique and independent of many of the “isms” of Twentieth-Century Art is a belief held by the art historian Barbara Rose. She contends the painter’s anthropomorphic forms (inspired by Nature) and her response to the natural world illustrate the painter’s disinterest in the European-led breaking up of the geometric planes of realism as explored through Cubism.176 True, the young O’Keeffe had received a strict training in the classical European tradition through her studies at the Art Institute of Chicago and New York’s Art Students League.177 Moreover, visits to Stieglitz’s Gallery 291 and copies of his magazine Camera Work had brought the newest ideas in art before her.178 However, she was more excited about them as exemplifications of the application of Kandinsky’s theories rather than as an art that resonated with her own. Kandinsky’s treatise Concerning the Spiritual In Art had made a profound impression on the young artist soon after she had completed her studies in Arthur Wesley Dow’s exercises in Composition.179 Robinson asserts

Though O’Keeffe had seen the early works of Picasso and Braque, it was Kandinsky’s theories and the expressive abstractions of Arthur Dove [as seen in Camera Work] that served as directional influences on her road to modernism.180

That she was a modern is often overlooked. Her ninety-eight-year life (with more than seventy-five of those years engaged in productive artistic output) both anticipated trends as well as created her own unique style. Her watercolors from the Plains of Texas in 1916-1919 reflected the simplicity and minimalism of later artists like Mark Rothko.181 In the ‘Twenties, O’Keeffe’s painted a “flower in huge scale…[so] you could not ignore its beauty…people will be startled – they’ll have to look at them…”.182 Thus, she
borrowed a leaf from the post-realists, the Super-Realists whose intentions were to focus “on a subject so acutely that we are forced to see it”.\textsuperscript{183} Post World-War I, the Surrealists explored the unconscious and dreams as a source of artistic inspiration. Hence, O’Keeffe can also be said to have used that movement as a springboard for her explorations.\textsuperscript{184} Her series on the “Jack-In-The-Pulpit” [1930] began as a starkly-photo-realistic depiction of a perfect small flower. By the end of the study, it became a gigantic, color-altered close up of a Paul-Strand-style, photograph-inspired, magnified black “Jack”.\textsuperscript{185} Throbbing with life, the shape could be interpreted to be a phallus; however, the energy of the painting brings to this writer’s mind words of Dylan Thomas: “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower also flows through me.”\textsuperscript{186} That O’Keeffe’s painting anticipates Thomas’s poem by nine years suggests that a certain kind of energy was in the ether of the times and that artists of many disciplines were seeking to express it; however, this is another instance of O’Keeffe expressing it first.

According to Barbara Rose, when O’Keeffe first joined the Stieglitz circle the men had to take her seriously because “the work was of a level that could not be ignored.”\textsuperscript{187} One reason it could not be overlooked was that the work was completely unique and unlike anything anyone was doing at the time. The simple blue or black line drawings (inspired by Arthur Wesley Dow’s exercises) seemed Asian in their simplicity. Her hot clear-yet-passionate watercolors of the Texas plains and her charcoal “Train In The Desert” were untraceable to any known art movement [1918-1921].\textsuperscript{188} When she moved on to oils her bold colors and natural forms were bursting with a passionate energy atypical of her time. Of the movements anticipated by O’Keeffe, one only need examine the Lyrical Color Structure of the ‘Fifties artist, Milton Avery depiction of non-identifiable shapes and compare them with similar colors and shapes produced by O’Keeffe in her 1916-1918 watercolors.\textsuperscript{189} Super-realists like Andrew Wyeth came after O’Keeffe’s photo-realistic exploration of the initial “Jack-in-the-Pulpit” series. [1930]\textsuperscript{190} O’Keeffe’s Cottonwood Series and New Mexican landscapes painted in the ‘Thirties predate Metaphysical Art of painters like the mid-‘Forties Charles Burchfield.\textsuperscript{191} The Abstract Expressionist use of color and shapelessness in the mid-forties and-fifties owes a debt to Kandinsky who, in turn, inspired O’Keeffe.\textsuperscript{192} O’Keeffe’s Patio Door Series predates
Rothko’s Abstract forms. (Although grouped in the Abstract Expressionist school, his lack of hard-edged geometric forms distances him from the Expressionists. His exploration of space using the “building up of fields of color” is not unlike O’Keeffe’s later rock paintings.) Finally, some of the ‘Sixties pure Abstractions and New Constructionist Art display shapes and colors with which O’Keeffe experimented as early as in the ‘Twenties.

2.15 Some Conclusions

Regarding where O’Keeffe would have situated herself within the sundry movements of Twentieth-Century Art, I suspect she would have distanced herself from all of them. Firstly, she distrusted words. All too often, Schools of Art developed philosophies. Philosophies required words to explain them. As my Georgia tells her doctor, “Words and I are not friends. Too many words mean too few paintings.” Rather than being a part of any “ism”, Georgia O’Keeffe wanted to “fill a space in a beautiful way” as quintessentially as possible.

Her art is her legacy. It is also, in a way, a visual story of her life. One summer in 1984, the almost-blind painter confessed: “I wish I had kept a diary…I think now that my life is never going to look right.” Happily, her paintings and her letters have been better than any diary in pointing me in the right direction. As a playwright I did my best to get her life “right”. As an actor, getting her “right” was to be my challenge, with O’Keeffe’s rueful observation as my rationale: “Art is a wicked thing. It is what we are.”

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6 Mosco, pre-play corpse monologue, 1997
8 Mosco 1999.
9 Cited in Cowart, Hamilton & Greenough 244.
11 Cited in Adato VHS.
12 Robinson 382-383.
16 Robinson 389.
20 Hogrefe 140.
23 Thomas Hauser (personal communication, 25 October, 2007)
24 Cited in Adato VHS.
25 Journal 11 April 11, 2007
26 Cited in Adato VHS.
30 Mosco 1999.
32 Cited in Georgia O’Keeffe, Georgia O’Keeffe (New York: Penguin Books, 1976, opposite Plates 56 and
57, unpaginated.
33 Mosco 2003.
34 Mosco 2004.
35 Cited in Cowart, Hamilton, Greenough 195.
36 Mosco 1999.
37 Mosco 2001.
38 Mosco 2001.
41 Mosco 2003.
42 Mosco, 1997.
43 Mosco 2001.
44 Working with my current director, Robert Kalfin, this motif has been discarded.
49 Mosco 2001.
50 Mosco 2004.
51 Mosco 2004.
52 Mosco 2004.
53 O’Keeffe, first page, unpaginated.
55 Eisler 163.
56 Cited in Eisler 163.
57 Cited in Eisler 164.
60 Mosco 2001.
61 Mosco 2004.
63 Mosco 2004.
64 Mosco 2003.
65 Mosco 2003.
66 Cowart, Hamilton & Greenough 213-219.
Mosco 2004. (The actor who portrayed Alfred thought that this dialogue was an impossible mouthful for an actor, and he refused to learn it. We compromised with “Murals?! – That Mexican disease? Who do you think we are? – Diego Rivera and Freda Kahlo?” Secretly, I miss the bombast.)


Mosco 2004.


Mosco 2004.

Cited in Adato VHS


Journal, 10 October, 1999.

O’Keeffe, Introduction, unpaginated.

Journal, 10 October, 1999.


Mosco 2007.

Journal, 10 October, 1999.

Mosco 2004.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2007.

Drohojowska-Philp 460.


O’Keeffe, unpaginated.

Mosco 2007.

Eisler 436-437.

Cited in Eisler 326.


Mosco 2007.

Eisler 120, 197-199.

Mosco 2007.

Eisler 365-366.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2007.

Mosco 2004.


For the life events selected for dramatic consideration and the various play structure from 1997 to 2007, please refer to Appendix A.

Journal, 30 August, 1997. (In June, 1997, I was fortunate to be able to meet with one of my favorite O’Keeffe biographers, Jeffrey Hogrefe. He endorsed my initial monologue choices with “That’s a really wonderful list”, 21 June, 1997. His support meant a lot, as it had been his biography that inspired me.)


Woodring 109-110.

Woodring 109-110.


See Appendix A, below, for the current and original sequences.
Michael Blakemore (personal communication, 16 July, 2002)

The reader is referred to Appendix A, 2001 at the end of this work for the shape of the play as shown to Blakemore.

Mosco 1999.

Mosco 2003.


Mosco 2004.

Mosco 2006.

Thomas Hauser (personal communication, 25 October, 2007)

Mosco 2007.


Mosco 2003.


Mosco 2007.

As previously noted. This repetition has subsequently been excised.


Thomas Hauser (personal communication, 25 October, 2007)

Cited in Adato VHS

Cited in Adato VHS

Cited in Adato VHS


Moss 111-117.

Moss 117.

Moss 44,45.


Morris 25.

Morris 25.


Hogrefe 52.


Hogrefe 116.

Hogrefe 118
Robinson 240.
Hogrefe 124.
Hogrefe 133, 125.
Hogrefe 141.
Hogrefe 142.
Robinson 241, Adato Video.
Hogrefe 125.
Adato Video.
Adato Video.
Robinson 50-52, 57-58.
Robinson 70, 108.
Robinson, 108.
Robinson, 156.
Rose in Adato Video.
Robinson 278.
Morris 48.
Morris 49.
Robinson 280.
Rose in Adato Video.
Rose in Adato Video.
Morris Plate 1.
Morris Plate 6.
Morris Plate 9.
Morris Plates 15 & 16.
Morris Plate 18.
Morris Plate 27 & 31.
Mosco, A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe (unpublished manuscript, 2008) 5.
Robinson 88.
Cited in Eisler 494.
**Part III: Performing A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe**

In this part I focus on the creation of the character, Georgia O’Keeffe, and her incarnation in three different productions of my play. My method for the creation of any character is an arduous and technical procedure. It commences prior to rehearsals and involves making numerous choices that become the basis for explorations during rehearsal and performance. This part, therefore, devotes considerable space to my methodology for Character Analysis. An unanticipated result of exploring a character with emotional vacillations was my experiencing parallel mood swings. O’Keeffe’s dichotomies were played out on stage, even as I suffered them, privately, as the actor. The positive and negative aspects of this will also be discussed.

Over a three-year period *A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe* received a staged reading, a sit-down reading, and a full-scale production. As the play’s author/producer, I was responsible for the journey of these productions from printed page to presentation. Each of these events necessitated rewrites to the material, selection of personnel (director, technical staff, and cast), decisions concerning physical aspects of the presentation (in conjunction with the director), and adjustments made for unanticipated variables. As will be seen, some of these choices were allocated to the director to enable me, as the main actor, to concentrate on my creation and portrayal of O’Keeffe. This did not always produce happy results as I found myself shifting between my roles as actor, playwright and producer for the various showings of the play.

3.1 Creating the Character “Georgia O’Keeffe”

Although sometimes misunderstood and maligned, Constantin Stanislavski’s approach to acting influenced later director/teachers such as Grotowski, Brook, and Boal. In his forthcoming work, *Acting on Impulse*, the British actor, director, teacher John Gillett
maintains that the Stanislavski Method, rather than being just one means of character creation, is the foundation for all subsequent theories of character creation. Gillett contends that its practitioners build wonderful organic performances, experienced and truthful, based on a transformation of our own essential humanity and a recreation of recognizable human experience in imaginary circumstances.\(^2\)

Antithetical to the current, British-based “representational” style (epitomized by those nineteenth-century French actors, Coquelin and Bernhardt), according to Gillett the Stanislavski Method is the one indispensable tool for an actor wishing to gain access to the heart of a role.\(^3\) As O’Keeffe was also intent upon a clarity and honesty of artistic expression it seemed appropriate to utilize a system that elicited a parallel result in the art of acting. Moreover, as has been shown, much of O’Keeffe’s artistry sprang from the balancing of painstaking methodology and intuition. Consequently, I felt it beneficial as an actor to approach her character’s creation in a similar way.

In *Building a Character*, Stanislavski described characterization “as the mask which hides the actor-individual. Protected by it he can lay bare his soul down to the last intimate detail.”\(^4\) My goal, then, was to find the perfect mask whereby I could “lay bare my soul” through the persona of Georgia O’Keeffe. The question was “How?” The curious alchemy by which an actor transforms her personality into that of another human being varies as greatly as minds, thoughts, and feelings vary from person to person. Therefore, I can only offer insights into my method for creating a character. When I wrote, “I’ll be becoming O’Keeffe in ten days. Incredible. I started the Character Analysis yesterday”, it meant that I had commenced the arduous, technical process I use when approaching a role.\(^5\)

Despite being the writer of this play and the creator of this character, I chose to examine Georgia as I would any role that was new to me. What follows is the blueprint with which I analyzed Georgia O’Keeffe as a character.

When I read a play I ask myself the following questions (that I answer in the first person as the character would):
1. What do I [the character] say about myself?

Every line of personal revelation is written out completely: this both illuminates the character’s essence and assists the memorization process.

2. What do others say about me?

Often comments made about the character provide insight into the character. They also offer a barometer of the character’s honesty and self-knowledge. These comments can also be those made by the playwright, directors, and critics.

3. Select adjectives for each personality trait exhibited in the statements above.

Words such as “driven”, “determined”, “passionate”, are certain to be included in the adjectives used to describe the character, “Georgia O’Keeffe”.

4. Make a list of the adjectives grouping those with similar aspects of being.

As an example, “vulnerable” and “sensitive” might be conjoined.

5. Referring to Items 1 and 2, above, count the frequency of each series of adjectives (as itemized in Item 4.)

This can be revealing as sometimes the obvious can been overlooked. Based upon the above, an unprejudiced starting point for the Character Analysis, proper, is reached. This juncture in the research process places one in a position to consider some of the more traditional questions posed by actors:
6. What is my clear major goal (also referred to as the line, spine, intention, action, super objective, or dream)?

7. What are my specific needs and drives?

8. Why do I want to accomplish them?

9. How intense are my desires to accomplish them?

10. How conscious am I of my personal motives?

11. What methods do I use to accomplish my goals?

12. What obstacles – both internal and external – affect my achieving my goals?

Having touched upon the inner workings of the character, I then look for possible reasons for her needs by examining her history, some of which could be known to me through the play or through research, and some of which I imagine. I use the personal pronouns “I” and “my” in my analysis as it enables me to personalize the role; hence, I consider:

13. My background:
   a. economic status
   b. childhood experiences
   c. religious upbringing and beliefs
   d. level of education
   e. innate intelligence
   f. political views
   g. cultural background
   h. sociological causes
   i. hobbies
   j. animal equivalent

14. My adjustment to people:
   a. Who are my friends?
   b. What kind of manners do I exhibit?
   c. Am I socially-interactive? Reclusive?
   d. What are my sexual attitudes?
15. How do I think and why do I think in the manner I do?
16. Are there any interesting character contradictions worth considering?
17. What kind of home do I keep? Do I like to return home or not?
18. What forms of entertainment, if any, do I like?
19. What is my vocation? Do I enjoy it?

This analysis of the character’s history enables me to then consider the arc or journey of the character. First, I ask questions that help me to unearth the emotional and mental state of a role in a given scene:

20. What did I do to get to this place in my life?
21. How has my journey affected me?
22. What is my stress and tolerance level at various points?
23. How do I change throughout the play?

The preceding questions afford sufficient knowledge to enable me to chart the arc of the character.

24. Prior to each scene, or in the case of *A Brush with Georgia O’Keeffe*, every transition, the actor considers the following questions:
   a. Where did I [the character] come from?
   b. What was I doing there?
   c. Where am I going?
   d. What shall I do when I get there?

Answers to these four questions provide me with what Stanislavski termed “the given circumstances” and help to clarify the character’s playable actions in each scene. They also assist the actor in making preparatory choices. For example, the way a scene might begin would vary greatly were the preceding moment a traumatic one or a joyous one.
The previous moment’s “given circumstances” color the emotional state of the character and inform the playing of each scene.

Then, I move on to the physical condition. Knowledge of these specific factors may necessitate my modifying aspects of my own physicality.

25. What is my age?
26. What is my energy level (i.e. vivacious, lethargic, etc.)?
27. Are there any impingements (i.e. allergies, infirmities, etc.)?
28. What are my size, weight and strength?
29. Describe my voice, its pitch, resonance, dialect, accent.
30. Have I a distinctive walk?
31. What do I wear and how do I feel about my clothing?
32. Do I have any personal props?

Upon completing the formal Character Analysis, I am now in a position to begin the process of inhabiting the character. The Character Analysis, however, is only a blueprint and the rehearsal experience might suggest other choices, as I observed in mid-October:

I’ve made possible character “prep” [i.e. preparation] choices (which could change) – I might need a choice not in my head but in my body – something physical.

Before plunging into the specifics of the various productions, and my creation of a Georgia for each version, it is instructive to consider my personal dynamic with the role I am about to portray. There is a particular emotional journey I undergo each time I study a new role although with Georgia (because of my additional investment as the author of the play) it was intensified.

Firstly, despite having been a professional performer since childhood and no stranger to the stage, as I approach each new character my mind engages in a quasi-tango with the role. The arc of my relationship to the character usually begins with “I’m so excited.
This part will be fun to play.” Then, as research commences, I become buoyed by the many commonalities I perceive that the character and I share.

Gradually, as the work progresses and the volume of assimilated material begins to overwhelm me, my confidence ebbs. I wonder: “Whatever possessed me to think I could play this character?” Finally, I reach bottom, sinking to: “This is going to be a disaster.” At this point however, invariably, the pieces fall into place (usually around the last week of rehearsal) and I return full circle, to “I’m so excited. This part will be fun to play.” My foray into becoming O’Keeffe followed this same pattern. However, the zig-zagging from enthusiasm to despair and back again was intensified by the addition of O’Keeffe’s emotional swings. Because my creative process was already an ambivalent journey, the variances imposed upon my equilibrium by the inclusion of O’Keeffe’s dichotomies resulted in a personal roller coaster unprecedented in my acting experience. Bearing this in mind, it is time to examine my three theatrical excursions in A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe.

3.2 The Catskill Arts Society Staged Reading

The emotional pendulum began its swing early in the process when I started preparations for a staged reading of the play in October, 2001. That was when the predictable fretting began: “She is, truly, the most complex character I’ve confronted as an actor as well as a writer,” and “I’m one with O’Keeffe now, and, at this juncture of the script, she’s very, very unhappy.” By September, the staged reading set for 17 October, 2001 at the Catskill Arts Society evinced this comment:

How do I feel? As though I’ll never be able to do O’Keeffe as a character – there’s little over a month to discover her inner workings and create a character of internalizing, just as I’ve written her.

Being aware of my tendencies to self-doubt in no way guaranteed I would regard my increasing trepidation as anything but genuine. In truth, I had less reason for insecurity with this play than with others; after all, I had written it. I even had a dream in March, 2001, after which I exclaimed: “I was “O’Keeffe!” Nonetheless, by July (with a staged reading only months away) I commenced my customary Character Analysis (and was poised to become ensnared in my familiar maneuvers.)
In order to create the role of Georgia for the staged reading it was necessary that I re-examine the play. The Catskill Arts Society requested a presentation only a half-an-hour in length. To avoid time consuming rewrites and edits I chose to start at the beginning of my piece and work through the first part of the first act. Hence, my play for their venue presented the story of a middle-aged O’Keeffe looking back at her childhood, adolescence, and early fame. As a result, that performance’s focus was mostly on the younger O’Keeffe with little about her later years. The character I was to embody had an innocence and youthful determination that had not yet evolved into her later ruthlessness. Moreover, manifestations of her sexuality were limited to mentions of her first beau, George Dannenburg, and brief encounters with Leah Harris and Paul Strand. There was neither Mabel nor Tony nor Jean. Stieglitz was represented as her great and major love (although his affair with Norman looms like a dark cloud and the catalyst for Georgia’s breakdown with which the play commences.)

Despite my usual trepidation, I pressed onward. It is important to consider the dates of three entries in my Journal: on 6 September I wrote that I was “never going to be able to do O’Keeffe as a character”; by 1 October I had noted the following attributes:

1. passion
2. adrift
3. artist
4. focus
5. balance
6. defense
7. loving

and by 6 October I had “started the Character Analysis.” These dates, and the gap between the first and latter two entries are significant because the year was 2001. As everyone knows on 11 September 2001 our world changed forever – particularly for those of us in New York City. On 10 September I had finished my consideration of the role of O’Keeffe in the shortened script, but by the afternoon of 11 September my mind was on other things:
The World Trade Center has been blown away. The city is closed...we’re staying home. The Mayor has asked us to...there is so much going on! The cleanup, searching for bodies – everyone is in a daze....

I include this here because, in the tradition of O’Keeffe’s “Artists [who] translate everything to Art,” within days...

...I finally shed tears – chugging sounds – like squeezing a lemon – not a lush tropical rainforest of tears. There is so much and so little to express. It’s the death of Stieglitz for O’Keeffe: no tears, just a measured calm – eye-of-the-hurricane stuff....

By transmuting the pain and shock of 11 September to O’Keeffe’s feelings of loss at the death of Stieglitz, I had taken a “specific” instance in my own life that evoked a particular emotional response and used it to parallel a similar experience for O’Keeffe. In short, this marked the moment when I was propelled away from the on-paper Character Analysis and became a breathing person – the moment when I reached the emotional understanding that O’Keeffe and I shared a parallel pain. It also represented a personal turning point from my negative spiral to my upward climb.

Prior to the start of rehearsals for the Catskill Arts Society’s staged reading, the first five questions of my Character Analysis revealed that Georgia, in the 2001 abridged version of the play, possessed the following attributes (in descending order of importance):

1. Dreamer/ visual/ artist/ imaginative/ free/ clear/ creative/ individual/ traveler/ seeker/ unusual/ adventurous/ expressive/ courageous/ idealistic/ hopeful/ talented
2. Disciplined/ focused/ intelligent/ precise/ perfectionist/ specific/ smart/ dedicated/ driven/ ambitious/ achiever
3. Ironic/ unpretentious/ pragmatic/ realistic/ humble/ adaptable/ rational/ self-deprecating
4. Defensive/ spiky/ proud/ angry/ willful/ scornful/ emphatic/ defiant/ protective
5. Morbid/ timid/ afraid/ unattractive/ ill/ discouraged/ frustrated/ patronized/
abused/ intimidated/ belittled/ obedient/ oppressed/ insecure

After examining the above attributes, Georgia’s overall goal appeared to be “to seek the
purest form of artistic expression.” The next questions were “How to access this as an
actor?” and “How to convey this immediately to an audience?”

As a writer, I had experimented with the use of “found objects” as one method of
initiating explorations into aspects of the painter. Later, I drew parallels between
O’Keeffe’s choice of painting subjects and her equilibrium or lack thereof within her
relationship with Stieglitz. Therefore, it is not surprising that Parkins and I adopted a
similar approach and utilized “found objects” as a jumping off point for our rehearsals.
The objects we selected included: a paper shopping bag with the image of a cow’s skull
and an artificial flower (a souvenir from the 1988 Art Institute of Chicago’s
Retrospective); a crystal ball; a Nautilus shell; a piece of pink satin; a black-and-
midnight-blue-and-gold velvet shawl; and a creamy silk flower.¹⁶ My rationale for each
of these selections was that the shopping bag represented O’Keeffe’s oeuvre: upon it
was a desert image, her last great motif; placed within it were a crystal ball (suggesting
her belief in her predestined life with Alfred Stieglitz and her awareness that her
subconscious was the source of her art); a shell (one of her nature subjects and an object
in her artistic explorations representing the deterioration of her marriage; pink satin
(choosing the lining of Stieglitz’ coffin which she tore out with her bare hands and
replaced with plain, white linen); the shawl (because of its depth of color and sensuous
texture); and a pale silk flower (as a reminder of Stieglitz’s epithet for her, “whiteness,”
and as celebration of one of her most potent themes, flowers.)

Initially, Parkins and I had felt these objects would be an interesting way to begin an
exploration of the play’s text. Unwittingly, we had discovered an ideal method for
introducing O’Keeffe’s world to the Catskill Art Society’s audience. When we arrived
at the venue for our presentation we were confronted by a gallery with its members’ art
on the walls. The stage had no backstage area, and the lighting rig was primitive.
Parkins decided the best way to bring in Georgia would be to have her enter the
audience from the back of the house. Parkins hoped the presentation of our “found objects” would inform the audience much as they had informed me as a writer. To her, “found objects” were

a way to bring the past into the present, a way of bringing her world into our world – objects are concrete manifestations of her essence, [and] rather than have her sit there drawing… she relates to objects: her power is in her visual acumen.17

In order for the audience to be able to focus on the “found objects,” we had to leave the house lights on as I wandered down the center aisle, ritualistically placed the contents of the shopping bag on a table just in front of the elevated proscenium stage, and, then, disappeared up the stage-left stairs (which afforded access to the stage.) For Parkins, entering through the house was

a way of acknowledging we were in a gallery space. O’Keeffe was looking at the art… By her moving through the audience, there’s a sense of not knowing, a ritual opening. We’re on board with mysteries: “Who is this creature?” Blackout. “What’s going to happen?” and “Boom!” [Lights come up] – it started!18

I made an acting decision that my entrance from the back of the audience, my journey to the foot of the stage, and the placing of each of the objects, one by one, on a table below the stage prior to any dialogue represented O’Keeffe’s soul examining the life journey upon which she was about to embark. After I arranged the objects there was a swift blackout; then, the lights revealed Georgia and her Doctor discussing her breakdown and examining her life prior to her trauma.

As the actor, I trusted my director’s choices. Consequently, at the time, we did not discuss her rationale behind the decision to begin with a shopping bag; however, she later provided a fascinating point-of-view regarding its purpose:

The shopping bag represented the commodification of her work and offered a kind of deconstruction of who Georgia O’Keeffe was…We don’t just perceive her as a great painter – we perceive her as an American icon who commands correspondingly high prices like Andy Warhol.19
Andrea Shapiro, our Stage Manager and Lighting Designer, had only a few lamps (and no gels) at her disposal. The total lighting possibilities consisted of a central light, a floodlight, a house light, and a dimmer. The challenge was to hold the audience’s attention for over half an hour with limited physical movement (I needed to remain close to the script as this was a reading) and no visual variance of lighting color. Moreover, we were (happily) forewarned that the theatre had no sound system. Consequently, we could not use a pre-recorded tape I had made with different actors reading all the other characters’ dialogue. One solution would be to engage another actor to read the role of the Doctor and I could portray all the other characters as well as O’Keeffe. Two weeks prior to performance, Shapiro’s husband, William Rowley, was available and quickly contracted.20

A few more words should be said regarding the physical aspects of the production. The Catskill Arts Society had a rudimentary elevated wooden stage with a simple proscenium arch. Fortunately, because their facility doubled as a historical museum, we were able to borrow some nineteenth-century chairs, an old music stand (for the script), and an antique table to lend an air of authenticity to the event. My costume, purchased several months earlier, was a black taffeta-and-velvet reproduction of a turn-of-the-century gown not unlike one I had seen the young Georgia wearing in her pictures from Texas.21 Over it, I placed a black woolen coat with a velvet collar that I removed and left in the wings prior to the lights coming up to reveal Georgia and the Doctor.

The Catskill Arts Society reading had only one week allocated for rehearsal, both in New York City and at the Shapiro/Rowley home in the Catskill Mountains of upstate New York. Parkins used whatever time was available to guide Rowley and myself through rehearsal choices of pace, internalization, externalization, stillness, and, where required, movement. Extraneous dialogue was excised: “Made more judicious cuts – it’s lean now – leaner and cleaner.”22 Anything that impeded the momentum of the material was edited. Places for ironic humor were found, for example, in the earliest monologue, where the birds are eating the flesh of the dead on a mountain, O’Keeffe observes, “It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you so I must be getting better.” Again, later, she out-Freud’s her Freudian psychiatrist with” “Sorry to
disappoint you, Doctor, but I seem to be one of the few people I know with no complaints about the first twelve years.”

After less than two days of rehearsal in the space (and very little pre-Catskills work), on 17 October, we did our best and were rewarded: after the performance, the potter, Cecily Fortescu remarked, “You are Georgia O’Keeffe.” Delightful though this was, I asked Andrea Shapiro for a reality check; she recalled that the 17 October presentation was “received very nicely by an arts group and lasted about forty minutes in length and never flagged.”

After the event, a letter from Carol Smith, The Catskill Arts Society’s Director, thanked us for both my performance and the presentation:

The script was amazing, and it was a joy to see the enormous creative energy you brought to this piece. I found it particularly interesting that you were able to simulate, with words and gestures, an emotive atmosphere quite similar to the actual paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe.

Creating “an emotive atmosphere…similar to the actual paintings of Georgia O’Keeffe” had been one of my goals, so, her comments were particularly encouraging.

3.3 Sit-down Reading at The WorkShop

In 2004, as a member of The WorkShop Theater, an Off-Off-Broadway company committed to assisting new playwrights, I requested the use of their space in order to mount a production. Before this could occur, they needed to review a copy of the current script and their company’s charter required a sit-down reading of any play being considered for inclusion in their season. Since the Catskill Arts Society reading in October, 2001, there had been considerable changes to both the script and the personnel involved.

Through April, 2002, Parkins continued to work with me sporadically; however, her interest in a further collaboration on A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe was waning. Consequently, in August, 2002, the actor/director Rae Allen agreed to take over as director. I had known Allen as a teacher/acting coach from the Breakthrough Workshops she had conducted in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, from 1984 through 1987. I respected her instincts as well as her theatrical pedigree. As I expected,
Allen’s experience led her to demand changes to the script, (as discussed in the previous chapter). Her observations of what was lacking and my implementation of her corrections made for a better play.

In May, 2004, Allen, Robert Aberdeen, (portraying all the men in O’Keeffe’s life), Virginia Roncetti, (representing all the women), and I, (as O’Keeffe), had a private reading of the new draft. I subsequently forwarded it to the Artistic Directors of The WorkShop, and it was scheduled for a sit-down reading on 14 August.

Having approached the creation of those initial monologues by adopting a stream-of-consciousness first-person narrative style, I again adopted that as one method for my accessing the character. Speaking as Georgia, I made the following notes, prior to the sit-down reading:

From my early years, I wanted my life to mean something.
I have decided to make my life mean something by expressing myself perfectly and precisely through my art.
When the need to express myself through art wanes, I know my life is in trouble.
Why not be the best – why else try?
I am excited, flattered, buoyant that a man of power, sexuality, artistic vision wants me. And I give him all I have.
Later, I have to hold onto myself like a tattered leaf on a bare branch to protect myself against the gale of Alfred’s personality.
I have always felt identification with wild landscapes – with the earth. It is my essence. I am American and American soil. Loam = “fertile earth”
May my earth always be fertile.
May I always find a place to plant myself to enable my plant to grow.

This exercise provided me with an overview of my grasp of the character. It revealed my instinctive impulses about O’Keeffe. In addition, I reasoned that each of my stream-of-consciousness Journal entries about or by Georgia might provide a portal for me through which I could enter O’Keeffe’s world.
As a consequence of this examination, I selected the following personal occurrences to use as a springboard to become O’Keeffe:

The little girl at Hunter on a journey
Man with the knife
Standing on a rock with ocean spray
Painting the knife
Ice leaves – Rego Park
M – at first and “none of your business”
“whipped cream”
The bar at Rockaway
G and the “blue plate special”
Pagan – passionate

Each of these phrases represents a moment in my own life that elicited an emotion parallel to an aspect of O’Keeffe’s personality:

“The little girl at Hunter on a journey”, represents me as a prodigy at a school for gifted children in New York City. Everything was an adventure. That child’s wants parallel O’Keeffe’s need for her life to mean something.

“Man with the knife” reminds me of a time when a mentally-imbalanced person brandished a knife at me as I was walking home one sunny Sunday afternoon, shocking me, frightening me – but I managed to create a diversion and escape. In that moment, O’Keeffe and I shared her tremendous drive to survive.

The “rock with ocean spray” is my love of the seashore – a love of nature that echoes O’Keeffe’s pantheism.

Once, I saw ice had formed on some leaves in a suburb, Rego Park, and their beauty was almost magical. “Ice leaves – Rego Park” reminds me of O’Keeffe’s wonder at the beauty inherent in the natural world.

M was someone who, initially, loved me, and then, dismissed me – much as Alfred had adored and, then, betrayed, Georgia.
Once, I was ashamed of someone who had said the words, “whipped cream”. My embarrassment was unkind, and, to this day, it is a source of regret. My shame at this person’s gaffe is something I used for O’Keeffe’s reticence regarding her past.

“The bar at Rockaway” creates a mood in me of hopelessness much as “the house of sand and stone” in Williamsburg, Virginia, depressed Georgia.

G violently broke a treasured blue plate – a form of abuse – that I chose to use to represent her feelings about her father’s abusive behavior.

Finally, “pagan – passionate” is a reminder to me to embrace her drive for sex and love despite her many difficult passages.

I had a framework for adopting the persona of Georgia O’Keeffe. However, the predominance of aspects of O’Keeffe’s personality varied within different circumstances. Still pursuing the Stanislavski Method as a means for accessing her character, I went through the script, and point-by-point, inserted personal substitutions of events in my own life that evoked sensations paralleling Georgia’s. I also broke down the segments into “beats” (changes of direction within a scene.) For each change in direction, a choice was made regarding my intention. For example, Georgia’s revelation of the content of her dream to the Doctor was one of the methods she used “to get help.” All this work was prior to the commencement of rehearsals. If, in rehearsal, I found that my choices differed from Allen’s vision, I was prepared to relinquish them in favor of her overview. The dual approach of attention to detail balanced by willingness to experiment and change provided a solid basis for my representation of Georgia. The reading evinced a successful result: we were offered the use of The Jewel Box Theater for a full-scale production in December, 2004.

3.4 Full Production of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

As noted in Chapter Two, prior to the commencement of rehearsals for A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe’s first full-scale production, considerable time was allocated to refining the script and making production decisions. Despite a 15 December opening looming, in the middle of November I was still rewriting the play. Concurrently, there were marketing choices to be made, creative and backstage personnel to be engaged, and
decisions in the offing concerning the production’s physical aspects. Regarding this last concern, Allen and I were in agreement that our sixty seat black box theatre would best serve the play by keeping the space simple and malleable. The floor was painted gray; floor-to-ceiling “blacks” lined the entire upstage wall, and two moveable silver chairs were our only set pieces. In the middle of the ten day rehearsal period, Allen decided we needed to project images of O’Keeffe’s art and the people in her world. Consequently, a large white screen was hung against the upstage “blacks”, a projector was installed, and suitable images were selected. Regarding this choice, Allen recalls: “Slides – when we were looking at images, we both came up with that idea and AWAY we went.”

In keeping with the simplicity of the set, the costumes were also muted and multi-functional: the women were in full-length, long-sleeved jersey sheaths. O’Keeffe’s was black; the other woman’s was deep gray. The man wore simple black slacks, a white shirt and a dark vest. The color scheme of both the set and costumes echoed the previously-discussed Dow concept of Notan (“dark, light.”)

The aesthetic underpinning the simplicity of the design was the script’s requirement for a malleable and flexible playing style. Hence, a minimalist set and non-specific costuming lent themselves to multiple interpretations and uses in keeping with the demands of the play.

Meanwhile, despite the completion of the play script, important design decisions, and an interesting graphic postcard to herald the event, the most significant focus for my energies had not yet commenced. It was not until mid-November that I turned my attention to becoming the character of O’Keeffe: “I have ten days to create and learn …O’Keeffe. I can do it…I can learn a page in half an hour…I can do a Character Analysis and memorization and specifics as well.” I erroneously assumed that because I had written the words they would be a simple task to memorize; this would cause me grief later in the process. Instead of embarking on the memorization immediately, I commenced another Character Analysis. Because of the numerous rewrites, the shape of the play and life-thrust of the character had altered. My 2004 Georgia had a new overall goal: “it’s not about career – it’s about being ‘keenly alive’ – like the desert bones – her overall goal is ‘to be keenly alive’. The reference to desert bones in conjunction with aliveness related to an observation made by O’Keeffe: “The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert…”
A few days earlier, returning to a reliable mode of exploration I had mused in stream-of-consciousness fashion about my need to “see and feel with a vision that is larger than the world I usually see.” I sensed there was:

something about the balance between free-and-courageous and swinging too far away in the explorations and going adrift… “freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose”; [she’s] (1) an Artist and (2) looking for mooring, because, so much of her life, she was adrift.

Once again, I made choices for the initial character preparation I might use prior to setting foot on stage. Some of the emotional catalysts remained the same as the staged-and sit-down readings; however, with a new overall goal “to be keenly alive”, some had changed. The new character preparation resulted in these possibilities:

“to be keenly alive” –
  on a rock above ocean spray – doing jetes – the little girl on the ride – the red blood of spilled wine – on the couch
Ashamed/pained -
  “whipped cream” -G/blue plate special – bar at Rockaway – “none of your business”
Artist/visual/etc. -  T
  the ice leaves/Rego Park – Launceston apple-tree/fog
Focused/ruthless –
  painting the knife – choreography (Boston)
Earth-connected/simple –
  cooking for Mo – washing vegetables as ritual
Ironic/Touchy -
  Mu telling me what to think and feel
Loyal/loving -
  Returning to Mi after months apart
[then a repeat of]
  “to be keenly alive” – sensory choices as above
In addition to the sense memories evoked by recalling the above experiences, I considered the importance of visual imagery. Sight had been profoundly significant to the painter and a meditation on her images might aid me in seeing with her eyes. I contemplated postcards of “Red Poppy” and “Sky Above Clouds IV”, a photograph of one of my own paintings that I considered particularly fine, four photographs I had taken off the documentary of the younger O’Keeffe in Texas and the older dramatically-posed, iconic O’Keeffe. There were also postcards of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz (which illustrated their dynamic), and a seventy-something O’Keeffe staring at me and daring me to get her right. Finally, there was a snapshot a friend had sent me of the intense blue of the New Mexican sky.\textsuperscript{44}

I felt my time was being used beneficially and organically. I was finally prepared to start work on the actual script, and I approached the role optimistically. Nonetheless, as I became more and more in tune with the character (and as the time to commence rehearsals drew nearer) my familiar pattern began to emerge. I became intimidated by the attributes needed by the actor who was to embody O’Keeffe:

\begin{quote}
Simplicity, truth, stillness, economy, grace, strength, clarity, boldness, understanding, sensitivity, discipline; the whole controlled by the creative force of a transcendent imagination, and the power of an astute and virile mind… served by a body which had been molded into a flawless instrument…\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

That these were ascribed to the legendary Eleonora Duse by her acolyte, Eva Le Gallienne, and not to me, did not help my self-esteem. My traditional “tango” was about to begin, and it was even more intense than usual because I cared so much about doing the painter justice.

Meanwhile, as the author of the play it had never occurred to me that I would experience difficulty learning my own material. However, the text was dense; one week prior to commencing rehearsals I faced a learning blockage.\textsuperscript{46} This unexpected turn of events enhanced my already mounting apprehension. Then, when rehearsals began, O’Keeffe’s emotional vacillation added to my personal unease. Moreover, tensions developed when I unexpectedly discovered that my director and I rehearsed in very different ways.
Having been schooled in the analytical Stanislavski Method for creating a character (much as O’Keeffe had been grounded in art through her formal training at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Art Students’ League in New York) I was primed for a rigorous, methodical rehearsal period. Allen, however, favored a more experimental approach. My Hair experience equipped me to work in the director’s way; however, I preferred improvisation in rehearsal only after a solid basis for the characters and the scenes had been explored. Allen’s and my divergence of approach on top of my mounting uncertainty (further fueled by O’Keeffe’s many contradictory impulses) produced a tension within me counterproductive to creative collaboration.

Unfortunately, because I was immersed in the process, I neglected to realize that the emotional tumult and resistance I was experiencing regarding working in a purely experimental way might have paralleled O’Keeffe’s process of rediscovering her art by “starting all over new.” In fact, Allen’s methods were ideal for helping me to become O’Keeffe, but I was too subsumed by my emotional tides to appreciate this.

Dutifully, rather than as a conscious collaborator, I would do as I was told: “try that lying down,” or “try that standing up.” Once, she asked me to randomly jump whenever the spirit moved me. This was Allen’s way of attempting to find ways to free me from a preconceived (as the writer) delivery. Had we had three or four weeks to rehearse I might have found this an interesting exploration; however, the cast was desperate for something concrete and we became confused. Moreover, I was still desperately trying to memorize dialogue.

On a positive note, the play required an emotional malleability and plasticity that could shift instantaneously and seamlessly from one moment or time period to another. This is something all the actors were equipped to handle and did. Unfortunately, our time was limited and consequently there was little opportunity to explore the work organically. What should have been a joyous culmination of my many years of work creating the play instead became about pushing for results. We were all very near breaking point by the time we got to technical rehearsal. That we did not break is indicative of our commitment to the project. It is moderately miraculous that The WorkShop Theater
production managed to transcend its “birthing” process and, as such, it remains a testament to the quality and emotional power of the play and the professionalism of the personnel involved. Slapped together with passion, good will, and whatever technique we possessed, the first night came and went in a blur of getting it on its feet.

The season ran from 15 December through 20 December, but it was not until 19 December that I could write, “I finally managed a good performance last night;” my best performance was on closing night. Several unplanned factors contributed to my deepening within the role.

Firstly, on the evening of the 19th towards the end of Act One the lights and slide projections failed throwing responsibility for holding the audience’s interest squarely on the text and the actors. In some way, the slides had eclipsed the words. Without the distraction of the images, the audience began to see through the eyes of my O’Keeffe rather than viewing the paintings through their personal filters. As a result, they became more involved in the play. Another factor was our making of a DVD of the show. On the morning of 19 December, we had filmed the entire production; because I was playing for a camera, I internalized my performance. It felt “right” and I incorporated this new-found minimalism that evening as well as on the final night. Being more internal and more relaxed caused the audience to become more drawn in. Consequently, the laughs increased. The last contributing factor to my improved performance was my altering my pre-show preparation. Up until 19 December, I had reviewed the script daily. That afternoon, instead, I replayed Perry Miller Adato’s documentary, Georgia O’Keeffe. It reacquainted me with the painter’s walk and Midwestern twang. I incorporated them into the last two performances. These supplied the illusive “choice not in my head but in my body – something physical,” that I had been hoping to discover prior to rehearsals. Owning her physically “helped with her wry, ironic detached delivery, permitting laughs and disdaining the lyrical language.” The day after we closed I wrote: “the enormity of the achievement is just hitting home to me – unbelievable!” The next day I continued, “I feel as though a house has been dropped on me. I hadn’t realized how much effort …O’Keeffe had cost me in life force….”
It is arguable that had we had a realistic pre-production and rehearsal period, I might have reached this poised-yet-ready place by opening night. One indisputable fact is that actors need time to get the rhythm of a role into their bodies. Certainly, O’Keeffe reworked her subjects again and again until she found their essences. In retrospect, the circumstances that resulted in such an unhappy rehearsal process were of my own creation as the play’s producer. I made three major errors: firstly, in assuming I could write and rewrite up until the last week in November, and only then, commence memorization. (In so doing, I had placed undue pressure upon myself); secondly, in only providing the actors and director ten days for rehearsals, technical rehearsal, and dress rehearsal, I seriously limited the creative team; finally, I should not have brought in a director without clarifying her vision and plan of approach. A positive aspect of errors in judgment is that they can be used as directional guides for subsequent endeavors. Therefore, for future productions, I would insist upon a one-month learning period prior to performance, a full month’s rehearsal period, and a likeminded director.

Allen also engaged in a retrospective re-evaluation:

too many slides – [I’d want] better lighting [and] a different approach to movement and form. Let it more organically come out of the script, (the writing), maybe even begin with three people reading and gradually break loose of them. Even occasionally going back to reading – more like a discovery.55

Above all, Allen wanted the play to be “physically more like a dream – her [O’Keeffe’s] dream perhaps – physically and emotionally.”56 Given that dreams had been both O’Keeffe’s and my inspirations this suggestion is a happy one. Perhaps this dreamlike quality will be incorporated in another production; perhaps not. I do not know. I do know that the lessons of the staged reading, sit-down reading and full-scale production of A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe will inform the next step of this process.

3.6 Conclusion
It is sometimes not clear if an artist chooses her subject or if the subject chooses her. Certainly when I chose Georgia O’Keeffe as my subject, there was a confluence of circumstances which pointed to our mutual resonance so, in some ways, O’Keeffe “chose” me also. By studying O’Keeffe’s artistic path I have explored how important it
was for this particular artist to remain true to her artistic vision and, furthermore, I
discovered the importance of a special “kind of nerve” that kept her focused on her
artistic quest despite being “frightened all the time.” Not only might this prove
instructive to all artists, but for me as a biographical dramatist writing a play about her
life, and later as an actor performing her, O’Keeffe’s special “kind of nerve” allowed me
to take the leap from tenacious biographer to artful dramatist. I certainly needed “nerve:
as O’Keeffe’s predilection for contrariety, while frustrating the biographer, provided the
dramatist access to certain aspects of O’Keeffe’s personality that would translate well
into theatrical form.

When I began my research into O’Keeffe it yielded a number of insights that suggested
how I should approach the work; for example, the art historian and critic, Barbara Rose
observed:

…O’Keeffe creates images that are…static and monumental… solid forms that
suggest the durable and timeless… luminous Southwestern skies… filled with
unmoving clouds, painted as solidly and opaquely as if they were made of
marble… painted with the same patient craftsmanship, brushstrokes blended
together as if they are barely visible at all.57

Rose’s comments suggested to me that an accurate representation of O’Keeffe’s life in
dramatic form would require language that matched the artistry of her brushstrokes
which were “barely visible at all.” It would require also “patient craftsmanship” that
balanced historical accuracy and creative exploration. Moreover, the lingering imagery
of the play needed to be “static and monumental” yet the dialogue and events required a
fluidity that incorporated her many emotional swings, physical dramas, and repetitive
experiences. In Part Two I explained how I balanced my research with my creative
instincts (thus paralleling the painter’s ambivalent emotional juggling) and how I
adopted O’Keeffe’s practice of working and reworking of an idea until I captured its
essence. As O’Keeffe distilled an idea into an image, so too did I attempt to distill ideas
into language; language that utilized rhythmic variation to offset the “static” imagery.
Throughout the process of this work O’Keeffe remained my guide. A play about O’Keeffe required more than a simple shaping of her words or events, as she herself indicated. O’Keeffe found it astonishing that

… people separate the object from the abstract. Objective painting is not good painting unless it is good in the abstract sense. A hill or tree cannot make a good painting just because it is a hill or a tree. It is lines and colors put together so that they say something. For me that is the very basis of painting. The abstraction is often the most definite form for the intangible thing in myself that I can only clarify in paint.\(^58\)

To render her world dramatically I would need to unearth a structure for my work that revealed her “intangible” inmost substance in its “most definite form” and which encompassed both an objective storytelling and an abstract foundation. However, as has been noted, I was keen to let the play’s structure reveal itself to me rather than to consciously seek it out so, like O’Keeffe, I used my subconscious and dreams to inform my work.

As considerations of the writing process in Part Two confirmed, the shape of the play eventually did reveal itself – supporting O’Keeffe’s assertion that “the artist’s form must be inevitable.”\(^59\) My working and reworking of material resulted in the synthesis of O’Keeffe’s words and deeds with my interpretation of her motives regarding language and events. Her ambivalence fueled the juxtaposition of incidents and memories. Her visual acuity inspired the selection of imagery and inclusion of literary allusion. The advice of my directors (Parkins and Allen) and learned associates (Blakemore, Kalfin, Hauser) enhanced the work.

Concerning the play’s current structure, this too appears to realize my goals. It is sufficiently linear to retain clarity yet appropriately erratic to convey her contradictions. Likewise, its themes became apparent as I delved deeper and deeper into her psyche and found that place where her contrarities united, a juncture seemingly fueled by her special “kind of nerve” and motivated by her desire to “make the unknown – known – in terms of one’s medium” despite being “frightened all the time… scared to death.”\(^60\)
According to Hogrefe, O’Keeffe’s motivation for writing her 1976 book about her work was “because such odd things have been done about me with words.”61 Even after its publication, as late as 1984 O’Keeffe fretted: “I wish I had kept a diary… I think now that my life is never going to look right.”62 Perhaps O’Keeffe might find consolation in the knowledge that those who have tried to depict her life (whether biographically or dramatically) have been dedicated to getting her life “right” within the parameters of their art. Because we have all been juggling our versions of history and creativity to understand the special “kind of nerve” that was O’Keeffe’s, the point where “the tenacious biographer left off and the artful dramatist began” differed. However, there was consensus that we were all intent on doing justice to her life.

The biographers and other dramatists have, in attempting to interpret her, affirmed the importance of the artist remaining true to her unique artistic vision. From my own processes of writing, producing and performing a play about O’Keeffe, I believe that this view can be extrapolated to the process of art making in general. What began as a dream had come full circle. The learning curve had been tremendous. Without doubt, O’Keeffe’s lessons for me have not ended. My play has continued to develop. With the hindsight of experience I am hopeful that my play’s next production will “fill a space in a beautiful way.”63 In the life of my play to date, and for future productions, I can do no better than to rely, as I have so often through this work, on O’Keeffe for my guide:

It must be your truth as nearly as you are able to put it down…there is no point in doing it if it is not a truth – One’s truth must necessarily have a certain amount of fantasy in it…but the fantasy must be one’s truth to keep one’s whole consistent…Why [bring it] into the world less than the most beautiful thing you can.64

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2 Gillett 20.
3 Gillett 20.
6 Sam Schacht (personal communication, 3 January, 2001)
7 For an example of a completed Character Analysis, the reader is referred to Appendix B at the end of this chapter wherein the Analysis I used prior to the full-scale production in December, 2004 is included in its entirety.

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I had been instrumental as a Director of The Working Company in bringing her out from America to continue these training programs when her previous producer, Kerry Packer, had elected to opt out in 1985.

Rae Allen’s C.V. is reprinted in Appendix E.


Cited in John Loengard, Georgia O’Keeffe at Ghost Ranch, A Photo Essay (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1995) 10

See Appendix G to view the List of Illustrations with visual material that informed my character preparation.


60 Cited in Robinson 166.
64 Cited in Cowart, Hamilton, & Greenough 210.
Epilogue: After the First A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

In March, 2008, A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe with a new production team was invited to return to The WorkShop Theatre Company for a limited run to commemorate Women’s History Month. This time the play was directed by Robert Kalfin with video design was by Marilys Ernst, music by Margaret Pine, lighting by Paul Hudson, set by Kevin Judge, and costumes by Gail Cooper Hecht. Natalie Mosco (“Georgia”) and Virginia Roncetti (“The Women”) reprised their roles and a new actor, David Lloyd Walters, joined the company as “Stieglitz” and “The Men”.

After a dozen performances in the Off-Off-Broadway venue, the play transferred to Off-Broadway’s St. Luke’s Theatre where it played for four months (closing because of the theatre’s contractual obligations to another work.) On November 1st, 2008, the production performed a special matinee at The Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. in conjunction with an Ansel Adams/Georgia O’Keeffe Exhibition.

This version of the play benefited from the mistakes of the 2004 production. In this instance, sufficient time was allowed for rewrites, learning, and rehearsals. The opening was delayed by one week in order to satisfy the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum (representing her Estate) that the material in the play accurately reflected O’Keeffe’s life. After much communication, they deemed the work well-researched and granted permission for us to use O’Keeffe’s images in our production. With their approval, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institute, Aamon Carter Museum, and Milwaukee Museum of Art also permitted us the use of their images. Once we opened, the reviews and audiences were appreciative. The current version of the script was well-received. Having performed Off-Off-Broadway and Off-Broadway as well as in a major national museum, the plan is to generate regional and international productions as well as a mini-version for educational institutions.
A BRUSH WITH GEORGIA O’KEEFFE

by

Natalie Mosco

“Where I was born and where and how I’ve lived is unimportant. It’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest.”

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revised August, 2008
A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

ACT I

VOICE OVER: GEORGIA, 72, 1960:

It’s always the same: They want to see Georgia O’Keeffe. (facing audience) O’Keeffe’s front. (turning sideways) O’Keeffe’s side. (faces US) O’Keeffe’s rear. [a shrug] They won’t understand my art any better if they see how I live: It’s all there on the canvas. If people don’t get it, I don’t care. Where I was born and where and how I live is unimportant – it’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest. You know, I’ve got wild turkeys in Abiquiu, New Mexico smarter than some of those folks that come barging into my world. I keep the birds in for pest control. Too bad they only eat grasshoppers! Monteverdi. I put a record on the stereo and those birds sit perfectly still on my window ledge until the piece is over. Imagine having wild turkeys who appreciate the genius of Monteverdi? Now you’ll tell everyone: “That O’Keeffe is a queer one!” Tell ‘em – Fuel my myth! Didn’t think I knew? I live in a desert not a vacuum! Hell, I’ve been through Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland again, McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, FDR, “Give ‘em Hell” Harry, “I like Ike”, and now JFK, (thank God because we almost got stuck with Nixon!) – Christ, Nixon?! - This country is going to the dogs! – Know how I know? I’ve got my radio. And my breeze through the pinon trees. That’s done it - Now you’ll tell everyone: “She’s as mad as a snake. Not only does she talk to the trees – the trees talk back!”

Well, they do. I might like people better if they were trees. A world with no people in it: my pinons whisper and my mind makes shapes – sometimes I know where they from and sometimes I don’t. (stopping, to herself) What made me think of that? – When did I last think of that?
[Blackout]

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 44, The Sanitarium, Doctor’s Hospital, 1932.

[lights up]

DR. JANKS:

Miss O’Keeffe? [silence] Miss O’Keeffe, I asked about your dream...?

GEORGIA:

How do you know there’s a dream?

DR. JANKS:

Isn’t there?

GEORGIA:

You’re obsessed with my dreams, doctor.

DR. JANKS:

Your obsessions are more to the point.
GEORGIA:

What makes you think I have any?

DR. JANKS:

Obsessions? Or dreams?

GEORGIA:

Either. What difference would it make...?

DOCTOR:

Miss O’Keeffe, Prof. Freud explains –

GEORGIA:

Ah Dr. Freud - Quite the favorite these days.

DR. JANKS:

You’re familiar with Freud’s theories?

GEORGIA:

Only as a defense against my critics: remember, my work is “Freudian suppressed desires in paint.”
DR. JANKS:

And is it?

GEORGIA:

It’s been so long since I’ve painted.

DR. JANKS:

[a pause] Miss O’Keeffe... the dream...?

GEORGIA:

[not easy] There’s this pause between light and dark, then, clear as the visions I see in the crystal ball that he gave me: I’m a corpse dressed in black in clothes like the kind I used to wear when I was still at school. I’m laid out in a Model A Ford which has no roof - this black shape away somewhere in some desert place. There’s a phrase: “indignant desert birds”. Black crows are swooping down on me from a great height and picking my flesh clean, like those sky burials in India. They put them on a mountain, (the person that died), and the birds eat the flesh ‘til there’s nothing left - the bones are bare and the spirit is free. It’s considered a bad omen if the birds won’t eat you so I must be getting better. I don’t want to think about that; I want to think about painting again. But I don’t want to talk about painting - words and I are not friends - too many words mean too few paintings. I used to beg -- “I can’t work with all these visitors. Their words cast shadows on my shapes.”

(Like
seaweed shrouds the bottom of the sea.) No, I won't think about water -- and I can't talk about him. My mind creates these shapes, see? Sometimes I know where they come from and sometimes I don't. Lines go straight 'til they can't help but turn, cutting away because they have to. I'm here because I want to paint. And function. And I guess I'm not doing either too well, am I?

DR. JANKS:

What do you think?

GEORGIA:

[remembering] “Art's a wicked thing; it's what we are...” So, when an artist isn't “arting”...? – (mimicking) “What do you think?” I don't “think”: I know.

DR. JANKS:

You’re “the most distinguished American female artist of the 20th Century”. No doubt, you're right.

GEORGIA:

Of course I’m right. “Female”?

DR. JANKS:

“Female”? Let’s talk about that. Freud hypothesizes the absence of a penis turned you away from your mother and towards your father. Let’s talk about your father --
GEORGIA:

Let’s not. My parents, where I was born, where and how I’ve lived – none of that matters. It’s what I’ve done with where I’ve been that should be of interest.

DR. JANKS:

Very well. Let’s talk about what you’ve done. Let’s talk about what gets you painting.

GEORGIA:

I never paint until I’m almost 100% sure what I’m going to do. Otherwise it’s just a waste of canvas and paint. There’s got to be that mind painting first.

DR. JANKS:

Are there many mind paintings before you pick up a brush? [Georgia is silent] Very well – then tell me about your first visual memory. How far back can you remember?

GEORGIA:

[Between then and now] You won’t believe me: I couldn’t be more than 8 months old.
Bright, white, sea of sunlight – Bright is not dark. Red-and-white on black. My kingdom is a quilt. I’m Queen, held by white-lightness. Queen, at eight months old.

[moving ahead] Nearly two years old.

Our Sun Prairie Farm: my ear is to the sweet, scored earth! Smell of what was once-green-growing-something. Mama, why can’t I eat the earth? [sound] Suddenly, I’m flying like a bird! Mama, lifting me from the path of an on-coming horse –

MAMA:

Georgia, you’re impossible.

GEORGIA:

By the time I’m ten,

MAMA:

Georgia, stay in the back room. Company’s coming.

GEORGIA:

[An internal shift to age 12] Lena Bucholz, hand me that paper bag. [Focused] Move. You’re in my light. Lena? What are you going to do when you grow up? I’m going to be an artist.
DR. JANKS:

Where did that come from?

GEORGIA:

I don’t know where I got my artist idea.

DR. JANKS:

You were how old?

GEORGIA:

I couldn’t’ve been more than eleven or twelve!

DR. JANKS:

How did your parents feel? Your mother –

GEORGIA:

She called it --

MAMA:

More of Georgia’s crazy notions!
GEORGIA:

  Doesn’t my being here prove she was right?

DR. JANKS:

  Was she often “right”?

GEORGIA:

  [dismissively] She never approved of me.

DR. JANKS:

  How did that make you feel?

GEORGIA:

  Sorry to disappoint you, Doctor – I didn’t care. I seem to be one of the few people I know with no complaints about the first twelve years.

  [between then and now]

Thirteen-and-a-half. I’d been away at
The Sacred Heart Academy Convent School:

  [GEORGIA:] Mama? Mama, I won a gold medal for Art Excellence!
[MAMA:] Why shouldn’t you get a medal? I’d be surprised if you didn’t.

GEORGIA: [as her Mother walks away]

[GEORGIA:] Mama?! [no response]

Mama is from Hungarian aristocracy: standards are high; discipline is strict. Of course, Papa’s in me, too: a wild Irish streak – a love of the earth! Papa’d buy me candy, take me to town! Of course, he also took me to the barn – that’s when Mama sent me away again. This time to Chatham Episcopal in Chatham, Virginia. To make a lady out of me? Or get me away from Papa? – [stopping herself] Never mind! – I’m 15 years old and as free as a bird!

Roasting wild onions in the dorms, teaching the Southern belles to play poker, and dancing, dancing, dancing! [dances for a moment; stops dancing] But, Mama’s side took over: I “decided to give up everything for my Art.”

DR. JANKS:

And did you?

GEORGIA:

It’s not about sacrifice; it’s about choice. I learned that four years later when I was at The Art Students’ League in New York: if I went dancing one night, I couldn’t paint properly for the next three days and I wanted to paint!
DR. JANKS:

Let’s talk about wanting to paint – was the Art Students’ League your first formal training?

GEORGIA:

No, no, no. Dr. Janks and I danced around the topic of painting for almost a year. My turkeys in Abiqui know more about music than Janks knew about art. But no, New York’s Art Students’ League was not my first formal training. When I was seventeen, I was sent to my aunt and uncle in Chicago – What was it Carl Sandburg called it? – “Hog Butcher for the World”?

Swirls of steam, oily dull brown fog. “The Art Institute of Chicago.”
Replicating Old Masters, winning medals for making copies of copies.
Sketching, representing, coloring in.
Placing first in Vanderpoel’s Life Drawing Class.
Wondering, “Is this Art?”

GEORGIA, 19:

Finally, at 19, braving New York. “Fifty-seventh Street”. A few worn steps, a wrought iron gate. The Art Students’ League. Big, light, airy rooms. The students call me “Patsy” after Ireland’s St. Patrick – I’m their Pet! They want to date me and paint me and take me dancing! They love the Irish in me. One loves it a bit more than the others -- George, from San Francisco. I call him “The Man from Way Out West”. Is it George or his West that moves me? Maybe it’s everything?! When William Merritt Chase enters the building, a rustle seems to flow from the ground floor to the top: “Chase has arrived!” –
silk opera hat, fur-lined coat, pale kid gloves and spats, cream carnation in the lapel of his smart brown suit.

[CHASE:] Nothing is more difficult to paint than flowers!

[CHASE:] Try to paint the sky as if we could see through it!

[CHASE:] Great works of art come from the heart!

GEORGIA:

I’m turning out an oil painting a day! Eugene Speicher tries to convince me to pose for him. It’s money, yes....

[GEORGIA:] But, Eugene, I don’t have time to pose. I need it for my own work.

[EUGENE:] It doesn’t matter what you do. I’m going to become a great painter while you’re just going to end up teaching art in some girls’ school.

And so, I pose. Another year goes by.

FEMALE STUDENT and EUGENE:

(Overlapping) “Rodin!” “Nudes!” “Gallery 291!” “Alfred Stieglitz!” “Hurry!”
GEORGIA:

A Day of White. Snow bending the limbs of a tree guarding the door at 291 Fifth Avenue. I brush that snow, baring a branch – lightening its load.

Up the front steps, into the elevator’s climbing cage, above The Headquarters to Save New York, above Wurmsen Tailors, up, up to the very top.
An empty room - green burlap walls – a pot-bellied stove – a large brass bowl. We fill the tiny space. These must be the Rodin watercolors – Hmm, they’re beautiful, but simple....

EUGENE:

What rubbish. It’s got to be a joke. [Exit]

GEORGIA:

They are just a lot of scribbles.

FEMALE STUDENT:

But they’re rather pretty....

GEORGIA:

They don’t make any sense at all

FEMALE STUDENT:
Stieglitz!

GEORGIA:

So that’s what a Jew looks like!

STEIGLITZ: You Americans have a vote, and therefore you think you must have an opinion. Rodin’s work is only for people who are free and who understand the highest meaning of art. It sounds mad, but everything born of spirit sounds mad in these days of materialism run riot. I’ve been damned for practically every forward move I’ve ever made. And I knew in advance that I’d be damned! Yes, it’s meant one gigantic sacrifice, but everything lasting probably means that. Life blood is the price....

GEORGIA:

Oh my God!

A cold winter in New York. One night, walking through Central Park, I stop, look, and see: trees shining white at the lake’s edge – the darkness looks exactly the way I feel: wet, swampy, and very, very gloomy. – If I encourage the way I feel to inform what I paint will that be what Chase means by “Art coming from the heart?” Painting that night.... Yes...
The O’Keeffe’s have run out of money.
No Art Students’ League for Patsy! At twenty-one years of age, it’s time for me to wake up. Traveling for commercial art work to Chicago:
[a litany] To copy lace for advertising – lace for collars – lace for cuffs.
To copy lace for advertising – lace for collars – lace for cuffs.
All I’ve been taught is to copy, to paint like other people. I’m just adding to the brush pile. So why not simply quit?
I copy lace for advertising – lace for collars – lace for cuffs.
I copy lace for advertising – lace for collars – lace for cuffs.
MEASLES! I CAN’T SEE! --

Back to Williamsburg, Virginia... Mama???? She can’t help me. She’s got consumption. She caught it nursing my uncles. Now, my sisters, Anita and Ida, are nursing her, and even my commercial art money has gone for Mama’s care in Charlottesville. Stuck in Williamsburg, I don’t know if I’ll ever see again, let alone paint! There’s nothing to do but sit and wait.
[pause] My sight returns but I have no vision?! – No paints, no dreams, just “mothering” the younger girls. Time, sliding over my head, I make dusting tours around the tower regions of the house. Avoiding Papa’s advances – It’s just like the barn all over again – Keeping away from his hands when I can. And when I can’t? [singing] “Hello, my baby, hello my honey, hello my ragtime summertime gal...” You’d push the Past out of the way - if only I could.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 23.

GEORGIA:
The younger girls and I have been sent for – Papa is told to stay behind. On the train to Charlottesville, the faraway horizon of the Blue Ridge Mountains seems to be summoning me.

[IDA:] Georgia, I think you should join my Art Class at the University of Virginia.

[GEORGIA:] Ida, I do NOT want to join your art class.

[IDA:] I’m sure you’d find it interesting.

[GEORGIA:] I’m sure I would NOT...

[IDA:] I’m sure you would....

GEORGIA:

My sister, Ida, won that bet. At twenty-three, I’m painting again! Because of a man named Alon Bement. My sisters think Bement is a joke – almost detestable -- but he shows me a new way of seeing spatial relationships:


I’m very fond of “Bementie” – and he’s fond of me...
[BEMENT:] Music is the key to all the other fine arts since its essence is pure beauty, so spatial art may be called “visual music”.

“Visual Music”?! – What a wonderful thought! I love music. Mr. Bement, when I was younger I played the piano – almost chose music over art for my career. I used to practice three and four hours a day – but I knew I wouldn’t have the time to get both art and music right – and, besides singing seems to me to be the most perfect means of expression. So spontaneous! And after singing, I think the violin. Since I can’t sing, I thought I’d paint. But now, I can make “visual music”. It’s all part of finding that power in me, my inner music, and, then, visualizing it – “beautifully”...because that’s the point of making art – “to fill a space in a beautiful way.”

BEMENT:

Get some teaching work this fall and winter and I’ll be able to hire you as my paid assistant next summer.

GEORGIA:

Writing letters like mad, hoping some school, somewhere, anywhere, will offer me a job. [to BEMENT] Mr. Bement, Mr. Bement? I’m to be “Supervisor of Drawing and Penmanship” at a school on the edge of the earth.

BEMENT:

That’s intriguing.

GEORGIA:
No. That’s Texas. It’s always been a sort of faraway dream: My grandmother pioneered West from New York in 1854 – Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders! The Adventures of Kitt Carson. The Wild West, you see? – there’s no place I’d rather be going – and – at 24 – I am! – Thanks to a recommendation by a friend who wrote about a position in Amarillo and that I could stay at her ranch I boarded a train for the Great American Desert.

[reading a brochure:] “Amarillo”, Spanish for “yellow”, is the cattle-shipping center of the Southwest. Trains run east and west and north and south to “the bone capital of America”.

[out of window:] They never told me it would be so beautiful. The most wonderful yellow trees in the world. Parched earth as far as the eye can see. I’m going to roam every inch of it with my friend, Alice! But there’s no Alice at the railway station -- Just a ranch hand --

[GEORGIA:] Excuse me, do you know the Beretta Ranch?

[COWBOY:] I work there.

[GEORGIA:] Oh! Did Alice send you to fetch me?

[COWBOY:] Miss Alice? She took fever and passed last week.

[GEORGIA:] Passed? Oh, Alice....
No friends, no credentials, what I know about teaching is like going to the moon! I can’t let the other teachers see me for the fraud that I am - so, I take a room at:

[reading the sign:] “The Magnolia Hotel” on Polk Street.

Temporary home to cow hands, gamblers, loose women, and Georgia O’Keeffe. Texas is like nothing else! – cattle drivers, coming to our hotel, lips, cracking and blistering from the sun and the wind and the weather – and eating two and three dinners at one sitting! [gunshot sounds]

[GEORGIA:] What’s the trouble?

[GUNMAN:] Nothing. I got him.

And there’s no time to miss anyone – I’m too busy!

[MRS. MacGREGOR:] Letter for you, Miss O’Keeffe. Europe.

[GEORGIA:] Thanks, Mrs. MacGregor.

From France. From George. My beau from the Art Students’ League in New York -- Once upon a time he was my Man from Way Out West. Now my San Francisco boy is studying art in France:

[GEORGE D.:] Mardi Gras, 1913:

Dear Girl: Already the streets are filled with music and dancing, and by evening there will be a riot of color all over Paris.
But when I get back I have plans for the Georgia O’Keeffe that exists only for me. Maybe by the time we’re 40, frank simple truth will disintegrate that funny shell of doubt and uncertainty that you love to crawl in and out of. When I get back, I’ll prove to you what I mean....

GEORGIA:

You never did. You’re right about one thing, George: I love my doubts. Keep your Paris carnival: I have the music of the Panhandle. Your Mardi Gras can’t compare to the lowing of penned cows, separated from their calves, crying for their lost children: deep and sad, over and over, haunting in the night. Going for long walks in this wide and empty country – Terrible dust and blowing wind. Coming home the color of the road. A buggy -- blown a block! A house -- turned over! Flooding creeks. Benches washed downstream! That’s “visual music”! To see and hear such wind is good. To me, it’s something real.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 26, 1914.

GEORGIA:

Suddenly – the world’s plunged into war! The Texas Plains – in red, white and blue bunting. NO! – Not my students! I’ve worn out my welcome in Amarillo. It’s no place for a pacifist. I’d better get away before they run me out of town. Anyway, I want to be a painter, not a teacher. I’ve saved up enough
money to return to New York. I’ll give Columbia Teachers’ College another try:

[ANITA:] [startled] Oh! – you’re...?

[GEORGIA:] Busy. This area behind the screen is restricted. By prior arrangement with Professor Charles Martin.

[ANITA:] [startled] Oh! [prattling] Yes. For me, too. Charles Martin gave me permission to paint here, too. I’m Anita Pollitzer. Haven’t I seen you in the corridors?

[seeing GEORGIA’s work] Oh! – that’s magnificent!

[GEORGIA:] In what way?

[ANITA:] Well...the shapes kind of – I don’t know how to say it --“sing”? It reminds me of...music!

[GEORGIA:] [finally smiling] -- Your name again?

[ANITA:] “Anita Pollitzer”.

GEORGIA:
But my money’s run out again. Eugene Speicher was right. I’m doomed to teach – this time, in a stultifying backwater, Columbia, South Carolina.

GEORGIA:

October 15, 1915.
Dear Anita... I feel all sick inside – as if I could dry up and blow away. Miserable beginning, dear little Pollitzer... But what is there to say? Who am I to try and express myself? And what is Art, anyway? When I think of how hopelessly unable I am to answer that question, I can’t help feeling like a farce. How can I teach Art if I don’t know what it is?! I’ve never felt such a vacancy in my life. I need someone to take hold of me and shake me out of my wits! Tell me I’m crazy, Anita, but I’ve decided to start all over new with my work – using the ideas in my head that aren’t like what anyone has taught me, with only charcoal and paper. And I won’t use any color ‘til it’s impossible to do what I want to do in black and white. As soon as I’ve said something worth saying – if I ever do – well, I’ll send it to you. Lovingly, your Patsy

VOICE OVER:


ANITA, [writing a letter]:

Dear Patsy: I bring you holiday greetings. Astounded and awfully happy were my feelings today when I opened your batch of drawings. I tell you, I felt them! I hope you’ll forgive me – You once told me that you wish you dared show them to Stieglitz. You said, “I’d rather have Stieglitz like something – anything – I’ve
done than anyone else I know of...” Pat – I had to do it – I knew there was one person who had to see them, so, I rolled up the drawings, tucked them under my arm, and on New Year’s Day, downtown I went to 291 and Stieglitz. I found the Great Man in the front room, alone:

   [ANITA:] Excuse me, Mr. Stieglitz? Would you like to see some drawings I’ve brought to show you?

   [STIEGLITZ:] I’m always open to Art.

ANITA:

   We went into the little rear room. I silently spread your music before him. He looked and looked:

   [STIEGLITZ:] Finally -- a woman of vision.

   [ANITA:] They’re not mine.

   [STIEGLITZ:] What woman did these?

   [ANITA:] They’re from a friend in South Carolina.

   [STIEGLITZ:] She’s an unusual woman – she’s broadminded – she’s bigger than most women, but she’s got the sensitive emotion. I’d know she was a woman –
look at that line! -- Are you writing to the girl?

[ANITA:] All the time.

[STIEGLITZ:] Will you tell her for me that these are the purest, finest, sincerest things to enter 291 in a long while.

ANITA:

And then, Pat, he said,

[STIEGLITZ:] I've got to give these drawings a show.
They belong at Gallery 291. Finally, a woman of crystalline vision.

ANITA:

Happy New Year, Patsy!

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 28. New York City.

GEORGIA:

Looking back over 1916 -- my world seems to be on wheels -- going so fast I can’t see the spokes -- And I like it! My life is a Kaleidoscope!
A Twist of the Tube: The washroom at Columbia Teachers’ College, New York.

[FEMALE STUDENT:] Are you Virginia O’Keeffe?

[GEORGIA:] No, I’m Georgia O’Keeffe. Why?

[STUDENT:] It says on the bulletin board that Virginia O’Keeffe is having an exhibition at a gallery called 291.

[GEORGIA:] Hmmm. Virginia O’Keeffe. That must be me. So. He’s showing my work without even telling me?!

Alfred Stieglitz, you may own New York, but you don’t own my paintings!

[GEORGIA:] Who gave you permission to hang these drawings?

[STIEGLITZ:] No one.

[GEORGIA:] Then, take them off the wall. You didn’t ask before you put them up.

[STIEGLITZ:] I think you are mistaken. No one tells me what to do at 291.

[GEORGIA:] I am Georgia O’Keeffe. These are my drawings.
[STIEGLITZ:] By your hand only. In truth, you don’t know what you’ve done in these pictures.

[GEORGIA:] Certainly I know what I’ve done! -- I’m not an idiot!

[STIEGLITZ:] Artistically, these may be yours. Intellectually, they belong to all of us – You have no more right to withhold these pictures than to withdraw a child from the world had you given birth to one.

GEORGIA:

Of course, the drawings stayed up -- you try arguing with Stieglitz and see where you get! – What is he seeking? What does he see? Am I the Artist or the Art? -- The world’s moving too fast: My life is a Kaleidoscope!

May, 1916. A twist of the Tube: Called from New York to Charlottesville. I have a premonition: hills of mud; trees, wet with Spring growth; bare cupboards, unheated rooms. One of my sisters has eloped; my other sister, Ida’s, been shooting squirrels for food. Why wasn’t I told? Too late!

CORONER:

Pulmonary Tuberculosis and Suffocation.

GEORGIA:

Mama! – Gone.
CORONER:

Face down in a pool of her own blood.

GEORGIA:

I can’t look at Mama. I can’t. I can hardly believe she isn’t here somewhere. Six weeks just washing away. Pouring rains and drowning tears and flooding memories. The battle, over. For her as well as for me. So tired I almost feel crazy -- Absurd! A Twist of the Kaleidoscope’s tube: I need to get back to Texas. I need to get back to “me”.

Dear Anita:
What can I write that would make you see “my” Texas? -- Walks into the sunset -- a long line of cattle like black lace against a sky blazing hot with red and gold. Night, coming on like a blue-black bowl over the Plains. Then, the moon, up out of the ground – battered where he bumped his head – but enormous. My moon, my sky, and my flat prairie land. That’s when I pick up my brush. I’m so glad I’m out here, and I’m not even having the smallest wish for New York. I’m loving the Plains more than ever -- terrible winds and wonderful emptiness – Prairie like the ocean -- and the blue of the sky -- Anita, you have never seen SKY!

Twist: My days? -- teaching; my nights? -- painting dreamscapes, writing letters.
Dear Anita: Last night I couldn’t sleep ‘til 4 in the morning – but managing to be up by dawn to meet the morning train – exciting to see it coming through the sunrise! – Everyday, scared when I look for the mail – afraid I’ll get another letter from him – but -- I can’t stop reading them:

[STIEGLITZ:] Dear Miss O’Keeffe – These drawings, how I understand them. They are as if I saw a part of myself – here’s my hand – do you wish to put yours in it? --

Dear Miss O’Keeffe – Little did you dream when you did them that they would – or could – mean so much to anyone as they have to 291 –

Dear Miss O’Keeffe – Some drawings I’m having framed – to protect them. I can’t bear the thought that they may be soiled...rubbed.

GEORGIA:

Dear Mr. Stieglitz: I think letters with such humanness in them have never come to me before. I wonder -- with every one of them – how you put it in – seeing and feeling – finding what I want....

Twist, 1917, the Kaleidoscope continues! Stieglitz wants more of me for 291! – Rolling my drawings and watercolors in newspaper. Sending them to 291.
Twist: My First sale! – I call it “Train in the Desert”.

[STIEGLITZ:] Dear Miss O’Keeffe – America – at war with Germany – My parents were born in Germany, so the New York streets, filled with soldiers, do not fill me with feelings of unmixed delight – When I was their age – 18, 19, 20 - I was an engineering student in Berlin – that’s where I bought my first camera. Where I discovered my passion for art and my life’s work, photography. Can you understand how torn I feel? I never was so little a part of New York as I am now.

GEORGIA:

Dear Anita – We must keep ourselves from feeling too much if we are going to keep sane and see with a clear unprejudiced vision.

[STIEGLITZ:] Dear Miss O’Keeffe – 291’s old back window is more marvelous than ever. To spend a night there – on a simple cot – right at the window – watching the lights go out – one by one....

GEORGIA:

Dear Anita – Don’t mention loving anyone to me... Emotions and feelings, running riot will eat you up and swallow you whole....
[STIEGLITZ:] Dear Miss O’Keeffe – Your next show will be my last presentation. I’ve decided to rip 291 to pieces. It’s time to move on.

The Plains, coursing with the juice of spring -- I need a break from Texas – Have to see the show -- [pause] -- It’s Steiglitz I’m going to see – just have to go – there isn’t any way out of it. And I’m so glad.....

[Calling] Hello?

[STIEGLITZ:] Alright! Alright! But the gallery’s permanently closed! [opening the door] Georgia?! [correcting himself] Miss O’Keeffe?

[GEORGIA:] [correcting him] Georgia. [they look, then] I had to see the show – 291 -- one last time.

[STIEGLITZ:] Your show’s come down – But you must see it. I’ll hang it all again!

And he does: just for me!

Now, he’s photographing me. Me?! – My face, twice; my hands several times.... It’s as though I’m with someone I’ve known my whole life....

VOICE OVER:

GEORGIA:

An open trolley ride for Stieglitz, me, and someone new: the photographer, Paul Strand. Within the folds of Stieglitz’s black loden cape, my eyes lock on Strand’s: small, dark and beautifully intense. And his lock on mine. Am I shivering from cold or excitement? I’m falling for Paul Strand. And he’s falling for me!

On the beach: Sea Gate --The Bather’s Pavilion – crazy people braving the icy Atlantic.... Clumps of seaweed, broken shells...

The Amusement Park! Calliope and carnival! Wienerwurst and donuts! Shooting the Chutes! The miniature railway! Evening.... Coney Island really coming alive: garlands of thousands of electric lights – hundreds of painted ponies – as removed from the plains of Texas as anything could be! A great party and a great day!

But, now, it’s night. Paul saying,

PAUL:

Farewell.

GEORGIA:

A great big quietness, overtaking me. Stieglitz’s black, loden cape, enveloping me. – I need to think - something, happening with Stieglitz. But “something”, happening with Paul Strand as well --- I have to get back to Texas again.

VOICE OVER:
Georgia, 1917.

GEORGIA:

Dear Paul: It’s so hot on the Plains – I can’t bear the feel of clothing. So I’m writing to you naked. Do you mind?

Dear Paul: Thank you for the Life of Nietzsche. I long to curl up inside it, feel it envelop me, closing me off from whatever isn’t you.

Dear Mr. Stieglitz – Too many headaches, fevers, sore throats. The doctors fear influenza or even tuberculosis – I’ve been forced to leave teaching and recover at my friend, Leah Harris’ ranch, just outside of San Antonio. Leah’s had consumption, so she’s the best nurse I could have.

[LEAH:] Now stay tucked in and rest.

[GEORGIA:] I never mean to be sick again.

[LEAH:] Just think about getting well.

[GEORGIA:] Leah, I expect you’re the only person I could bear to look after me.

[LEAH:] Georgia, we both know you can’t bear anyone for very long, so I’m taking it as a sign you’re getting better since you’re biting my head off.
GEORGIA:

Two women, walking alone at night.

LEAH:

No wind, so still and so light ...

GEORGIA:

Nothing to be afraid of --

LEAH:

-- because there’s nothing out here.

GEORGIA:

And no one else in the world but me and Leah Harris, the finest girl in Texas.

[GEORGIA:] What, Leah?

[LEAH:] I want to kiss you.

[GEORGIA:] Oh.

[LEAH:] Why do you think you’re here? Don’t you know I’ve been looking for you all my life?
[GEORGIA:] You’ve been wonderful -


[GEORGIA:] I can’t do that. But I need you in my life.

[LEAH:] I know. That’s what I’m counting on.

Crackling camp fire, sparkling stars.

GEORGIA:

And Leah, eyes like diamonds reflected in flame.
I don’t seem to be me. I seem to be someone else – or something else. My slate, wiped clean of New York – the past. Stieglitz, sending Paul Strand to Texas to fetch me “home”.

PAUL:

First, letter after letter. Then, silence. I come down here and now, you’re pushing me away. I’ve got the tickets. The train leaves in two hours. Stieglitz expects you to make your own decision about coming back to New York, but he won’t be happy if I return alone.

GEORGIA:
Aren’t you the funny one, Paul? *I’m* pushing *you* away? You’re afraid to love me – because it might upset Stieglitz – and you’re afraid I’ll love him – because you need me for yourself – Well, here you are - and here I am. When you get up your courage, who knows where I’ll be?

[LEAH:] It’s just that I want you to have every chance.

[GEORGIA:] You’re not making sense, Leah. Now you want me to go?

[LEAH:] Of course not. I want you here. Now. Every minute, every day, where I can see you and care for you. I need you in my life.

[GEORGIA:] “Everybody wanting something they can’t have”.

[LEAH:] What?

[GEORGIA:] Something Paul said.

[LEAH:] Paul. Stieglitz. Men -- pulling you away from me. And, the more I resist, the more I’m pushing you to them.

Georgia, I’m afraid I’ll never see you again.
[GEORGIA:] It’s only for a little while.... Leah, I will be back --

Telegram to Stieglitz: Starting New York tonight. My heart has wheels. These are my Kaleidoscope years: Goodbye to little boys and mothering women... Pennsylvania Station, June, 1918. The now-familiar black and gray. Paul Strand, delivering me and Stieglitz’s cape, enveloping me. I won’t run any more.

End of ACT I
A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

ACT II

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, 1918, 29 years old.

[STIEGLITZ:] Step. Just one more flight.

[GEORGIA:] Where are we going?

[STIEGLITZ:] Step. We’re almost there.

[GEORGIA:] What is this place?

[STIEGLITZ:] Step. What would you like to do more than anything? To teach?

[GEORGIA:] I would like a year to paint.

[STIEGLITZ:] You’ve got it.

It has a skylight, faces south.

[GEORGIA:] Yellow walls? Orange floor?

[STIEGLITZ:] The colors of Mr. Flower’s chrysanthemums.
[GEORGIA:] Mr. Flowers?

[STIEGLITZ:] A code name. My niece is in love with our gardener. This studio was their secret place....

[GEORGIA:] Not a very good place for painting. But, exciting....

A barrel, coming from Texas. Old drawings and paintings! Turning a page: throwing them into the ashcan in the alley!

STIEGLITZ:

We’re off to The Far East China Gardens.

GEORGIA:

[echoing] The Far East China Gardens. With “the Men.” John Marin -

[MARIN:] Art shifts – it cannot be tied down or pigeon-holed...

Steiglitz –

[STIEGLITZ:] So few GET it!

Marsden Hartley –

[HARTLEY:] Max Weber brought us Cezanne and cubism first.
Stieglitz –

[STIEGLITZ:] And I showed them first!

Charles Demuth –

[DEMUTH:] There’s something about lighthouses and fog...

Stieglitz -

[STIEGLITZ:] All movements of any influence on the moral and artistic advancement of mankind have been activated by abiding faith and hope in the hearts of the leaders.

Arthur Dove –

[DOVE:] Stieglitz – you’re a thorn in the crown of the commonplace!

Stieglitz -

[STIEGLITZ:] Of course I am! Georgia, try the Moo Goo Gai Pan...

Chinese meals with “the men” are a regular occurrence now that I’ve moved up to New York permanently. “The men”. Stieglitz’ apostles. Other artists
that he champions. There’s such power when Stieglitz speaks – he molds his hearer. People seem to believe what he says, even when they know it isn’t their truth. [a confession] – It makes for an easier life. Mostly, I listen. Words wash over me like water over tea leaves -- a not-unconstructive activity -- the result is quite an acceptable cup of tea! As for “the men” -- I get on with them very well. I do all their hard work: hang up their shows, carry their pictures, put them in storage, get them out. That makes me quite a useful citizen. They’re wild because Stieglitz carries my first charcoals with him everywhere! – Hartley calls them “Stieglitz’s celestial solitaire!” But worse is what Stieglitz calls me!:

[STIEGLITZ:] Whiteness, Virginal, The Great Child,
Woman Supreme, A Purer Form of Myself,

and

[STIEGLITZ:] The Spirit of 291....

The men, in their turn, call my color:

[MEN:] hopeless,

too bright,

Arthur Dove says he likes my work, but:

[DOVE:] That girl is doing without effort what all we moderns have been trying to do.
“Without effort”? Just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean I can’t make conscious artistic choices. No one thinks very much of any of us. Except for Stieglitz.

[STIEGLITZ:] Put away your wallets. This one’s on me.

Late that night, coming home: Terrific wind, blowing the ashcan in the alley over…. My old Texas drawings and paintings, swirling through the air!

[STIEGLITZ:] Chaos always signifies peace and hope.

GEORGIA:

Chaos always signifies peace and hope?

Embracing the adventure:
Every morning, painting alone, nude!
Noon, Steiglitz, sweeping me off to lunch, clothed.
After lunch, the light “just right”, the Photographer, retiring behind a big black box. The Model, assuming a pose.

[STIEGLITZ:] Open the shutter just enough; overexposure is the enemy.

I am a puppet, Stieglitz puppet....

[STIEGLITZ:] Don’t move! Don’t breathe

... captive in his color wheel.... [a sneeze]
[STIEGLITZ:] Got in Himmel! You moved! [a giggle] We need “texture”! To The Apartment!

GEORGIA:

His wife’s Victorian folly: grotesque tapestries, time-trapped dust, slants of sunlight, and the talc-and-lavender of Emmeline Obermeyer Stieglitz and a daughter, Kitty. Alfred, it’s cold. At least let me put on a bed jacket?

STIEGLITZ:

Just a moment longer. When I make pictures, I make love.

[EMMY:] Alfred?! Alfred! This is past all bearing! We agreed that your dirty, anarchistic artists were never to set foot in our home – But now you have the effrontery to bring your whores here?!

[STIEGLITZ:] You’re slandering an innocent woman. She’s just a girl! –

[EMMY:] What kind of girl would go to a married man’s home and encourage his depravity?

[STIEGLITZ:] I’m being charged with something absolutely untrue! That’s always been your problem: never comprehending artists live by a different code. You can’t understand
any fine or decent relationship between a man and woman....

[EMMY:] Just – both of you – get out. And – Alfred – don’t ever come back!

[STIEGLITZ:] Fine. Consider our marriage dissolved. And don’t beg me to return because I shan’t.

[EMMY:] No fear of that – You’ll come crawling back when you realize you have no money and nowhere to go – and I won’t have you!

GEORGIA:

Escape! To “our” studio. Now, home to the Steiglitz Circus!
Black box near the wall. Dirty-white umbrella beside the camera.
Developing solution, in the bathtub. Overhead clothes lines, with Crowded with drying prints, dangling down like snakes.
I pose. I pause. I pose. I pause. And then I pose again.
Reclining on the bed – awaiting: Peace from Chaos.

I am a puppet, Steiglitz puppet...
Am I?

We made a pact, you see? I got my “year to paint”; he got me for eternity. His favorite play was Faust. And my consolation: well, I don’t like being second or third or fourth. THAT’S why I got on with Steiglitz: with him, I felt first. I was where I belonged: with the only man who dared to love me.
[between then and now]  1919, 1920,  1921... Summers of “mellow fruitfulness”...

We summer at Lake George. His wife Emmeline – (she’s the Rheingold Beer heiress) -- was a frothy creature who preferred to holiday in Europe. His people never liked Emmy, but they’re extremely welcoming to me -- twenty or more characters and their entourage in attendance at any given time. There’s “Ma” Hedwig – (neither tall nor thin) but dignified, with soft, attentive eyes:

[HEDWIG:] You’ve made my boy so happy.

His sister, Selma Stieglitz Schubart, trivial and grand, flouncing around the farm in Fortuny silk gowns, blowing smoke rings from a constant cigarette:

[SELMA:] Anyone who can make my brother happy has earned a place in our world.

Her lover, the tenor, Enrico Caruso:


Even that dog he gave Sel, a French bull terrier named Prince Ricco –

[a snarl; a bite] Ow! Pass the iodine and keep that mutt away from me. But I don’t really mind – much – because it means so much to Alfred:

[STIEGLITZ:] Lake George is in my blood! Days of deep, blue clarity. The greens, never fuller, deeper – the Lake always the Lake – and
O’Keeffe, a constant source of wonder to me – like Nature itself!

As for me, I’m full of paint: “Grapes on White Dish – Dark Rim”, “Plums”, My “Apple Family” series...

[STIEGLITZ:] Georgia’s got “apple fever!”

And – I do.

After lunch, escaping the table -- fooling no one -- for our “nap”, yes -- Alfred, undoing my buttons, yes -- racing each other up the stairs -- intensely sane -- mad – children, yes, oh yes – delicate arching filigree of the cool iron bed, a breeze, billowing the white lace curtains, yes – Alfred, caressing me as if I were a butterfly’s wing, yes – run with a pine branch next to my ear and I can hear the pine trees singing, -- sunsets in Texas, yes – flowers that grow, the courage to make Art – a miracle, and a total light! - yes – Oh – Life! -- Oh! Oh! Yes! –

After dinner, rowing on the Lake, the light, disappearing behind the mountains. Being...? - Very happy. [a discovery] The happiest six months of my life. Every woman should have Stieglitz. For a lover.

VOICE OVER:


GEORGIA:

Our intimacies – going public. 150 photographs by you; 45, of me, labeled only as ”A Woman” – ”Those” photos – uncovering me, piece by piece.
[STIEGLITZ:] Work isn’t art until enough noise is made about it!

The Critics, viewing and reviewing:

[CRITICS:] An ascetic, almost saintly-appearing woman --

Embarrassing things –

In her, the ice of polar regions and the heat of tropical spring-tides meet and mingle....

strange and far removed from me -

...her great painful artistic climaxes...

-- giving me a shiver

...her ecstasy of pain as well as ecstasy of fulfillment. She is the Sphinxian sniffer at the value of a secret.

-- a queer feeling of being invaded --

Mona Lisa got one portrait of herself worth talking about. O’Keeffe gets a hundred.
Press conference. Alfred and I go into our “dance”:

[STIEGLITZ:] I was born in Hoboken. I am an American.

[GEORGIA:] I have not been to Europe.

[STIEGLITZ:] Photography is my passion. The search for Truth my obsession.

[GEORGIA:] I have been much photographed.

Becoming a “newspaper personality” – If I’m so “celebrated”, why don’t I feel like celebrating?

STIEGLITZ:

Get used to it.

GEORGIA:

[between then and the next now] Within one year, the pattern for our lives was drawn.... 1922. 1923. 1924.

Summer and summer and summer at Lake George. A place of little pretty lives and little pretty scenery -- so “perfect”, I want to tear it all to pieces. Family, coming and going – coming and going –Sometimes, there are twenty people at the table – all, eating corn on the cob?!. Can you imagine Ma and Sel (with Prince Ricco and Caruso) plus twenty others waving their cobs, corn in their teeth, holding forth about weather, crops, and analyzing my paintings? And there are those horrid children:
[SUE, 3:] Good morning, Aunt Georgia –

[slapping her] Don’t call me “Aunt”!

My head, aching, I escape to the Shanty – the tumbledown shack I claimed for my studio. Covering canvases with white lead ‘til they’re really smooth – Will painting on them feel like roller-skating? Only a few new works: “Lake George... with Crows”, “Corn...Dark”, and a small one I call “Pattern of Leaves”....

SEL [calling]:

Georgia? Sweetie? – come away from that shack and be our North at Bridge!

GEORGIA:

Nerves, so tight, they won’t unwind. Have to get away — To Maine. Walking in the pouring rain and fog – for spite! Then -- sleeping and sleeping and sleeping. The rain and the quiet and the smell of the sea making me quite a normal human being again. Broken shells. Closed shells. Shreds of seaweed washed up by the ocean.

Back in New York because Alfred’s here. [to Steiglitz:] You need your audience; that’s your way, not mine. I’m not a city person. I’m afraid of the city – tangling me up in more and more things to do that I can’t stop.

[STIEGLITZ:] But we’re here -- doing shows.

[GEORGIA:] Being “whispered about!
[STIEGLITZ:] A whisper travels farther and faster than a shout and eventually registers on every New York ear.

Why is it -- New York always breaks me down? Where did that come from? “I need to kill a snake.” “Kill a snake”? I’m a snake. “The men” seem to think so. Demuth even painted me as a “snake plant”. I guess I’m betraying their Eden. I do what I can – but I have to keep something of myself or I won’t have anything left.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 36, December, 1924.

STIEGLITZ:

Ma is gone. Emmy has granted that divorce. You’ve got to marry me.

GEORGIA, 36, 1924:

Whatever for? Marriage. You do what you can to destroy each other. At least he let me keep my name... “Happy is the bride the sun shines on”? -- Sullen needles of rain. John Marin, chauffeuring our car into a lamp-post. The bride, in black. “Yes”, to “love and honor”; but haven’t I been “obedient” enough?

We moved to the 30th floor of the Shelton Hotel. I’d never lived up so high before and was so excited I began talking about painting New York.
[STIEGLITZ:] What are you going to paint New York for, anyway?

[GEORGIA:] It’s like a dream. A city going up to the sky –

[STIEGLITZ:] You can’t do it. The men haven’t even done very well with it. What do you think you’re going to do?!

Or, at the sight of my first large flower canvas:

[STIEGLITZ:] I wonder what you think you’re going to do with that?

[GEORGIA:] Oh, I’m just painting it.

[STIEGLITZ:] [dismissively] Silly.
[throwing a crumb] But lovely.

I’ve been “granted” first place, but he gave out the ribbons. Of course, when one of my flowers fetched the highest price ever for a work by a living American artist, he changed his tune.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 37, 1926.

GEORGIA:
Vulgar greasy people -- coming to my shows, because of *those* photographs, projecting *their* sexual associations on *my* poor shapes and colors and flowers:

[VISITORS:] Freudian suppressed desires in paint....

Wanting to crawl far, far into a dark, dark hole –

Shameless naked statements....

And stay there a long, long time –

Unconscious outpourings of sexual juices....

Then, the critics: buzzing around my flowers and shapes and shells and expressing their disdain:

[CRITICS :] Mere prettiness,

unpleasant,

clinical,

sickly.

GEORGIA [39, 1927:]

Finding a lump in my breast. Naming it “Mrs. Stieglitz” – a name I
refused three years ago. [to ALFRED:] Alfred, don’t ever call me “Mrs. Steiglitz.” “Steiglitz” is not a healthy name for women.

STIEGLITZ:

What are you talking about?

GEORGIA:

Let’s put it this way: Your mother, the first Mrs. Steiglitz, had a fatal stroke. Your wife, the second Mrs. Steiglitz, divorced you. Your daughter, Kitty Steiglitz, has gone crackers. Do you really want to run the risk? As his most comfortable choice, we married: he needed a “Mrs. Steiglitz”. Still there were others at his beck and call. When he had his affair with Paul Strand’s wife, Beck Strand, I looked the other way. Of course I did: because as Paul’s wife, Rebecca, is “one of us” – sharing in the artistic process. Becky understands -- Artists translate everything into Art:


Of course, there’s a painting, “Black Abstraction”. [An afterthought] The tumor is benign.

VOICE OVER:
Georgia, age 40, 1928.

GEORGIA:

Another lump. This time, naming it “Dorothy Norman”, a twenty-one-year-old socialite, oozing her way into our appropriately-named “Intimate Gallery” and quickly metastasizing. Alright, alright – let me try to be fair here: Norman and her husband are new to New York – fresh from Philadelphia’s Main Line. Her parents (like Alfred’s) were German-Jews and she went to Smith? – Dorothy was brought up to believe Man is the Master and Woman is there to Serve. And, yes, to her credit – she knows she knows nothing – and she wants to learn!

[STIEGLITZ:] “What does Art mean”?

[DOROTHY:] Excuse me –

[STIEGLITZ:] Do you ask what the wind means?

[DOROTHY:] Excuse me –

[STIEGLITZ:] You might as well ask what life means....

[DOROTHY:] Mr. -- ?

[STIEGLITZ:] What?

[DOROTHY:] That painting, there...?
[STIEGLITZ:] Has been acquired. [continuing] The Intimate Gallery is not a business or a Social Function. All but Time-killers are welcome.

GEORGIA:

The cancer went into remission -- to await the birth of aherdaughter. Then, it returned. This time, my husband is alone.

[STIEGLITZ:] I know you...?

[DOROTHY:] No. I...Mr. Stieglitz?

[STIEGLITZ:] Alfred.

[DOROTHY:] (shy) Alfred....

[STIEGLITZ:] Yes...uh...?

[DOROTHY:] Dorothy. Dorothy Norman.

[STIEGLITZ:] Dorothy.

[DOROTHY:] Art?

[STIEGLITZ:] Art...?
[DOROTHY:] You speak of it so directly, clearly – answering all my questions as though you know them – but you’ve no idea who I am!

[STIEGLITZ:] I know you were here and then you were gone.

[DOROTHY:] I’ve had a very difficult time keeping away from – The Room. But I had to rest and await the birth of my daughter.

[STIEGLITZ:] A young mother! – So – you’re married...? [She nods] And this marriage? Is it emotionally satisfying?

[DOROTHY:] [not convincingly] Well, yes.... I’m in love with my husband – we have a new baby....

[STIEGLITZ:] Is your sexual relationship good? [silence] Ahhh. [brushing her breast] And do you have enough milk to nurse your child?

[DOROTHY:] [confused; eyes averted] No. But -- I – I’m here because – I want to help The Room.

[STIEGLITZ:] And The Room is here to help you.

[DOROTHY:] *The Room* help me?! – It is my place to help you: A man – an American man --
whose life has been a singularly perfect, incarnation of the struggle towards Truth in humble, modern form. *Man* – in *American* terms and on *American* soil!

GEORGIA:

Oh! It was bad enough having “the men” talk about The Great American Novel, The Great American Play, The Great American, oh, everything, when they didn’t know anything about America, -- now, here was some dilettante, whose only claim to fame was scoring a wedding ring as Mrs. Sears-Roebuck. And I had to stand by and watch Mrs. Mail Order serve up a disgusting mouthful of hot mush to my husband – “Man – in American terms and on American soil!” Alfred hadn’t been across the Hudson in twenty-seven years!

[singing] “Row, row, row your boat...”

I should’ve been born a fish...

You had your fishes, Mrs. Norman. Baby after baby. And my husband, the biggest baby of all.

[GEORGIA:] I was sure I’d have a little one some time –

[STIEGLITZ:] But Georgia – you’re just a kid yourself!

[GEORGIA:] Alfred, I’ll die if I can’t have a child of my own.
[STIEGLITZ:] Any woman can have a baby, but there’s no woman who can paint like you.

So now we’re playing Faust: I’m “Eternal-Empty”; she’s “Eternal-Feminine”. But, exhibiting photographs of her? In our Gallery. In front of all our colleagues. Before the critics?! My critics?! She doesn’t need critics! She’s no artist! I had to earn that kind of notoriety! I paid for your love, stroke by stroke.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 44.

GEORGIA:

“...there is no God apart from poppies and the flying fish...”

Now, where did that come from? A shred of a poem? The membrane of a dream?

“...yellow, frail sea-poppies...”

No. [almost too lucid] My sketch is of camellias: Two milky white camellias floating in a star-filled sky above the canyons of New York.

[GEORGIA:] Alfred?

[STIEGLITZ:] What?

[GEORGIA:] The new Radio City Music Hall.

[STIEGLITZ:] What about it?
[GEORGIA:] I’ve submitted a sketch for a mural for their Powder Room.

[STIEGLITZ:] Murals?! – That Mexican disease!? – Do you think I’d let you trivialize all I’ve invested in our partnership? Do you think I’d let you prostitute your art like Rivera and Kahlo for the politics of workers and peasants?

[GEORGIA:] I’ve signed a Contract for $1,500 dollars --

[STIEGLITZ:] $1,500?! When I’ve worked to get your prices up to $5,000!? $1,500 to paint a ladies’ toilet? How dare you?!

[GEORGIA:] I’ll get Hell if I fail, won’t I?

[VOICES:] Abandon the Music Hall project –

Attend to your husband –

Concede your mistake.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 45, November, 1932.
GEORGIA:

Delay after delay, the shell of Radio City Music Hall is finally constructed. Now, it's time for the artists to do their work. I enter the Powder Room.

[whispers:] underdeveloped,

mere prettiness,

sickly,

silly, but lovely....

It's time to begin.

I'm inside a big white box, imploring my visions:
There, for floating camellias. There, for skyline.
All around, for stars and sky. And, there, a ghost-like tower, tilting closer -- leaning towards me.
Touching spongy wetness -- Who's been watering the walls?!
Flowers, oozing -- petals, peeling --
Unborn blossoms, pressing me under; unbuilt buildings, pushing me down. downward, downward to the flood --
I'm a water lily slipping through the waves.
Past,
“....Fishes
With their gold, red eyes, and green-pure gleam, and under-gold....”
I think I can hear mermaids singing:
Of treasure, buried deep. Of cooling jade and glowing pearl.
Beneath the cold black water mermaids breathe. Like eggs of fishes, I am lost and gone like weeds. Don’t wake me. Let me drown....

VOICES:

Dorothy Norman. Female hysteria. She couldn’t finish the Powder Room. “Couldn’t finish?” – She couldn’t start. Dorothy Norman. She said the walls were not properly primed. That the canvas came unglued. She came unglued. Menopause. Syphilis. Dorothy Norman. She just couldn’t face Stieglitz. Dorothy Norman.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 46, The Sanitarium, 1933.

GEORGIA:

Let’s not get carried away – We’re not talking Switzerland or even Saranac Lake here – Doctor’s Hospital is a private institution for highly-strung celebrities and socialites on 85th Street and East End Avenue. Do we really think the river view is a good choice for someone with a fear of water?! Dr. Janks is neither licensed to practice medicine in the state of New York nor listed in any national medical directory. But his compassion prescribes “rest”. During all my time at Doctor’s Hospital, I’ve never uttered my husband’s name. Consequently, Janks absolutely forbids Alfred to see me.

ANITA:

Maybe I shouldn’t have taken Stieglitz those charcoals drawings...?
GEORGIA:

Anita’s visits are usually welcome ones -- I think psychiatric espionage is not Anita’s forte. Nor yours.

DR. JANKS:

It’s been almost a year. Mr. Stieglitz is still your husband -- you have to talk about him sometime. [Exit]

ANITA:

Janks convinced me it might help....

GEORGIA:

Stieglitz! Stieglitz! Stieglitz! There – I’ve said it! That name has a music that makes holes in my sky! – Like a beacon! – A light – And his unique way of seeing makes me see better — but, I can’t live where I want to – I can’t go where I want to – I can’t even say what I want to. I’d be a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I want to ‘cause that’s the one thing that’s nobody’s business but my own – not even his.... I know my career, as it has become, I owe to Stieglitz -- but don’t you ever wonder...?

ANITA:

What about?

GEORGIA:
Paths. Choices. When I was out there on the Plains -- living my landscapes -- alone with my own “music” -- without the ever-present, ever-needy Stieglitz, without “the men”, the critics, the maze of New York -- my work crystallized -- because I kept my vision focused: on seeking to make my unknown -- known. By keeping the unknown just beyond me -- like those Blue Ridge Mountains, calling me so long ago -- I felt almost capable of catching -- crystallizing -- a clearer vision of life.... And now, well -- I’ll never know, will I?

Tell Alfred to come and take me home.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, 1933. Lake George.

GEORGIA:

Alfred and his New York ways -- too many people, too much talk. Why is it people make me feel like a hobbled horse? So, I’ve escaped for a winter at Lake George. All alone, and I need it that way --Well, not quite alone -- there’s my gift from Anita -- my new kitten, Long Tail-- all soft and white and secure in my love. Maybe I love her too much -- maybe it’s something in me that I have to spend on something alive that is beautiful to me. Once upon a time there was the painting. Now? Nothing worth putting on canvas.

[JJEAN:] Hello?

I’ve asked Jean Toomer to visit. Jean is a friend. A French, German, Jewish, Welsh, Dutch, Indian, Negro friend. Such a quiet, gentle man. He wrote the
novel, \textit{Cane}. Jean understands loss. His wife was my friend. She died in childbirth last year...

\begin{quote}
[GEORGIA:] Jean. You came.

[JEAN:] Of course. (a pause) The Hill is so different in winter.

[GEORGIA:] I like it better.

[JEAN:] Fire, inside. Snow, outside. Quiet all around. I like it better, too.
\end{quote}

GEORGIA:

In the white house, at the edge of the frozen lake, we don’t talk, just listen. To the snow, falling thick and fast, real winter snow. Not talking seems to give a great quiet that makes the whole house feel good. [a pause]

JEAN: Where are you?

GEORGIA: Oh, with those shapes that keep sliding around in my head. Where are \textit{you}?

JEAN: I’m thinking of something I wrote.

GEORGIA: Yes?

JEAN: “the sawdust glow of night” and “the velvet pine-smoke air”.

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GEORGIA: - that gives me shivers all over through to the roots of my hair -

JEAN: “...and her slim body, white as the ash of black flesh after flame.”

GEORGIA: “...black flesh after flame...” Hold me very, very tight and make me feel warm.

GEORGIA:

[writing] The Hill, Lake George. Dear Jean, I miss you. As suddenly as you came, you left. I’m stirring to life in such a quiet, surprising fashion – as though I’m not sick any more. I even started painting again. So everything is very nice – only I miss you. I like knowing the feel of your maleness. But it’s good that we’re apart: I need it that way. [to JEAN:] Oh, Jean – you make me want to be loved and laugh – to not think – to be just a woman. But I can’t risk going back to the world yet: I don’t know if I’d recover if I were wrecked again. So, here I sit, alone at the Hill and tend my plot of earth with absurd care.

VOICE OVER:

GEORGIA, age 48, 1935.

GEORGIA:

Traveling to New Mexico: regaining my sanity in my “mad country”?! – I never thought I’d say it but “Thank you, Dorothy Norman.” She’ll be attending to Alfred while I’m attending to me in a land I call “The Faraway” --
where I’ll be attending to my rattlesnake.... Snakes have an instinct to survive. Magically, they shed their skin. The lesson is to shed mine. Yes!

My first summer in New Mexico, lying on a weathered carpenter’s bench under a tall thick tree, by D.H. Lawrence’s Pink House, remembering his words while looking up through the branches to the glittering stars --

“Be alone, and feel the trees silently growing.
Be alone, and see the moonlight, white and busy and silent.”

But not quite alone. I’m here with Paul Strand’s wife, Becky. We were meant to stay at the Pink House – where Lawrence stayed – but the light’s not right for painting, so we’re back at The Big House, under the roof of our hostess, Mabel Dodge Luhan, the most feminine person I ever met, and her fourth husband – the Pueblo leader. Tony Luhan: tall, strong, black braids to his waist, turquoise jewelry on his hands and chest. Tony’s brothers come, wearing only loincloths and feathers – glistening bodies, rippling muscles – dancing to a throbbing drum – Wine! Peyote! – I dance, too! -- Tony chants: “We are all birds in the same nest” -- Giving me an actual physical thrill!
Throwing caution to the winds -- when Tony goes to Santa Fe, I go to Mabel. When he returns, I share a bed with Becky. And when Mabel isn’t around – well, -- Next to my Steiglitz, I’ve found nothing finer than Mabel’s Tony.

It’s this place! -- wonderful – nobody ever told me how wonderful. It’s like “The dawn of the world!” -- Freezing in the mountains in rain and hail, sleeping out under the stars -- So alive, I could crack at any moment! – Not a cleft in the waking day or night that isn’t full-to-brimming-over with completeness!
But, where to place Mr. Alfred Stieglitz, and how to deflect Mrs. Dorothy Norman? But not too far! She’s tracking shiny things – circling, like a crow lured by the promise of reflected sunlight. But I have the sun itself and a land I call “The Faraway” – it’s a love affair I know better than to try to be free of. So, here I am – divided between two landscapes: New Mexico and New York. No. I won’t go back. My snake has shed its skin.

[STIEGLITZ:] [a bellow] GEORGIA!

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 51, 1939. Back at Lake George.

GEORGIA, 51, 1939:

Of course. Finding it harder and harder to head West each June and leave the pale, tired old man who’s made my world for me.

[STIEGLITZ:] Georgia?

[GEORGIA:] Coming, Alfed.

[STIEGLITZ:] Where were you?

[GEORGIA:] Alfred, why the fuss. I’m always here.

[STIEGLITZ:] What were you doing?
[GEORGIA:] Following your doctor’s instructions: straining your vegetables, grinding your heart medication, measuring the dosage --

[STEIGLITZ:] Instead of painting. Georgia, you shouldn’t waste your time on me – an old wreck whose moment is over – you need to go to your “Faraway” and find inspiration.

[GEORGIA:] Sure I do.

[STIEGLITZ:] I’m serious. My heart attack was a year ago. It won’t happen again. It shouldn’t be me that’s keeping you from your Desert Self.

[GEORGIA:] What are you trying to do?

[STIEGLITZ:] Sit up. I’m a broken, forgotten man. People even call me Mr. O’Keeffe!

[GEORGIA:] Shhh, Alfred. I’m here. My Desert Self isn’t going anywhere. There’ll be plenty of time to paint my bones --

[STIEGLITZ:] Bones?! – Barrels of bones! – I could’ve had you committed all over again – Our New York apartment looked like an animal graveyard!
[GEORGIA:] Alfred, don’t excite yourself --

[STIEGLITZ:] Sometimes I think you love them more than you love me.

[GEORGIA:] I’m here -- and as long as there’s an “Alfred”, I’ll get along with my divided self the best way I can. No fear: I won’t leave you. It would be too unkind.

[STIEGLITZ:] In all this time, haven’t I taught you anything? – It’s never unkind for an artist to live his life his way.

[GEORGIA:] Nice. I’m a traitor to your doctrine if I stay and a heartless wife if I leave. We’ll talk about this later. I need some time to come up with a workable possibility.

[STIEGLITZ:] [a pause] Georgia, lunch is late again. The doctor insists my meals be served punctually.

VOICE OVER:


GEORGIA:

[a shopping list:] Watercress, lovage, beets, spinach, corn –
[TELEGRAPH OP.:] Miss O’Keeffe! Miss O’Keeffe – urgent telegram for you!


[STIEGLITZ:] If you really care about a thing, you do something about it.

I shift my Buick into third and speed across the desert, a cloud of red dust in my wake, the radio blaring --

[under the rest of the dialogue ‘til Stieglitz’ death, a recording of Benny Goodman’s clarinet solo in “Sunny Side of the Street” plays]

[STIEGLITZ:] It takes two to make a truth, a Yes to one’s Yes; a No to one’s No. That is one’s truth.

All sorts of pieces of all sorts of things, a litany in my brain....

[STIEGLITZ:] Oh, Georgia, we are a team. Yes! A team!

VOICE OVER:

[STIEGLITZ:] When I am no longer thinking, but merely am, then may I be said to be truly living; to be truly affirming life.

A bedside vigil alongside Dorothy Norman, a woman I’ve spent seventeen years mindfully avoiding.

Alfred, where’s your camera now? --

[STIEGLITZ:] When I make pictures, I make love.

GEORGIA:

Open the shutter just enough”...?

VOICE OVER:

July 13th, 1946.

[STIEGLITZ:] I am sitting with the photographic plate in my hands. I have just developed it, just looked at it, just seen that it is exactly what I want. The room is empty, quiet. The walls are bare – clean. It is the perfect photograph, embodying all that I have ever wished to say. It slips from my hands and breaks as it falls to the ground.

VOICE OVER:
1:05 A.M.

[STIEGLITZ:] I am dead.

GEORGIA:


No tributes, no songs. No flowers, no garlands, no wreaths. One by one, they bid farewell. Then, he and I ride together, one last time. Finally, just the two of us. Alone. Yes, Alfred, it does take two to make a truth.

He’d done his last photograph of me in the summer of 1938. Under a tree by our Lake. Ferns, daisies, strawberries and “our” apples, in my lap. Six summers later, I return to put the ashes of Alfred Stieglitz under that tree.... I put you where you can hear your water: “Let one another flower, and through what each takes from the other, the soil shall re-enforce itself.”

So many tag ends of Alfred’s affairs to attend to. I was taught to turn out an oil painting a day. For the past three years? All I do is inventory, catalog, disperse, or destroy. I sit and push my pen day after day and it seems I’ll never be finished. But eventually the thaw will come, the snow will melt, and the little buds will sprout through the hard frozen earth. I’ve never worked harder in my life. As for painting?! -- in all those years, only once -- for Alfred: “Black Bird With Snow-Covered Red Hills.” A sightless bird gliding West above a snow-packed valley.
It’s finished. And, at sixty-one-years of age, it’s time to learn a new way to be alone.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 70, 1958.

GEORGIA, 70, 1958:

calling the dogs] Beau! Chia! Time to greet the dawn! We’re dancing in the
dawn like that Corn Dance at the Santo Domingo Pueblo - My Beau! My Chia!
– My Chows! – We’re not creatures of habit – Our only habit is getting up to
meet the dawn. We’re in Abiquiu – red-streaked cliffs, my flat-topped blue
Pedernal Mountain, and the molten red-orange snaking Chama River below --
A world with no people in it. Just me and Chia and Beau. My chows! Ha!
You’re my creatures. My chows know how to bite! We’ve seen plenty of
shoes fill up with blood. Sometimes blood has to be spilled – like the day after
Stieglitz’ funeral – Dorothy Norman’s shoes were bloody:

[DOROTHY:] Miss O’Keeffe –

[GEORGIA:] Mrs. Norman, I’m in charge now. There’s
no place for you here.

[DOROTHY:] Miss O’Keeffe, I signed the Lease on this
Gallery ---
[GEORGIA:] Alfred only let you sign the Lease to needle me. Why? Because I abandoned him each summer for my desert!

[DOROTHY:] Mr. Stieglitz relied on me –

[GEORGIA:] You insinuated yourself into our life, disregarding your husband and children –

[DOROTHY:] My work, my being here has made a difference to American art.

[GEORGIA:] Everyone should have a little project in life.

[DOROTHY:] There is no need to –

[GEORGIA:] Oh yes there is: your behavior towards Alfred was absolutely disgusting –

[DOROTHY:] No, it was –

[GEORGIA:] Your every action expressed contempt for me and disrespect for our marriage. Get out of my gallery.

[DOROTHY:] This is my gallery, too. I’ve been helping –

[GEORGIA:] You’ve been helping yourself to my husband. Well, the buffet is over. He’s dead. I’m in charge. Get out.
Of course I used the poor bitch. If she hadn’t been around, well, how could I have gotten away to paint? But that’s our little secret. And besides, it was so long ago! Now, it’s time to greet the dawn – We mustn’t miss the dawn – it’ll never be just like this again.

VOICE OVER:

Georgia, age 97, 1984.

GEORGIA:


I used to gaze into your crystal ball, awaiting images. No more. “Macular degeneration”: first, the middle of one’s world blurs. Then a thick film, bubbles up, spreads outward, like ripples of pond scum churned up where a stone is thrown. It’s as though there’s a permanent stone in each eye – which is ... odd – because I’ve loved stones so....

I used to stare straight at the sun. Pinwheels and starbursts and violent strange shapes imprinting themselves on my retina as if it were a photographic plate. I used to roam the desert – no hat, no gloves, no glasses – feeling and seeing my world exactly as it was and then making my sensations into a work of art. Now? I sit – in a sun that burns through to my
bones – and watch the shapes and colors group and re-group in my head. In there, I’m still painting.... [She listens a moment]

Nothing. Just a breeze through the pinon trees that tells me about weather and things. My pinons assure me the sky is still BLUE. And that that "BLUE will live forever."

To live in a tent, just open the flaps and let the wind blow through. A wind that sends my ashes swirling above my Pedernal Mountain. That would be some wonderful kind of wind.

...mirages -- wiped out by the wind...

To simply stand out in space and have nothing.

THE END
A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This work focuses on the American painter, Georgia O’Keeffe, (1887-1986), one of the most important female artists of the twentieth century. It considers the private O’Keeffe and the public O’Keeffe and spans approximately ninety-five years of a remarkable life.

The challenge to the playwright was to discover a mode of expression that paralleled O’Keeffe’s abstract vision. In short, if, to O’Keeffe, “a painting isn’t any good unless it’s good in the abstract sense,” neither is a play of her life. But what abstraction would serve? My solution was to use different rhythmic styles:

Naturalistic exchanges between “O’Keeffe” and the myriad of other characters ground the piece in reality and are the jumping-off-point of the play.

The Time Frames (segregated “spots in time”), suggest images that were etched onto the consciousness of the artist that solidified into private symbols and later became motifs in her work. Each Time Frame sequence bridges years like separate snapshots and moves the play forward to the next important moment. They are visual haikus akin to cinematic jump cuts.

The Landscapes create moments of pause for “O’Keeffe”. They are lingering paintings-in-words of places.
The Kaleidoscope series depicts a “world going so fast I can’t see the spokes” – life experiences moving too quickly to be immediately assimilated.

Regarding the appropriateness of rhythms for the play, O’Keeffe believed that painting was “visual music”. Moreover, at one point in her life, she was torn between a career as an artist or as a musician. Therefore, both rhythm and music should play roles in the directorial shaping of the work. Sights and sounds should create a theatrical equivalent to the “visual music” that the artist spent a lifetime bringing into being.
FURTHER READING


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Appendix A: Dramatic Topics and Script Order

[A.1 First List of Events for Dramatic Consideration (April, 1997)]
- a monologue about first cognizance of the world (first memory/first sight)…
- a monologue or moment of being alone like a wounded animal: the lion healing in his lair, the elephant with the burial ground, the ritual of being alone to heal: the maleness in her world showing her the way to behave when in pain: women share; men conceal…
- [something about] throwing away work she’d created to please others and starting to paint her own way, the shapes in her head…
- O’Keeffe, loved by Stieglitz, as a plucky, confident scamp
- The early love – the novelty, the posing, the partnership…
- Conflict as woman and artist when Norman began usurping woman role/function…
- The confession of weakness and plea for help…
- After the plea, the shells, the sea, the need to be alone in the burial ground, for the ritual death and regeneration…
- Possibly a jubilant monologue about being alone
- (Or a short nightmare about being alone?)
- A “song” for the chows? With an Indian dance? (something crazy for a solitary soul)
- The blindness, refusal to admit it; pride/the ability to see through Time’s
- limitations as parallel to first sight?

[A.2 Updated List of Life Events for Dramatic Exploration (August, 1997)]

This is My Country (1935) (The Snake Monologue)
Childhood
Madison, Wisconsin (letters)
Stieglitz’ Vision (The Torn Leaf)
Other Women (Beck, Norman and then some)
The Massing Storm (Cancer/Menopause/Radio City Music Hall)
Cracking Open (Breakdown)
Getting Better (Breakdown)
Choices (Breakdown and Jean Toomer)
Chatham Episcopal College
Chicago/Virginia/New York
Two Train Journeys (A Ballet)
Amarillo, Texas
The Carolinas
Art to Anita Pollitzer
News to Anita
How Dare You Show my Pictures?
A Canyon Triangle Subject-and-Object (A Marionette Ballet)
Fulfilling is My Country 2 (1929)
Speaking for Myself (Catalog Notes, 1938)
The Death of Stieglitz (Cutting the Puppet’s Strings)
Revenge (The “Death” of Dorothy Norman)
I’m an Indian, too (Tony Luhan)
A Life of Zen (a ballet)
Secrets with the Chows
Solitude with Juan
Blindness and a fading into BLUE

[Note: Next rewrites occurred in 2000; professional employment absorbed 1998-1999]

[A.3 Script Sequence (2000) - partially-completed script]

Setting the Record Straight, 1973
Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Sacred Heart Academy
Letters from Chatham Episcopal Institute, 1903
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Virginia/New York) – first sight of Stieglitz
Two Train Journeys: A Ballet (Williamsburg/Charlottesville) – Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Landscape 3: Columbia, South Carolina
[Note: This ends the sequential work written thus far. Two additional already-completed monologues were “This Is My Country” (The Snake) and Old Georgia/”Blue”.

**A.4** Script Sequences (October, 2001) - first full script

**Act I:**
Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Selling the farm/Williamsburg
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Virginia/New York) – first sight of Stieglitz
Williamsburg/Charlottesville – painting again with Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Time Frames 3 (News from Anita)
Landscape 3: Columbia, South Carolina
“How dare you show my pictures?”
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (Chinese meals with “The Men”)
Time Frames 3 (painting New York/painting flowers, vetoed by Stieglitz)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“Paths/Choices.”)

[Note: this marks the end of the play as presented at The Catskill Arts Society, 14 October, 2001. The 2001 script sequences continue below.]

Landscape 4: Canyon, Texas
Time Frames 4 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama, letters
Landscape 5: Coney Island
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, letters
Time Frames 6 (The Marionette Ballet)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“The only man who dared to love me”)
Time Frames 7 (Pattern of Leaves)
Time Frames 8 (Norman/cancer/breakdown

**Act II:**
Georgia, 1935 (“This is my country”, The Snake Monologue)
Patters and Distances 1935-1946
The Death of Stieglitz, 1946 (“Cutting the Strings”)
Revenge on Norman
A Zen Ballet
Secrets with the Chows
Georgia, 94 (“Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue”)

**A.5** Script Sequences (December, 2001) - script read by Michael Blakemore

**Act I:**
Blind Georgia, 1973 (“Setting the record straight”)
Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Selling the farm/Williamsburg
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Virginia/New York) – first sight of Stieglitz
Williamsburg/Charlottesville – painting again with Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Time Frames 3 (News from Anita)
Landscape 3: Columbia, South Carolina
“How dare you show my pictures?”
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (Chinese meals with “The Men”)
Time Frames 3 (painting New York/painting flowers, vetoed by Stieglitz)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“Paths/Choices.”)
Landscape 4: Canyon, Texas
Time Frames 4 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama, letters
Landscape 5: Coney Island
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, letters
Time Frames 6 (The Marionette Ballet)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 ("The only man who dared to love me")
Time Frames 7 (Pattern of Leaves)
Time Frames 8 (Norman/cancer/breakdown)

Act II:

Georgia, 1935 ("This is my country", The Snake Monologue)
Patterns and Distances 1935-1946
The Death of Stieglitz, 1946 ("Cutting the Strings")
Revenge on Norman
A Zen Ballet
Secrets with the Chows
Georgia, 94 ("Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue")

A.6 Revised Script (2002)
[Note: The sequences for Act I’s 2002 script remain the same; the difference is the editing of overly-long childhood experiences. Act II, however, was expanded to include the Jean Toomer episode and incorporate the Old Crow Feather Dream. In addition, the Secrets with the Chows and Revenge on Norman were excised until a way could be found to incorporate them into one monologue. A Zen Ballet was cut, completely, as it slowed up the action.]

Act II:

Georgia, 1935 ("This is my country", The Snake Monologue)
Georgia and Doctor, 1939 ("Very few of life’s journeys are linear")
Time Frames 9 (The Hill, Toomer, The Hill)
Abstraction: a zig-zag of journeys and returns
Landscape 6: The Death of Stieglitz, 1946
Old Crow Feather
Georgia, 94 ("Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue")

A.7 Revised Script (December, 2003) - first three-actor version

Act I:

Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Selling the farm/Williamsburg
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Williamsburg/Charlottesville – first sight of Stieglitz)

Chicago/Williamsburg/Charlottesville – measles/father/painting again with Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
New York/meeting Anita
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Time Frames 3 (News from Anita)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
“How dare you show my pictures?”
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (Chinese meals with “The Men”)
Time Frames 3 (painting New York/painting flowers, vetoed by Stieglitz)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 ("Paths/Choices.")
Landscape 3: Canyon, Texas
Time Frames 4 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama, letters
Landscape 4: Coney Island
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, Paul, letters

Act II:

Time Frames 6 (The Marionette Ballet)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 ("The only man who dared to love me")
Time Frames 7 (Subjects/Pattern of Leaves)
Time Frames 8 (Critics/Norman/cancer/breakdown)
Georgia with the Doctor, 1939
Time Frames 9 (The Hill, Toomer, The Hill)
Georgia, 1935 ("This is my country,” The Snake Monologue + Mabel, Tony, and Beck)
Georgia with the Doctor, 1939 ("Realm of the Illogical")
Landscape 5: The Death of Stieglitz, 1946
I’m an Indian, too (Dance with the Chows/Norman’s blood)
Old Crow Feather
Georgia, 94 ("Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue")

A.8 Revised Script (August, 2004) - sit-down reading at the WorkShop
[Note: This script is a tightened version of A.7]

A.9 Revised Script (December, 2004) - first full-scale production; included with this study
[Note: This script is the same as A.7 except for the inclusion of quotations at the start of Act I and the excision of the Toomer episode]

Act I:

Independent quotations
Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Selling the farm/Williamsburg
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Virginia/New York/Lake George) – first sight of Stieglitz
Chicago/Williamsburg/Charlottesville – measles/father/painting again with Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
New York/ meeting Anita
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Time Frames 3 (News from Anita)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
“How dare you show my pictures?”
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (Chinese meals with “The Men”)
Time Frames 3 (painting New York/painting flowers, vetoed by Stieglitz)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“Paths/Choices.”)
Landscape 3: Canyon, Texas
Time Frames 4 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama, letters
Landscape 4: Coney Island
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, Paul, letters

Act II:

Faustian Bargain
Chinese Meals with “The Men”
Time Frames 6 (The Marionette Ballet)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“The only man who dared to love me”)
Time Frames 7 (Lake George/Subjects/Pattern of Leaves)
Time Frames 8 (Critics/Norman/cancer/breakdown)
Georgia with the Doctor, 1939
Time Frames 9 (The Hill, Toomer, The Hill)
Georgia, 1935 (“This is my country,” The Snake Monologue + Mabel, Tony, and Beck)
Landscape 5: The Death of Stieglitz, 1946
I’m an Indian, too (Dance with the Chows/Norman’s blood)
Old Crow Feather
Georgia, 94 (“Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue”)

A.10 Revised Script (November, 2005)
[Note: The following versions are experiments with new beginnings, especially of Act I, and a new structure, again, for Act I]

Act I:

Time Frames 1 (The Hill, Toomer, The Hill)
Georgia with Doctor - The Corpse Dream, 1933
Time Frames 1 (Childhood)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
Selling the farm/Williamsburg
Time Frames 2 (Chicago/Virginia/New York) – first sight of Stieglitz
Georgia with Doctor
Chicago/Williamsburg/Charlottesville – measles/father/painting again with Bement
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas
New York/ meeting Anita
Landscape 2: Columbia, South Carolina
Time Frames 3 (News from Anita)
Georgia with Doctor, 1933
“How dare you show my pictures?”
Time Frames 4 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama, letters
Landscape 3: Canyon, Texas
Landscape 4: Coney Island
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“Paths/Choices”)
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, Paul, letters
[Note: Act II proceeds as in the December, 2004, presentation]
**A.11 Revised Script (May, 2006)**

[Note: This reflects and effort to find a new start for the play and mix up the Kaleidoscope chronology]

**Act I:**

“Bad Georgia. Naugty Georgia.”/“Where I was born” quote  
Georgia, 1915, Columbia, South Carolina (letter to Anita)  
Meeting Anita, the year before (New York)  
Georgia, 1912 (Giving up art, three years before)  
Charlottesville with Bement (painting again)  
Landscape 1: Amarillo, Texas  
Time Frames 1 (Chicago/Virginia/New York) – first sight of Stieglitz  
Time Frames 2 (News from Anita)  
“How dare you show my pictures?”  
Time Frames 3 (Kaleidoscope 1) Mama  
Time Frames 4 (Childhood)  
Selling the farm/Williamsburg  
Landscape 2: Coney Island  
Time Frames 5 (Kaleidoscope 2) Leah, Paul, letters

**Act II:**

Faustian Bargain  
Chinese Meals with “The Men”  
Time Frames 6 (The Marionette Ballet)  
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“The only man who dared to love me”)  
Time Frames 7 (Lake George/Subjects/Pattern of Leaves)  
Time Frames 8 (Critics/Norman/cancer/breakdown)  
Georgia with the Doctor, 1933 (The Corpse Dream)  
Georgia with Doctor, 1933 (“Paths/Choices”)  
Time Frames 9 (The Hill, Toomer, The Hill)  
Georgia, 1935 (“This is my country,” The Snake Monologue + Mabel, Tony, and Beck)  
Georgia with Stieglitz, Lake George, 1939  
Landscape 3: The Death of Stieglitz, 1946  
I’m an Indian, too (Dance with the Chows/Norman’s blood)  
Old Crow Feather/Georgia, 94 (“Hindsight, Foresight, and Blue”)

**A.12 Revised Script, August, 2006**

[Note: This script retains the same format as A.11; however, some expansion and editing occurs in various sections in an effort to clarify non-linear chronology. It was this version that Hauser read and found confusing.]

**A.13 Current Script (December, 2007) - included with this study**

**Act One:**

an elderly O’Keeffe in Abiquiu, being spiky to unwanted visitors  
a needy O’Keeffe with her Doctor, relating the Corpse Dream  
Time Frames – flashing back to 4 times in her childhood (deciding to be an artist)  
The Sacred Heart Academy, selling the barn, travel to Virginia  
Time Frames – Art Institute of Chicago, NY’s Art Students’ League,  
First glimpse of Stieglitz and “291”  
Chicago to earn money as an illustrator, giving up art, discouraged, measles, blindness  
Virginia – abused by father  
Sent to Mama in Charlottesville, Alon Bement’s classes and a return to Art  
First visit to Texas to teach  
Back to NY for extra credits, meeting Anita Pollitzer  
South Carolina, teaching again, letters and art to Anita  
Anita, taking O’Keeffe’s work to Stieglitz  
Back in New York for more credits – Stieglitz’s unofficial showing of her work  
Kaleidoscope 1916 – mother’s death, escape to Texas, letters to and from  
Stieglitz, art to Stieglitz and another show  
Unexpected trip to New York – photographed by Stieglitz, meeting Paul Strand, Coney Island  
Kaleidoscope 1917 - Escape to Texas – seductive letters to Paul, art to Stieglitz  
Illness and recovery and love with Leah Harris  
Paul to Texas to “fetch” O’Keeffe “home” to New York  
O’Keeffe to Stieglitz in New York

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Act Two:

Stieglitz’s gift of a year to paint
Meeting “the men”; dismissed as a “woman painter”
Life as Alfred’s photographic subject, sexuality
Times Frames – Summer at Lake George (Molly-Bloom-like monologue), exhibition of Alfred’s nude photographs of O’Keeffe, Lake George (hemmed in by family), Escape to Maine, back to New York (the city “breaking me down”)
Time Frames – marriage, The Shelton years (painting New York, flowers, discouraged by Stieglitz), sexual associations hung on her flowers, critical disdain, Cancer #1 (naming it “Mrs. Stieglitz”, his affair with Beck Strand), the operation and the painting, Cancer #2 (naming it “Dorothy Norman”)
The Breakdown – 1929
“Cured” – 1933, O’Keeffe deconstructs her journey, wonders who she’d have been without Stieglitz
New Mexico – The Snake Monologue – (affairs with Beck, Mabel, Tony)
Abiquiu, 1949 – Alfred had been dead three years
Time Frames – flashback to news of his stroke, bedside vigil, his death, burying his ashes
Abiquiu – a dance with the chows (flashback to her rabid attack on Norman)
Georgia, 97 – The crow feather dream, blindness, Juan Hamilton as her eyes
Coda – the spirit is free
1. Clear major goal:
   (a) To be keenly alive

2. Needs and Drives:
   (b) To express myself perfectly and precisely through my art
   (c) To fill a space in a beautiful way
   (d) To maintain my vision
   (e) To honor my commitments to myself, first, and my husband, next
   (f) To be the best painter in the world (better than any man)
   (g) To live in my country – New Mexico
   (h) To nurture myself
   (i) To protect my inner self from outside energies
   (j) To have a child
   (k) To be loved
   (l) To be a painter
   (m) To be left alone
   (n) To teach
   (o) To stay out of Father’s way when he drinks to avoid sexual abuse

3. and 4. Why are these needs and drives and how intense is my desire to accomplish them?
   (a) To be keenly alive is very intense and deep-rooted. I have such a passion for the land and life and the experience of living that I want to match it by living in that way. Having seen the cycle of planting and harvest, I know that life is brief. I felt that even as a child. I always wanted to make the most of time. To learn. To move forward. To succeed. We had been born fairly well off. Women in my family were expected to become equal contributors to the home. Yes, there were delineated responsibilities, but mostly because, on a farm, that the manual labor went to the men only seemed sensible. My mother had been well-educated. We would be too. As I was the eldest girl, I learned to compete with and best the boys whenever I could. There is just something in me that wants to experience life fully and to get the most I can from it – because I truly LOVE living. Being keenly alive also includes experiencing all of life: “to bump my head on all the hard walls and scratch my hands on all the briars!”

   (b) To express myself perfectly and precisely through my art is a need because I have two loves that I use to express my passion for life: art and music. Of the two, I feel I’m better at the art. Having selected that, it has become my passion. I have decided to affirm my passion for life and to be keenly alive by expressing myself through my art. This is an important need, and one that always remains supreme. When the need to express myself through art has waned, it is a sign that I am in serious trouble in my life.

   (c) To fill a space in a beautiful way was the Arthur Dow’s dictum which reawakened me to art as a possible mode of expression. I’m very good at assimilating the ideas of others and holding them (loyally, even superstitiously) for life if they have been proven to work. This concept was one of the keys which unlocked my artistic expression. It is an important need, but it has been assimilated. I am incapable of doing anything except express beauty.

   (d) To maintain my vision is an important need because, as an artist, the inner vision (as evoked by Kandinsky) must remain the guide. Also, the external vision must be guarded: that is the artist’s second most important aspect. That’s why Stieglitz’ visitors distress me so: they cloud my vision.

   (e) To honor my commitments to myself, first, and my husband, next is important: I had spent a lot of time trying to honor my commitments equally, or even, to place him first, but it soon became apparent that I had to place myself first or I’d be submerged by his larger-than-life personality. I have to hold on like a tattered leaf on a bare tree limb against the gale wind of Alfred’s forceful personality. Or he’ll destroy the little plant that I am. Honoring commitments is important to me because I learned the virtues of honesty, and hard work from observations of my father’s working of the land. I idolized my father when I was younger. Then, his sexual advances and abuse turned me away from him and even further towards my art with its privately-symbolic expression of my feelings. Having seen how marriages “go”, I am apprehensive of them. I love Stieglitz and what he represents enough to make me overcome the trauma of my parents’ mismatch and to try.

   (f) To be the best painter in the world – better than any man – is a goal because, well, why not be the best if one is going to try? – After all, I might not get there, but I certainly won’t if I don’t aim for it! – Better than any man is significant because it’s easier for a man to succeed in the world of art. He’s expected to be able to work as an artist. Women are expected to paint as a hobby or as governess/teachers. If I’m limited by society to be a teacher, well, at least I’ll have the consolation that I’m the best artist I can be. So, at first, “to be the best painter in the world?” is my mantra to keep my spirits high and focused despite society’s limitations and my financial constraints. Next, it becomes my means of staying first in the eyes of Stieglitz, of maintaining his love. Both reasons are strong.

   (g) To live in country – New Mexico – becomes the greatest need of my life. It reminds me of my childhood strength and drive and hope. It nurtures me and feeds my soul. It challenges me – with a ruthless, unyielding truth. It protects me from unwanted visitors and intrusions upon my art. It even shields me from Alfred and his demands. I need the energy and isolation and wild pagan-ness of the place to bring me back to life.

   (h) To nurture myself is a great need. Earlier, I just plowed ahead with my dreams and goals. It was later, when I got to New York, that I realized there were certain limitations that my essence placed upon me. An early example was the dancing one night and not being able to paint properly for the next three days. Later, it became the visitors, needs of Stieglitz, the green chalybeate essence of Lake George. When Stieglitz turned on me to justify his liaison with Dorothy Norman, I realized I couldn’t even count on him to be there for me. I had given so much of myself to him that it took a lot of energy and refocusing of priorities (towards myself) to save myself from going under. Now, this is a very important need.
To protect my inner self from outer energies is also a great need. It is tied to the one above, to nurture myself. This inner self that I’m protecting is the artist. The above nurturing is both the artist and the personal. I know it rejuvenates me as a person and woman, and it inspires me as an artist. I know it’s “my” place. There are no doubts.

To have a child was a great need. In my celebration of life, I wanted to bring life onto the earth – so that it could enjoy life, too! Then, when I was with Alfred, whose brilliance matched mine, I longed to celebrate our union and bring a child from it to dazzle the art world and ourselves. But Alfred refused. And he cited his reasons for loving me that I was just a kid myself. I loved the paternal nurturing older husband who cherished me. I also cherished him and understood his fears about losing me through childbirth. But the final nail in the child’s coffin was Alfred’s insistence that I would be unable to focus on my painting with a child. Of course, he accomplished that diversion himself, by being the spoiled petty, needy baby that I never had.

To be loved is a great need, but to love myself becomes a greater one: because too many people either let me down, died, or ceased to love me. As a child, Father’s love gave me great self-esteem, as did my successful competition with the boys. The fact that Mama didn’t express her love physically didn’t shake me too much. I knew she cared even if she disapproved of my eccentric ways. I always believed in myself. As time passed, father’s love turned to lust and confused me – if this was loving, I wanted no part of it. I wanted to be alone, private, safe, within myself. Then, when I began to achieve success, I felt loved. Until the critics “turned” and then Alfred “turned”. Gradually, I felt the best place for me would be back out on the prairie (the kind of land that had given me my original impetus to be me as an artist), that the best love was my own, for myself, and for the world I created.

5. How conscious of my motives am I?
(a) I know that I have such reverence for God’s natural creation that I have always wanted to live life as keenly as possible. Part of that is making my life matter – I need to “be keenly alive” to experience the totality of existence. When I decide to become an artist, then, I realize the more things I experience, and the more fully, the more I’ll have to say as an artist. I know I need to make my life mean something because it’s a fleeting and magical treasure. There was something in me that always knew that. That’s why I live so long: because I love living. I am thrilled with who I am, and my sensations as a sentient being on the planet. And I am a-tingle at manifesting this passion precisely through my art.

(b) I know the more perfectly and precisely I express myself through art, the more fully experienced my existence will be to me and to the earth I walk on. I know I’m a perfectionist because I can’t see the point of trying anything unless you try your best. Maybe I always needed to be best because I was competing at home (first) and then in art (later) with the boys/the men. Maybe, as a woman, I always had to be that little bit better to be permitted to continue. I know I need to fill a space in a beautiful way because Dow’s training opened me to self-expression. But it also fits in with my idea of a world I choose to be a part of.

(c) I know I need to fill a space in a beautiful way because Dow’s training opened me to self-expression. But it also fits in with my idea of a world I choose to be a part of.

(d) I know I need to maintain my vision because how else can I paint? And I love to paint.

(e) I know I need to honor my commitment to me because it’s a part of who I am. Perhaps it’s a superstititious part: if I don’t stay clean in my actions, my vision will become muddied and my art will suffer. But it’s also who I am: I’m a fair, forthright, Mid-Westerner who isn’t afraid to work and who stands by her word. Like the barn stands there protecting the cattle from the cold.

(f) I know I want to be the best painter in the world (better than any man) because it’s been a slog to get where I am. There were so many people telling me I couldn’t have what I wanted. And, gradually, I got what I wanted. Steiglitz helped me get it. Bement and Dow showed me the way. Chase honed my technique. The publicity machine generated by those photographs. I knew what I was doing. I knew it would make me both notorious and famous. I had to have “the goods” when the crunch came – “the goods” at my time meant being better than the men, the best painter I could be, maybe the best painter in the world. And I defined best by having my technique under my belt and staying true to my vision – and having the courage to try new and outrageous and nervy things. And I managed to do that even without Steiglitz – because, by then, he’d already made me an entity unto myself. I know myself, my goals, my strategies. And the fact that they’ve worked thus far makes me want to keep on with them.

(g) I know I need to live in my country, New Mexico, because I get my energy from the earth and the energy of the place. I know it rejuvenates me as a person and woman, and it inspires me as an artist. I know it’s “my” place. There are no doubts.

(h) I know I need to nurture myself because, when I haven’t, I have had penalties: My health and my work. I know when the need for nurturing began – it seemed to coincide with World War I – with my being alone and really trying new things out on the Plains. Before my first show, even before Steiglitz saw my work. I have seen how easily I can get wrecked from too much tumult: the anti-war sentiments I expressed during WWI which resulted in my head-on confrontation with authorities and my need to leave Canyon for San Antonio and Leah’s ranch – where (I had no money and lots of physical frailty) I permitted Leah to nurture me in return for sharing my body with her sexually. Then, I permitted Paul to nurture me. Until he delivered me to Steiglitz’ care. The thing is, I have always needed someone to carry me at times. When I needed a bit more care. When my uncertainties took over. When my energies were rubbed raw (soul had been sand-papered) by the prevailing mood of the time. I know myself. I know what I’ve done and why I’ve done it. I don’t apologize. I was more sinned against than sinning.

(i) I know my inner self needs to be protected. I know my art comes from the inner shapes. I can’t permit negativity and violence to intrude upon my tiny little world. New Mexico, when I saw it, was the closest in external appearance to the
tiny inner world I saw in my mind’s eye. Finally, there was a physical manifestation of my inner life which existed as an indomitable dream of living desert: and it gave me hope that in New Mexico, the earth’s ability to withstand outer turmoil because this edifice of strength existed, giving form to my internal images! I am fully aware that my husband did not live up to the “love and honor” part of things. And that he was as dangerous to mean as he was protective. I realize (during my journey) that I must learn to protect myself – that I’m a special case among women: if I can paint like “the men”, I must also stand like the men – on my own.

I know I always wanted to have a child. I know, eventually, that I can not. I never fully explored my reasons for wanting one. This is one of the unexamined areas of my life. I worked hard to understand myself, but, when the baby didn’t seem to be possible, I closed the door on any examination. I believe I crave a child because I crave to experience all of life’s many experiences.

I learned from an early age that wanting to be loved wasn’t an empowering goal. And, despite yearnings, I resisted the tug of love – because I didn’t trust it would be constant. And I am constant in my commitments. I learned the best love was mine for myself. That I do know.

I know I want to be a painter because I love translating my joy and experience of the earth onto a canvas or paper. And, in so doing, illuminating me to me. I know that. Perhaps I don’t realize that my love affair with paint, some people share as self-illumination with their spouses. But I have had to fend for myself on my own with my artistic vision as my guide for formative years: I know to trust the vision and the painting over any other kind of love communion.

I know my motives in wanting to be left alone are in wanting to work in peace. I don’t realize I’m afraid to let anyone have control of wrecking my life again the way Stieglitz did. Being left alone is my preventative against pain. I believe I need solitude for my work – which I do, but I’ve also been so ground down by people, cities, that solitude is a way of shielding me from intrusions.

I know I need to teach because we have no money for me to continue my lessons as an artist, for me to even buy paints. I also know, despite my enjoyment of the pursuit, that it breaks my heart when I compare it to the possibility of actually being the painter I promised myself I’d be when I was 12 years old.

I know Father’s abuse is wrong, but I can’t avoid it. He is stronger than I. Mama has sent me away on numerous occasions to put distance between us. I know how degraded his physical attentions leave me – I want to crawl far, far into a dark, dark hole and stay there a long, long time – like some wounded, feral creature.

6. What are the methods I use to accomplish my goals?

(a) To feel keenly alive, I explore the earth and its sensations. I paint and attempt to translate the beauty around me on to paper. I play the piano and later the violin. I write suggestive letters to men far away in the hope that one will make a move and actually want to marry me and care for me. I read voraciously to understand the purest aspirations underlying my chosen art form, painting. I capture the heart of a powerful, influential man – even as he has captured mine, and I dare myself to let go and take that chance – even flouting convention by being photographed salaciously in the name of art, and having an affair with a married man. I embrace his ideas and ways until they transgress my energies and convictions. I love him until he makes it too difficult to continue. I find “my” place as a means of regeneration. I choose odd and daring subjects in the hope of making people notice me, my work, my art – by changing my subjects – each more outrageous than the former – I became the first self-publicist, reinventing myself like Madonna. (Of whom, I’ve never thankfully heard!) When my husband dies, I fulfill my contract by placing his creative works in major institutions and overthrowing his affairs. Overlooking his affairs. Remaining publicly out of a dark, dark hole and stay there a long, long time – like some wounded, feral creature.

(b) To express myself perfectly and precisely through my art, I select only the best colors and best brushes and I keep my palette immaculately clean. I tighten my canvases and under-paint them with white to give them a heightened luminosity. I study with the best teachers at the best places. I never start until I almost know 100% what I want to paint. I choose my subjects wisely. I repeat studies until I get to the essence of each subject. I destroy anything that I consider a failure (thus assuring my standard will endure). I issue a few paragraphs making clear my intentions as time progresses and I become bored with the misinterpretations my work had suffered. I continue to explore my landscape, collect bones, stones, and other artifacts as likely subjects. I spend a large portion of my time (until I finally move there) in New Mexico, a place giving my art inspiration and impetus. I correspond with critics, other artists, friends, who have a similar seeking spirit. I listen to music. I make certain to never miss a dawn or sunset. I roam every inch of the land around my place. I look. I watch. I think. I envision. I work in a disciplined way – painting every morning, and sometimes longer, when there’s a particularly nutty problem awaiting my attention (like the Clouds series).

(c) I try to fill a space in a beautiful way by always seeing, always evaluating, always examining what I see before me in life and then on the page. I try to make my life a mirror of that by creating a beauty in space all around me: my home, my clothes, my food, my garden, not just in my art. In that way, the chances of my creating beauty are maximized because it’s become a part of my living and breathing.

(d) Likewise, my methods of approach for maintaining my vision include everything I do to fill a space in a beautiful way. I also set out to experience new sensations, dangers, extreme visuals to enhance my experience of the earth. I crave sensation as a means of enlivening my experiences and giving me something to translate into art. I really see. I really look. I visualize the world as a series of framed subjects: I don’t even see the realities of these subjects as much as their shapes, planes, curves, abstractions. I eat carrots. I rest my eyes. I do exercises to strengthen my eye muscles. And I continue to question, seek, view, and bond with the landscape.

(e) My methods to honoring my commitments to my husband and myself are – rearranging my nomad ways to his lifestyle, Chinese lunches with the men, gallery openings, nude photography, Lake George. Cooking for 30 corn-eaters, seeing his friends. Marrying him, when he needed that assurance. Not having a baby. Overlooking his affairs. Remaining publicly dignified despite setbacks. Listening to his advice (i.e. dictates) whenever possible. Not having affairs even though he did. Honoring his wishes even ‘til death. Reworking the pine box and lining. Seeing to it that he experienced a beautiful, solemn dignified funeral. Scattering his ashes at the lake. My methods of honoring my commitments to myself are
pulling away from him when I had to, helping the men – because I knew invariably I would make myself indispensable to the gallery. (the only way Dorothy Norman did years later without the pitting of another woman’s husband, not rocking the boat to keep my peace and his, traveling away from places that felt too oppressive. Eventually, traveling to my places for my revitalization and release. I never embarrassed him publicly during his lifetime. I never took a lover that he knew about. I always came back to him after my sojourns. I didn’t even make a scene at the hospital. But it built up. After his passage, I felt free to honor my commitment to myself and to release the venom that had given me 2 cancer scares.

(f) My methods of approach to being the best painter in the world (better than the men) are similar to those cited as expressing myself perfectly and precisely through my art. In addition, I choose subjects guaranteed to shock, arouse interest, attract attention. I cultivate critics. I permit nude photographs of me to be taken. I allow Stieglitz to circulate stories about my origins. It’s not that these things improved my painting: they improved the public’s perception of my work. Then, by honing my craft more and more, refining my vision, selecting daring subjects, and cultivating a public persona as created by Stieglitz, I became unbeatable! We were all good painters – I was the most marketable commodity.

(g) My method of living in my country, New Mexico, involved finding my country, finding my place within it, and then buying the two properties which fed my artistic soul. I even had to woo Abiqui away from the Catholic Church. And I’m proud of that achievement – it’s a testament to my indomitability.

(h) My methods approach to nurturing myself are going quietly inward, taking myself away to isolated places, being on my own, heeding my own inner needs above all else. I find that Stieglitz’ love is far from the marriage-vow kind, I begin to focus on learning to really love myself, FIRST. I make them feel everything is possible as it has been for me. I cojoe Stieglitz. I beg. No use – nothing works. I do not achieve this goal as I have all my others – but, in part, that’s because I have a larger goal: to be a famous artist – and Stieglitz has convinced me that I can’t be a mother and achieve that goal. And art is the most important thing to me.

(i) To protect my inner self from outside energies, I develop a fearsome exterior to keep people at bay – an imperious ness, even as a child. I play on my own. I paint on my own. I keep to myself. I expect little from others. I go into my room and close the door if Stieglitz’ friends become too oppressive. I paint alone every morning by my own insistence. I escape the city or Lake George by going away from Stieglitz. I discover and move to New Mexico. I become more and more Empress of my domain. I “employ” people rather than have friends. I become economically self-sufficient. I trust fewer and fewer to come into my life. I focus on the painting and a life of beauty. I socialize when I want to and not any other time. I listen to my inner needs.

(j) What do I do to have a child? I try to meet men who might want to marry me. I woo them by mail. I have been brazen in my sexual responses (perhaps not going all the way, but far enough to probably scare them off with my passion). I cojoe Stieglitz. I beg. No use – nothing works. I do not achieve this goal as I have all my others – but, in part, that’s because I have a larger goal: to be a famous artist – and Stieglitz has convinced me that I can’t be a mother and achieve that goal. And art is the most important thing to me.

(k) In order “to be loved”, I aim for excellence (in order to get love from my parents). I try for keeping out of mother’s way (to avoid confrontations and anything which could remove that love). I try to be perfect in my schoolwork, to win Mama’s and teachers’ admirations. I aim for excellence in my careers as a teacher and artist and win a kind of love from students and teachers and friends and Stieglitz. I write provocative letters to get George, Arthur, Stieglitz, Strand, Toomer – and who knows who else – to love me. I also flirt with Ted Reid. I allow Stieglitz to photograph me nude to get him to love me, to create an image for the public to adore. At one point, when Dorothy Norman has made it evident that Stieglitz’ love is far from the marriage-vow kind, I begin to focus on learning to really love myself, FIRST.

(l) To accomplish my goal of being a painter, I observe. I read. I experiment. I visit galleries, museums, other artists. I study at the best schools with the best people. I attack Dorothy Norman when it’s finally safe to do so. I buy myself the places I love. I find hired help to care for me and my needs in my way. I grow fresh vegetables on my land. I listen to music. I watch the dawn come up and the sun set.

(m) I achieve my goal of being left alone by snapping the heads off people who come near me unmasked. I move to a remote place. I don’t have a telephone for a long time. I repeatedly change my unlisted number when I finally do get one. I hire people only until they become intrusive. Then, I fire them. I become passionate about solitude. I go for walks and drives away from civilization on my own or with very few and select people. I become economically self-sufficient. I stay as healthy as possible to forestall the need for assistance from anyone. I trust (almost) no one. I coerce the pig farm at Abiqui from the Catholic Church.

(n) To achieve my goal to teach. I write letters to locate a position. I get a job and organize a series of lessons based upon the kind of work that taught me to see. I bring nature into the world of my students. I get them as enthused as I about seeing. I make them feel everything is possible as it has been for me.

(o) To avoid sexual abuse I dress “down”, run away from home, keep to myself, beg for him to stop, move away from Father when it becomes too much.

7. Obstacles to the above (internal/external)

Goals:

a) To be keenly alive

Internal obstacles: doubt, illness/blindness, despair, uncertainty/my own perfectionism
Act Two

8. Preparation before each scene –

i) To protect my inner self from outside energies

b) To express myself perfectly and precisely through art

c) To fill a space in a beautiful way

d) To maintain my vision

e) To honor my commitments to myself, first; my husband, next

f) To be the best painter in the world (better than any man)

g) To live in my country (New Mexico)

h) To nurture myself

i) To protect my inner self from outside energies

j) To have a child

k) To be loved

l) To be a painter

m) To be left alone

n) To teach

o) To avoid Father’s advances

External obstacles: poverty, family illness, limitations placed on women, no man to love me, anonymity, mobilization for war, men who let me down, a father who becomes drunk and sexually abusive, a husband cheating on me and publicly proclaiming it, his refusal to let me have children.

b) To express myself perfectly and precisely through art

Internal obstacles: my own standards, the challenges of the subjects I choose, (until later) an unformed vision of my own

External obstacles: societal pressures regarding “what art should be” and “what women should do”, Stieglitz’ meddling in my work, my commitment to being with my husband as opposed to my commitment to my artistic vision to be in New Mexico, my gradual blindness.

c) To fill a space in a beautiful way

Internal obstacles: defining “beauty”

External obstacles: none

d) To maintain my vision

Internal obstacles: despair and uncertainty brought on by confusion over Stieglitz, about what I’m trying to say, about my sanity

External obstacles: once I have defined my artistic vision, none (until my eventual blindness)

e) To honor my commitments to myself, first; my husband, next

Internal obstacles: I have been taught to honor the man as I honored my father and I believe that is as it should be (my own moral code), the tug of New Mexico

External obstacles: Stieglitz’ ranting and petulant, needy behavior, the tug of New Mexico (again) – because it is so much a part of me that it’s both internal and external.

f) To be the best painter in the world (better than any man)

Internal obstacles: personal doubts, a belief that maybe I can’t be the best or even if I am it won’t make any difference to my succeeding at my goal, lack of personal vision or conviction

External obstacles: society, financial, lack of a place to show my work, others (Stieglitz) imposing their views on my work (often to the work’s detriment.)

g) To live in my country (New Mexico)

External obstacles: a wife’s place is with her husband

h) To nurture myself

Internal obstacles: the feeling that I don’t deserve it, my belief that the man comes first, my work ethic

External obstacles: Stieglitz’ demands, our family’s poverty, Lake George as opposed to my being where I want to be, the demands of a career in the public eye

i) To protect my inner self from outside energies

Internal obstacles: an unknowing of how much from the outside is too much until it has become such, a need to be touched by the physical world emotionally and visually in order to activate my emotional response and create its equivalent in art.

External obstacles: the demands of my family, teachers, students, earning a living, my teachers, and eventually Stieglitz—in short, the demands of people and society which impinged upon my solitude

j) To have a child

Internal obstacles: fear of being swamped by the child, fear that having a child will interfere with my art, the body clock and menopause

External obstacles: no husband, no one who asked to be the father of my children, Stieglitz’ resistance

k) To be loved

Internal obstacles: do I really deserve it? (I know I deserve to be obeyed – but loved?), the compulsion to “earn” it, the unwillingness to see (until I must) that the greatest love I can receive is my own

External obstacles: a withholding Mama, an abusive (when drunk) Father, men who are afraid of me, a husband who loves – but only conditionally, a public betrayal by him

l) To be a painter

Internal obstacles: doubts, lack of vision, lack of eyesight

External obstacles: family finances for training, societal pressures, critics

m) To be left alone

Internal obstacles: my need to be loved, my need for a child, for someone with whom to share my beauty, my sense of responsibility to Alfred

External obstacles: the need to work in the world to earn a living, the need to interact with the world to sell my pictures, my frail husband’s physical needs, my own frailty as I grow older, my need away from civilization to depend upon civilization for its products to enhance my life, my need for paid companions, doctors, etc.

n) To teach

Internal obstacles: my desire to paint (I can only teach if I see it as a means to my end: to be a painter external obstacles:

no one has hired me

o) To avoid Father’s advances

Internal: no obstacles except the first time, my innocence

External: his strength, my trust, my feeling that somehow I’m to blame for his advances.

Preparation before each scene – Act One – I have been reading works about making Art – as a child in the womb – I chose to embody Georgia O’Keeffe because I liked the Akashic Record on her. My spirit has chosen to experience life through art. The opening is my unborn soul sitting through the statements I have heard, read, which attract me to becoming a physical entity on earth. When the scene flips to the Doctor’s office, it’s as though the Soul has forgotten that I chose the madness as well – and I am deep within the challenges of my chosen entity’s physical journey. The main thing I do recall from my Soul days was that I wanted to make Art. – Act Two – I have been asleep, in New York, in the little studio – I see a flapper, dancing around a Gallery somewhere with pictures of me and my paintings. She’s cute, but I have a larger agenda. Suddenly, I am awakened by Stieglitz, asking me what he can do for me. “I would like a year to
I saw the honesty of the Irish – Is the summing up I make of my life before the Akashic Tribunal. “This is what it all meant: and now, it’s a mirage.” What matters is that my Soul is still here – like the Blue – and that it is free and, after a period as free as the wind, it will be reborn again and seek to make art anew. Hence, the needs of my Spirit are shared by all artists.

9. Character’s background

a) Economic status:
From the apparent privilege of life on a large farm, things went down fast. I thought I was being sent away because I was difficult. It was because we needed help in educating the children – money must’ve been failing as tuberculosis impinged upon our family – especially through my father’s family. As a child, I loved my family, and I feel that we realize whatever prosperity we had had come through Mama’s family and determination. Later, I realized our family had the genetic impulse to succeed. Don’t misunderstand – I would never malign my Father. Even after all he’s done to me – because, on some level, I wonder if I provoked his acts. Meanwhile, economically, we went from well-to-do to poor swiftly – only it didn’t seem swift to a little girl – but as I grew, the family’s resources shrank. Perhaps I should’ve realized it corresponded to Mama’s health. Maybe it did. Maybe it didn’t. But we went down soon after Virginia. We became poor – no money for special schools, special training for special talents. The possibilities of my becoming an artist dwindled with our finances. Was it my determination? Was it ignorance? I didn’t feel it was impossible even living out in the prairie – is THAT self-confidence? or was it simply that I had the freedom to try and fail because there was nothing left to lose?! I knew what ‘poor’ felt like, so living with Stieglitz on borrowed eggs was more of an adventure than a hardship. And gradually, my long-shot paid off: he made me famous. I had to play that long shot: it was all I had. He loved me. He supported my work. And, even further, he turned me into a newspaper personality. I fed the mystique. And became exactly my goal – a self-supporting, independent artist. What a journey from the early days!

b) Childhood experiences:
There are too many to recount. The season’s passage – the snows of winter yielding to the budding of spring. My first memories of sunshine – probably in late June – on a quilt in a field with my mother and Aunt Winnie. My physical appreciation of the texture and sensory communion with the earth. Playing with my dolls – in a world I’ve created for them by me. Looking out the window at the night snow under moonlight and considering ways to paint the white – and coming to it on my own: leave the paper blank. My discovery of the power that being a painter could give me in my heart. The most significant discovery was that Time was finite. Being on a farm, I saw the seasons early. And I understood that each season is the only time there is for a life. I became imbued with urgency, with the necessity that one must use the time and energy one has right now to make one’s dreams come true. It isn’t greed that makes me grab – it’s the beating wings of the bird of death always just behind the next moment. And that’s the way it is. And religious upbringing and belief:

Because Mama was Protestant and Father’s family was Catholic, we came to a compromise: no one paid a lot of attention to religion. True, I attended both Catholic and Protestant schools, but the time when the Catholic Church could’ve gotten hold of me, my most tender years, were left to me to find a divinity in my own way. Observing the seasons, the flowering, I became an acolyte of nature, growth and the earth. I became one with it. And the land was what gave me the stimulation and sustenance as religion would to others. The land became my resurrection. Thus, my religion is the earth.

c) Level of education:
Early times at the Sun Prairie schoolhouse yielded to Sacred Heart, Chatham Episcopal, The Art Institute of Chicago, The art Student’s League, the University of Virginia, Columbia Teachers’ College in NY, plus all the institutions where I became a teacher... but, despite Stieglitz’ public relations to the contrary, I was a well-educated, well-read young woman of the turn of the Century. Having never done the Grand Tour, I nonetheless managed original thinking and interpretations by “touring” my own country. I made leaps of association based upon my instruction and inner need and powers of observation and reading which resulted in my unique approach to life and art.

d) Innate intelligence:
I have a sparkling, original, incisive mind driven by my wonderment at Nature’s beauty and power. I am enthralled by the passion of Nature. It is the only energy I’ve ever encountered capable of matching my own inner passion. As I discover wilder and wilder places – with more and more violent weather – I sense a resonance to the depths of my being. My life has been difficult, but the spirit has still triumphed. That’s why I love the desert: because it represents the triumph of living spirit over tremendous adversities. As such, it is a logical extension of my animism as Texas had been representative of my spirit of adventure when I was younger. And that is why neither South Carolina nor Lake George spoke to me: my life has not been a series of pleasant, easy, stay-out-of-the-rain, cossedet experiences. It has been one of sacrifice, and fighting to stay alive/afloat. There have been episodes of blindness, baldness, bitterness, sexual abuse, criticism, public humiliation – and I lived to paint again. I have a tremendous well of self-knowledge dug when I was alone on the prairie just thinking and being and painting. Thank God my Mama demanded that the girls be educated – or I might’ve ended up completely mad instead of just in spells. I am brilliant. And cunning. I know how to “play” people to serve my needs.

e) Political views:
I dislike politics. It interferes with the inner impulse to express. I believe people can become distorted by politics. I particularly loathe the World War I and it’s jingoism for death and destruction. I see each battle as a wound on the body of my God, the earth. I have no time for politics or for “isms”.

f) Cultural background:
If a culture is the petrie dish in which I was gestated, I’m a farm girl. My first teachers were the fields, wind, weather, seasons. I learned divergent points of view from my Irish and Hungarian forbears. I saw the honesty of the Irish worker juxtaposed against the affectation and pretension of the middle-European aristocracy, clinging to outmoded traditions on a frontier plain. I admired my Mama’s insistence on education for her girls, and her strict standards for excellence were imbued into me. But I refused to assume the hypocrisy of European ways. In a sense, I disowned my mother in favor of the honesty of the land. The earth is my mother. From an early age, I learned self-reliance: if I couldn’t play with the boys, because I was a “girl”, well, I wouldn’t play with the little girls either – I’d go
my own way. Later, I went away to school and forged an independent and curious identity – as I blended my farm
countryside. I learned to identify that which made me sing inside. Just as I resisted words, once I realized copying Old
work to the max, everyone would have celebrated me. As it was, I wasn't one or the
other: too independent and (occasionally) outspoken. I learned early to simply keep my mouth shut and get out of
of art); to really see; to read; to listen to music (to play music!); (both, as means of identifying my own inner music); to
me is the way he and his brothers worked and knew the land. I've got the Irish larrikin
left the way for the master to learn; the art he showed me – deepened my rectitude as well as broadened my concepts. I
learned it was possible to earn a living doing what I loved. I learned about the Europeans. I discovered a partnership was
possibility between a woman and a man and an artist and her champion. I had no compatible marital examples upon which
to draw, so I believed we had a good relationship and a degree of true happiness. Until the betrayals began. The, I
returned to the land and my self. And that is the cultural background from which all else has sprung.

h) sociological class:

I'm a peasant farmer in my soul. I have some aristocratic blood in my veins. But it irritates me – even as it gives me
an inherent sense of superiority, even nobility. It is so curious that the very thing I war against also empowers me.
But I don't feel the need to be empowered as a feminine creature: I desire empowerment to achieve my goal: to live
keenly through my art. I have never had a problem identifying with the less-than-elegant. We are not well-to-do. The
thing I admire most about my father is the way he and his brothers worked and knew the land. I've got the Irish larrikin
spirit for games and pranks. And I'm prouder of the earthly connection than of any elegant
pretensions. I am a Druid. That's why I permit myself to be represented as a "naïf" rustic: in a way, my energies
spring from that, despite my education beyond anything a farmer would receive.

i) hobbies:

I love to paint. It is not my hobby; it's my life. But, off that overwhelming need, many interests spring: to roam the land
as a means of knowing it emotionally as a part of my self and my experience (thus enabling me to translate it into a work
of art); to really see; to read; to listen to music (to play music!); (both, as means of identifying my own inner music); to
see the work of other artists; to cultivate a correspondence with artists, critics (to further my career and my perceptivity).
Apart from that, there is the maternal, nurturing aspect of my personality: the baker of bread, the cook, the housekeeper.
I am the lover and the wife. As such, I allow myself to be photographed prior to any licensed union. I attend gallery
openings. I become a public personality. I try to ignore the embarrassing things said of me and my work. I love to walk.
That's a really BIG need. And I love to connect with Nature. And I love to paint. Later, I become a bit of a daredevil
behind the wheel of my car. I eventually have a garden where I grow wonderful things. I have turkeys and dogs. I learn
from the dawn and the sunset. I love my life and my world.

j) animal:

Certainly, I have the eyes of a hawk or another bird of prey. But, there's this snake in me too – sexual, cunning, smart.
Interestingly, the hawk and the snake are not compatible. Both prey upon other species. But there's also a soft child of
wonderment – a kitten that grows into a self-serving sleek fine-boned cat. Again, a huntress! cat, hawk, snake
Interestingly, the hawk and the snake are not compatible. Both prey upon other species. But there's also a soft child of
wonderment – a kitten that grows into a self-serving sleek fine-boned cat. Again, a huntress! cat, hawk, snake

10. Character's Adjustment to People:
a) My friends and family:
1. Stieglitz: Powerful, famous, celebrated, scandalous, important, influential, the essence of art itself, someone from whom I
crave approval, endorsement and support. To me he is M, JW
2. Mama: grand, demanding, indignant with my unladylike ways but determined to make me a fitting product of the Totto
clan. She is both critical and wise, strong and carping. I know she loves me, but she withholds expression of that love
because she feels it to be unnecessary and undignified. In a way, she is a combination of M (in her expectations) and
Miss C (in the remote condemnation).
3. Father: As a child, I adored Father. He gave me treats and surprises. Later, his
drinking altered the personality. He became irrational, leering, and a sexual predator. Can the female lioness refuse the
lion? Moves, repeated by my elder brother, Francis. Father is a combination of GB, for his nastiness when drunk, and G
– for the kind of emotional/sexual cruelty he inflicted.
4. Ida: Ida is my favorite sister. I have a large family, but Ida is the closest to me in essence. Anita is too into ribbons and
laces and is a bit of a drip (see cousin Linda here). Francis Jr. is like R. S., distorted, mad, a little manipulative and full of
himself. I prefer to keep out of his way. But Ida – Ida has my essence, only she doesn't have my courage. In some
ways, her painting exceeds mine. And she goes into a health profession, so she's a "worthy" human being. To me, she is
my own sister. S
5. Anita, my sister, is like A: vain, dazzling, self-assured, glamorous.
6. Anita Pollitzer is inspirational, irrational, talented, appreciative, stimulating, and my champion – not unlike MH or CP.
My refusal to let Anita publish the biography on me is akin to my way of refusing to sing backup for Wendy (in
Australia).
7. Dr. Javish is an irritating, quack psychiatrist – I don't approve of shrinks. I don't even like doctors: they didn't help
Mama, did they? But I need him: he's my only hope, so I go along with his methods in the hope that I'll find a key to
getting me out of the space I'm in either with him or on my own. I use him until I don't need him anymore; however,
eventually, his efforts prove to be those of someone on my side. When he's gone, I actually miss him. He is like MW.

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8. **Chase** is a teacher of elegance and wisdom and success. He is like CE.
9. **Alon Bement** is a flop of tremendous appeal and knowledge who gave me and my art another chance. He is DB.
10. **Alice Peretta** is a friend who opened up a world for me through bringing me to Texas. She believes in me. Loyal, fair, honest, someone who makes the planet a better place. She is like HS.
11. **Leah** is someone I’m not above using to serve my ends. I will sleep with her if I must. I even convince myself – temporarily – she’s what I want – because I need her to carry me until I’m well enough to find another person to carry me. Yes, I’m attracted to her. No, I don’t really want sexual relationships with women to become a publicly-known choice. I don’t really use anyone in this way. When I was 22, I, foolishly, thought it was safe to move in with G – I had no money and needed a place to go. Although I haven’t had the exact experience, I understand the motives. Emotionally, she is similar to D. Leah looks like SM.
12. **Paul Strand** is a colleague. He’s also got a rich family, so if Stieglitz fails, well, maybe I can haul in Paul. I’m really attracted to him, but he’s too slow to make his move. Paul is DL.
13. **Beck Strand** is someone married to someone I might’ve had. She is beautiful and I enjoy her company. Still, I’m smarter and more interesting and more talented. We are on-again-off-again as friends and lovers. Beck is P.
14. **Chia and Beau** are the babies I never had. They are a perfect couple: tough, protective, fiercely loyal to each other and to me – they are like Alfred and me. And I can control them a lot easier than I could call the shots for the life Alfred and I shared. I love them totally, and they do my bidding. We walk and play together. And they are as free and rough with the mountainous world as I am. They are like **Buddy or Francie** – great dogs who loved and understood me!
15. **Dorothy Norman** – a user, a climber. The woman who stole my man. She has it all – and she wants what I have, too. TM.
16. **Mabel Dodge Luhan** is a socialite, but she is the one who first brought me to Santa Fe. So I am immensely grateful to her. She is a double-edged sword in that she takes as much as she gives. But I’m not above experimenting with her, too – she is SiB.
17. **Tony Luhan** is amazing – odd, tall, strong, and I love his body: he can have me any time he wants. I permit him anything – in fact, I wish he’d do more. He is GM.
18. **George D.** is a Californian. He is like a strange creature, and conceited with it. He lies – to me and himself – he is SG.
19. **Ted Reid** is someone I really like. There is a chemistry I’ve never felt before. But he’s totally afraid to act on his impulses. He is MJ.
20. **Lena Bucholz** is a child I “use” – by showing her her inferiority to me, I illustrate my superiority in general. She is BS.
21. **Eugene Speicher** & the other students – A well-meaning pain in the ass – yes, he gives me money, but he’s also a drain on my time – he is like JO, the others are like CTWC’s staff – a big club.
22. **“The Men”** – the guys whose approval I need in order to work. They are like the ADEs/PDs of the WS. I need them on my side. “Dove” is also FG; “Marin” is also MBu.
23. **Emmeline Obbermeyer Stieglitz:** the wounded vain wife – SM.
24. **Kitty** – the dreadful daughter – A/B.
27. **Juan Hamilton:** my young man, carer, eyes. He is SJG.
28. **Housekeeper/Nurse:** Someone with whom I “stuck” because of my ailments. My Pilates teacher, J.

a) Manners: I am imperious, abrupt, proud, in control, famous, protective, used to getting my own way, not above causing a commotion to make my point. When I was younger, I was enthusiastic, playful, protective, determined, daring.

b) Neither a social butterfly nor a wall flower, I am self-possessed, private, able to get out and enjoy myself with people when I wish to, but I prefer to stay focused on my work, my energies, and I loathe crowds – much-prefering a one-on-one to parties.

Sexual attitudes: I am easy with my sexuality, titillated, able to manipulate men and women with my favors. I enjoy – it is a part of my being keenly alive. I am experimental, but I can drop someone or some form of sexual exploration as easily as I can adopt it. My father’s advances confused me, but I learned from an early age what men wanted – and I know how to use it to get what I want. I am a sexual, pagan being.

11. Why do I think in the manner I do?
It’s all about me: staying alive, staying true to my essence, being able to paint as I wish – having control of my life. A lot of what I do is protective, defensive, and controlling of others. Experience has taught me that one is either in control or controlled – I prefer to be the former.

12. Contradictions?
Sexual appetite and ascetic clothing.
Cold and aloof but a love of dogs.
Famous but isolated.
Married but living better separately.

13. My home:
I love my homes in New Mexico. They are perfect – beautiful, natural, of the earth and expressive of my artistic essence.

14. Entertainment: concerts, recordings, music, cooking, eating, entertaining in my way, on my terms, camping, walking.

15. My vocation. I am a painter, an artist, and I love it.

16. What did I do to get here?
Whatever it took.

17. My journey and its effects on me is the subject of my entire play.
18. Stress level – I keep a lid on things and simmer, then explode – I don’t suffer fools gladly. When I was poor, I had to hold my tongue whenever possible to avert losing my source of income—this gave me headaches; later, with wealth, my tongue is looser, harsher. I don’t need anyone.

19. I am silent, reserved, passionately internal – but also very much able to express my emotions and passions and feelings through my art.

20. Age: 46 is the jumping off place for forward and backward.

21. Energy level: full, wired, focused, sensitive, like a “man’s coat hanger” in the shoulders – pressed down and correctly square, a fullness within, a rectitude, and a silence.

22. Allergies, infirmities? Blindness, typhoid, rash, macular degeneration, tuberculosis, headaches, and, of course, emotional woes.

23. Size, weight, & strength: 5’4”, weighing 120 lbs., I am more willful than strong.

24. Voice: pitch (rich yet delicate); resonance (a bit internal and thin, but still out there); dialect (Mid-West-Texas-Santa Fe).

25. Walk: measured, clean, solid, sure; can be skipping and wild and dancey – but earthy, grounded.

26. Clothes: Expensive or cheap, they have clean, tailored lines, are black and white - with an elegance unique to them

27. Personal props? No – unless it’s the staff for walking with the chows, later in life.

28. Opinions (done separately)
"Keenly alive”, etc.

On a rock above ocean surf and spray – doing jetes – the little girl on the ride – the red blood of spilled wine – D and the couch

Ashamed – pained, etc.

“whipped cream” – G/blue plate special – bar at Rockaway – the d – “None of your business”

Artist – visual – romantic – tender – wonderment, etc.

The ice leaves (Rego Park) – Launceston apple tree fog

Focused – ruthless – detailed, etc.

Painting the knife – choreography (Boston)

Earth-connected – simple – wise, etc.

Cooking for M – washing vegetables as ritual

Ironic – touchy, etc.

Mu, telling me what to think and feel

Loyal – loving – moored, etc.

Returning to Mi after months away – ditto GM – as if I’d never left

“Keenly alive”, etc.

On a rock above ocean surf and spray – doing jetes – the little girl on the ride - the red blood of spilled wine – D and the couch
Appendix D: Presidents of the United States During O’Keeffe’s Lifetime [1887-1986]

[Note: This list was acquired from http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/chronological.html/]

1885-1889  Grover Cleveland
1889-1893  Benjamin Harrison
1893-1897  Grover Cleveland
1897-1901  William McKinley (assassinated)
1901-1909.1  Theodore Roosevelt
1909-1913  William Howard Taft
1913-1921  Woodrow Wilson
1921-1923  Warren G. Harding (died in office)
1923-1929  Calvin Coolidge
1929-1933  Herbert C. Hoover
1933-1945  Franklin Delano Roosevelt (died in office)
1945-1953  Harry S. Truman
1953-1961  Dwight D. Eisenhower
1961-1963  John F. Kennedy (assassinated)
1963-1969  Lyndon B. Johnson
1969-1974  Richard M. Nixon (stepped down)
1974-1977  Gerald Ford
1977-1981  Jimmy Carter
1981-1989  Ronald Reagan
Appendix E: Rae Allen, Curriculum Vitae

RESUME

ACTING – DIRECTING – TEACHING

ACTING, BROADWAY:

AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE (Tony Award)
DUDE
FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
TRAVELER WITHOUT LUGGAGE (Tony Nomination)
DAMN YANKEES (Tony Nomination)
PAJAMA GAME
OLIVER
O’CASEY’S PICTURES IN THE HALLWAY and I KNOCK THE DOOR (also co-produced)...and others

ACTING, OFF-BROADWAY, TOURING, REGIONAL:

A LIE OF THE MIND (Mark Taper Forum)
AMADEE (Off-Broadway)
CREDITORS (Off-Broadway)
THE ORPHANS (Public Theatre, NYC)
A CRY OF PLAYERS (Baltimore)
American Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Connecticut:
WINTER’S TALE/MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM/ANTHONY & CLEOPATRA/TWELFTH NIGHT
THE DEATH OF BESSIE SMITH (Off-Broadway)
New York Shakespeare Festival:
LOVE’S LABOURS LOST, HENRY IV, PART II
SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL (Off-Broadway)...and others

ACTING, FEATURES:
[Current:] THE FOURTH TENOR w. Rodney Dangerfield (Borderline/HBO)
STARGATE, CALENDAR GIRL, A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN, ANGIE, FAR OUT MAN, TORCH SONG TRILOGY, TAKING OFF, MOVING, WHERE’S POPPA, TIGER MAKES OUT, DAMN YANKEES, etc.

ACTING, MOVIES OF THE WEEK & SPECIALS
FACE OF A STRANGER w. Gena Rowlands
SHE SAID NO w. Judd Hirsch
KEEPING SECRETS w. Suzanne Somers, etc.
DEADLY GAME (Menendez trial)
FAERIE TALE THEATRE (ALADDIN), and others

ACTING, EPISODIC TV:
THE FEARING MIND (Recurring)
PROVIDENCE (Guest star)
L.A. DOCTORS (Guest star)
ENCORE, ENCORE (Guest star)
HUDSON STREET (Guest star)
SEINFELD (Guest star)
BROOKLYN BRIDGE (Guest star)
EQUAL JUSTICE (Guest star)
HEAD OF THE CLASS (Guest star)
BABY BOOM (Guest star)
HILL STREET BLUES (Guest star)
SCARECROW & MRS. MILLER (Guest star)
GREATEST AMERICAN HERO (Guest star)
SOAP (Recurring)
ALL IN THE FAMILY (Recurring)
STUDIO 90, etc.

ACTING, TV PILOTS:
I’M HOME, RAINBOW GIRL, GRANT’S TOMB, ACE, etc.

COACHING:
People I have coached: Cher, Olivia D’Abo, Maryum D’Abo, Paula Poundstone, Daphna Kastner, etc.
Also have coached actors, directors, producers & teachers in Europe & USA
Movies: (Recent:) 7 weeks on SPANISH FLY (Director: Daphna Kastner, Starline Productions – coached director, writer, stars)
Did similar work w. Tommy Chung on FAR OUT MAN)
DIRECTING, TV & FILM:
(Current) WINNING (Pilot)
Film AFI: Two short films, TOLSTOI and ARNOLD AND KATHY
(Current Feature in Development) Between the Chalk Lines (screenwriter Scott Sayre)

DIRECTING, THEATRE:
MASTER CLASS (Santa Barbara Ensemble Theatre (Honorable mention BACKSTAGE WEST)
MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE (Dramalogue Award)
SEMPLE (Langston Hughes)
DUCK DANCING and NOBODY’S HOME (both by Mark Mantell)
CYRANO DE BERGERAC (Long Beach Civic Theatre w. Stacy Keach)
VOICES (Laat w. Sally Kirkland)
(5 Seasons @ Ford’s Theatre, Washington D.C.): SHADOW BOX, CHRISTMAS CAROL, etc.
END GAME (Samuel Beckett, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Minn.)

DIRECTING, NEW YORK/East:
FATHER’S DAY
HOT HOUSE (Megan Terry, Chelsea Theatre)
APPLE PIE OPERA (Joseph Papp’s NY Public Theatre)
BIG KNIFE (Clifford Odets, Co-Artistic Director Etc. Theatre Company)
STAGE WEST, Springfield, Mass. (LORT CO., Co-Artistic Director – 3 years – produced over 21 plays, 5 children’s plays, directed 15 of the above including works by Shakespeare, Chekhov, O’Neill, Genet, Kaufman & Hart, Ibsen, Coward, Hellman, Langford Wilson, etc.)

TEACHING and ACADEMIC DIRECTING:
FILM: BREAKTHROUGH SEMINARS – Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Zurich. Cologne, Los Angeles
PRIVATE COACHING – Los Angeles
BREAKTHROUGH INTERNATIONAL – Los Angeles, Sydney & Melbourne, Australia
N.Y.U.: SCHOOL OF THE ARTS - Acting & Film Professor - 3 years
[Also directed productions CANDIDE, PLEBIA’N’S REHEARSE THE UPRISING, COMPANY, SAVED, LOVE FOR LOVE, etc.]
YALE SCHOOL OF DRAMA – Visiting Lecturer
O’NEILL FOUNDATION
GOODMAN SCHOOL OF THEATRE (Director: HOT L BALTIMORE; Seminars: Chekov, Shakespeare)
SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS (Director: ROSENKRANTZ & GUILDENSTERN)
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ARTS (Seminars on film acting, Chekov, Grotowski, etc.)

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:
AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE (AFI/DWW)
HARVARD UNIVERSITY – BUSINESS SCHOOL –
SCHOLARSHIP FROM NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
ADMINISTRATION IN THE ARTS –
BFA, MFA – NEW YORK UNIVERSITY (DIRECTING) -SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
DIRECTING with: Lloyd Richards, Peter Cass, Carl Weber (Berliner Ensemble), Martin Esslin, John Arden, J. Grotowski, Andrew Sarris
ART HISTORY (NYU Art Institute)
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ARTS (Graduate)
HUNTER COLLEGE (Attended)
PRIVATE STUDY: Uta Hagen, Harold Clurman, Morris Carnovsky, Stella Adler, Sam Christianson, etc.

HONORS & AWARDS:
Tony Award Nominations (Broadway):
   DAMN YANKEES – Director, George Abbott
   TRAVELER WITHOUT LUGGAGE – Director, Robert Lewis
Tony Award Recipient (Broadway):
   AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE
Awarded AFI GRANT to complete 2 Short Films
DWW Funded by Ford Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts and private funds
Awarded NATIONAL ENDOWMENT GRANT – Harvard Business School – Administration in the Arts
### APPENDIX F: Tables of Production Dates, venues and Key Collaborators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Production Details</th>
<th>Cast/Personnel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>F.1</strong></td>
<td>The Catskill Arts Society – staged reading</td>
<td>17 October, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia:</td>
<td>Natalie Mosco</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctor:</td>
<td>William Rowley</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director:</td>
<td>Lisa Parkins</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage Manager:</td>
<td>Andrea Shapiro</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F.2</strong></td>
<td>The WorkShop Theatre Company – sit-down reading</td>
<td>14 August 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Georgia:</td>
<td>Natalie Mosco</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Doctor/Men:</td>
<td>Robert Aberdeen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women:</td>
<td>Virginia Roncetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director:</td>
<td>Rae Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage Manager:</td>
<td>Bayo</td>
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<td><strong>F.3</strong></td>
<td>The WorkShop Theater Company – full-scale production</td>
<td>15-20 December 2004</td>
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<td>Doctor/Men:</td>
<td>Robert Aberdeen</td>
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<td>Virginia Roncetti</td>
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<td>Stage Manager:</td>
<td>Bayo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lighting Design:</td>
<td>Joel Silver</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Computer Graphics:</td>
<td>Susanna Miller</td>
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<td><strong>F.4</strong></td>
<td>The WorkShop Theater Company – full-scale production</td>
<td>20 March – 8 April 2008</td>
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<td>Doctor/Men:</td>
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<td>Women:</td>
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<td>Director:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stage Manager:</td>
<td>Emily Compton</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Composer/Sound Design:</td>
<td>Margaret Pine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Set Designer:</td>
<td>Kevin Judge</td>
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<td>Lighting Design:</td>
<td>Paul Hudson</td>
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<td>Costume Design:</td>
<td>Gail Cooper-Hecht</td>
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<td>Video Production Design:</td>
<td>Marilys Ernst</td>
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<td>The personnel remained the same with the exception of the following:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stage Manager:</td>
<td>D.C. Rosenberg</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Stage Manager:</td>
<td>Charlotte Volage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sound Technician:</td>
<td>Elizabeth Shiavo</td>
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<td><strong>F.6</strong></td>
<td>The Smithsonian Institute – Washington D.C.</td>
<td>1 November 2008</td>
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<td>The personnel remained the same</td>
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Appendix G: Illustrations for Abbreviated Pre-show Character Preparation - December, 2004

(1) “The Red Poppy”; (2) “Sky Above Clouds IV”; (3) original watercolor by the author; (4) photo of young O’Keeffe taken from Adato documentary; (5) photo of “dramatic” O’Keeffe taken from Adato documentary; (6) postcard of O’Keeffe and Stieglitz, 1942, Arnold Newman, photographer; (7) postcard of O’Keeffe, 1967, Philippe Halsman, photographer; (8) photograph of a Taos sky.