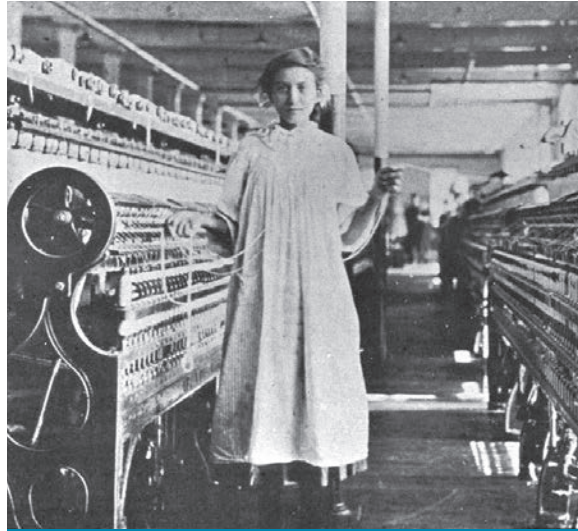


MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE THE PARLOR



A young woman works in a textile mill in Lowell, Mass.

Few women lived as Catherine Sloper and her peers did. In the South in the 1800s, most black women were enslaved. In the North, the U.S. was becoming industrialized. Mill owners started hiring women to work in dangerous conditions for less than half the wages they would pay men. Some women found work as domestics, working in others' households as maids, cooks, etc. In *The Heiress*, we see an example of a domestic in Maria. Outside the city, women who lived on farms and homesteads worked from dawn to dusk to care for their families and households.

Though some women had no rights and others had few, they fought for power over their lives. During the 1830s the women workers at the Lowell textile mills organized and went on strike to demand better pay and safer working conditions. They created the first union of working women in American history. They did this at a time when women could not vote! The Lowell mill women came together to claim their rights. They provided a catalyst for the Women's Suffrage Movement, which earned women the right to vote 90 years later in 1920.

GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

In the play Dr. Sloper tells Morris Townsend "... the West is opening up. Many men are turning their eyes in that direction." What he is referring to is the California Gold Rush, which took place between 1848 and 1855. During this time gold was discovered in California and over 300,000 people rushed to California to find gold and strike it rich.



WATCH

Take a virtual tour of what a house in Washington Square looked like in the 1850s.

<https://bit.ly/2RvK4sZ>

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

How do our parents influence who we become?

2

How do you know someone loves you too?

3

How can you take control of your identity and future?

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

RESOURCES

"United States: Inheritance Laws in the 19th and 20th Centuries". Library of Congress <https://bit.ly/2RB0xPJ>

"Can She be Loved on Washington Square?" *The New Yorker*. <https://bit.ly/2VXbrL2>

"For Love or Money: How The Heiress Charmed Audiences From Washington Square to Broadway." *Broadway.com*. <https://bit.ly/2TV4hFd>

Examining Gender Race and Class in the 19th century. University of Florida <https://bit.ly/2FDh9w1>

Exploring U.S. History: Women and Equality. George Mason University. <https://bit.ly/2FDh9w1>

The New York Public Library, The Billy Rose Foundation <https://on.nypl.org/2CvhCwU>

"Separate Spheres" via Thoughtco.com <https://bit.ly/2DgZTuU>

Washington Square in the 1800s <https://bit.ly/2APE6Jg>



the mead center
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024
Phone: 202-554-9066
Fax: 202-488-4056

Written by: Morgan Charéce Hall
Edited by: Rebecca Campana

Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.



ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE

PORTRAIT OF COURAGE

THE HEIRESS



BY RUTH GOETZ AND AUGUSTUS GOETZ
SUGGESTED BY THE HENRY JAMES NOVEL "WASHINGTON SQUARE"
DIRECTED BY SEEMA SUEKO

FICHANDLER STAGE | FEBRUARY 8 – MARCH 10, 2019

DR. SLOPER: Help her be clever, Lavinia. I should so like her to be a clever woman.
MRS. PENNIMAN: But she is so gentle and good!
DR. SLOPER: You are good for nothing unless you are clever!

The Heiress is generously sponsored by Barbara and Arthur Bushkin, Daniel Korengold and Martha Dippell and



and Ilene and Steven Rosenthal.

The D.C. Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, The Bay & Paul Foundations, Rockwell Collins and the Albert and Lillian Small Foundation.

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHTS



AUGUSTUS AND RUTH GOETZ

Photo courtesy of New York Public Library.

“Dramatization is imagination made palpable, or visible, or understandable — instantly. It is the imaginer’s highest moment.” — Ruth Goetz

The Heiress was written by the married couple Ruth and Augustus Goetz in 1947. Ruth, a playwright, adaptor and translator, was the daughter of a theater writer and producer and was involved in every aspect of theater from a very early age. She studied scenic design and made a living as a costume designer and story editor before meeting and marrying Augustus in 1932. Shortly after they got married, Augustus quit his job as a stockbroker to pursue a writing career of his own.

After they collaborated on several projects together, Ruth suggested that they adapt the classic novel *Washington Square* for the stage. In 1947 the play opened on Broadway and was a hit! Two years after their success on

Broadway, the Goetzes were asked to develop the screenplay of *The Heiress*. The film starred Olivia de Havilland and Montgomery Clift and received four Academy Awards.

Augustus died in 1957. Ruth continued to write plays in both French and English until her death in 2001. To honor her late husband, she wrote the play *Sweet Love Remember’d*. Through her work with the Dramatists Guild and the Young Playwrights Festival, both of which she is a founding member, Ruth was known and remembered as a mentor and supporter of young playwrights.

Dramatists Guild – a renowned community of professional playwrights, composers, lyricists, and librettists dedicated to protecting, informing and promoting the interests of theater makers.

FROM GOSSIP TO NOVEL



Henry James, author of “Washington Square”

The story of *The Heiress* began with a juicy piece of gossip. In 1879, actress Fanny Kemble met with her friend Henry James to spill a story. Her brother had proposed to a plain-looking woman, who was extremely rich.

Kemble’s brother

wasn’t in love with the woman but wanted her inheritance. The unwitting heiress fell head over heels for her suitor even though “her father disapproved strongly (and justly) of the engagement.” James was a famous novelist and he took this piece of gossip and wrote the novel *Washington Square*. Ruth and Augustus Goetz then adapted this novel into *The Heiress*.

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S NOTEBOOK

Leading an all-female design team, director Seema Sueko used three words to guide the artists in building the world that we see on stage: reclaim, thriller and revolutionary.

“Reclaiming what’s been stolen is at the heart of *The Heiress*. Each character at different moments in the play and for different reasons has an epiphany that something has been stolen, snatched or deprived of them. In this play, on different timetables, they attempt to reclaim that thing. Stylistically, the play is a thriller of the heart... We are focused on the micro, on the family, on the domestic sphere and specifically the tender sphere of the heart. But, still, the reclamation at the end is nothing short of revolutionary.”



Seema Sueko

MARRIAGE IN THE 1800s

A woman’s quality of life in America during the 1800s was almost entirely dependent on marital status. The ideal woman was submissive; her job was to be a meek, obedient, loving wife and subservient to the men around her. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or participate in the public sphere of men. As a result, marriage, preferably to a wealthy man of high status, was the central concern for many women.

Marriage was a way of improving or cementing a family’s social status. In addition to money, established families like the Slopers, might also consider the man’s reputation, the prestige and history of his family name and how the man made his money. The man’s age, appearance or personality, the daughter’s wishes, and love were not usually considerations.



The Empress Eugenie Surrounded by her Ladies in Waiting, 1855 by Franz Xaver Winterhalter gives us an idea of how upper-class women dressed during this time.

INHERITANCE LAWS

The general law just before the time of *The Heiress* was that a woman would lose control over her inheritance (money and property) after she married. However, in the mid-19th century, with the New York Married Women’s Property Act, most states passed legislation giving married women, rather than their husbands, ownership and control over all personal and real estate property they had inherited or been given. Married women’s inheritances became separate property that they could use as they wished. If Catherine was to marry Morris, she would have the power to use her money as she wished, which was a relatively new law during 1850.



Catherine’s total inheritance equaled \$30,000 in 1850. How much would her inheritance be worth today?

PREPARATION OF AN HEIRESS

Upper-class women like Catherine and her cousin, Marian, had the advantage of education that was not offered to working women in the 1850s. However, the education upper-class women received was not meant to be academic. The goal of elite female education was to provide young ladies with the social graces and manners befitting their place in society, and to

instill a basic knowledge of literature, classics, arithmetic and geography. Lessons also included instruction in religious and moral principles that would lead to the development of virtuous character. These lessons would all come in handy when a woman became a debutante and, later, a hostess in her married home.

A debutante is an upper-class young woman making her first appearance in fashionable society. The tradition of debuting was formed so that young women, of marriageable age, could be presented to high society for the first time. This usually occurred between the ages of 16 and 18. Parents hoped that their daughter’s beauty and charisma would outshine that of all others in the room and, thus, secure them a suitable husband. Following the ball, the young women were expected to regularly attend high society events and mingle in approved social circles.

Fashion in the 1850s was just shy of the southern-belle hoopskirt era. Costume designer Ivania Stack said the 1850s were “all about the ruffles.” Women used their



Rendering by costume designer Ivania Stack.



Laura C. Harris as Catherine Sloper. Photo by Tony Powell

clothing to provide a barrier between themselves and the outside world by wearing several layers of ruffles on their skirts and petticoats. This provided a protective layer around a woman. At the same time, the layers and the rigid, restrictive corsets they wore were also a type of cage. The clothes of upper-class women made them beautiful birds without freedom.