SUSAN GLASPELL: FEMINIST PLAYWRIGHT

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts Degree

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Anna Katherine Wiley

April 1989

I am submitting a thesis written by Anna K. Wiley entitled "Susan Glaspell: Feminist Playwright." I have examined the final copy of this thesis and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English with a concentration in literature.

[redacted]
Mardia Noe, Chairperson

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

[redacted]

[redacted]

Accepted for the Graduate Division:

[redacted]
Director of Graduate Studies

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

After thirty-two years of taking graduate courses, it is with some embarrassment that I bring to closure the Master's degree--begun originally on the campus of Indiana University in theatre and now completed at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in English. In "Susan Glaspell: Feminist Playwright" I was able to draw from both areas of study and take advantage of the efforts of a number of my classroom professors, as well as writings and scholarship which span much of the twentieth century.

At Indiana my graduate work began under Professors Richard Moody, Hubert Heffner, Gary Gaiser and Richard Scammon. Their classes, their friendship and their encouragement cannot be forgotten. As a mature graduate student at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga my thesis research was supervised and guided by Professor Marcia Noe. I am grateful to her not only for her careful reading of this thesis, but for her relentless encouragement to complete what had been started. I want to thank Professors Reed Sanderlin and Robert Vallier for giving of their time and counsel and for serving on my committee. Scholarship may be a lonely exercise, but it cannot be accomplished by oneself.

The final form of my thesis would not have been possible without David Wiley, my husband. Where my computer literacy ran out, his took over, and the final printing was only one of his many contributions to my pursuit of a Master's degree--a pursuit which has endured just slightly longer than our marriage. I must also remember my son Richard in these acknowledgments, for when everyone else grew tired of hearing about Susan Glaspell, he continued to discuss my work with me.

Anna Katherine Wiley

March 7, 1989

Chattanooga, Tennessee

Introduction

Susan Glaspell, a "new woman" of the second decade of the twentieth century in America, left a valuable legacy for the feminists who would follow her. Her life and writings are examples of what women are capable of doing when given the opportunity. In both she sought to prove that women could participate in life fully--and on their own terms. A woman should not only expect Virginia Woolf's "room of her own," but should be allowed to use a mind of her own.

With the freedom to use her mind and to explore a full range of her female consciousness, Susan Glaspell came to conclusions that had not been available to her sisters of the past century. She was able to break loose from old restrictions imposed on the females of the world. She was an example of what became possible for women in the early years of the new century. She graduated from college, traveled abroad and became a professional writer. Without giving up the pleasures of love and family and concern for others, she was able to find success as a journalist, as a writer of short stories, novels, and dramas, as an actress, and as co-founder and jack-of-all-trades for the Provincetown Players. As a resident of Greenwich Village in its early days, she moved within a diverse group of "movers and shakers." Her friends and acquaintances were artists, political journalists, editors of radical magazines, social workers, socialists, teachers, suffragettes, and anarchists. Her delight in this world she shared with other "free-thinkers" of the day comes through in her description in The Road to the Temple:

> Our friends were living down-town in "The Village," so that is where we lived; it was cheaper, and arranged for people like us. Nice to have tea before your glowing coals in Milligan Place, and then go over to Polly's or Christine's for a good dinner with friends. Every once in a while, in the Sunday paper, I read

> of Greenwich Village. It is a wicked place, it seems, and worse then wicked, it is silly. Just what Greenwich Village is now, I do not know. Through the years I knew it, it was a neighborhood where people were working, where you knew just which street to take for good talk when you wanted it, or could bolt your door and work all day long. You had credit at the little store on the corner, and the coal man too would hang it up if the check hadn't come. I never knew simpler, kinder or more real people than I have known in Greenwich Village. I like in memory the flavor of those days when one could turn down Greenwich Avenue to the office of the Masses, argue with Max or Floyd or Jack Reed; then after an encounter with some fanatic at the Liberal Club, or (better luck) tea with Henrietta Rodman, on to the Working Girls' Home (it's a saloon, not a charitable organization) or if the check had come, to the Brevoort. Jig loved to sit in the cellar of the Brevoort. He had his own corner, and the waiters smiled when he came in. (247)

To outsiders the Village may have always appeared wicked and silly; but to Susan Glaspell and George Cook the Village was an example of what could be accomplished when people dedicated to ideals worked together. Those who lived in the Village were willing to consider and try out and even fight for new ideas and new means of expression, and women were as welcome there as anyone else. According to one who was there at the time, journalist Hutchins Hapgood, the women, who were finally about to win the vote, were in the forefront of the important movements of the time. In his account of his life, A Victorian in a Modern World, he writes, "When the world began to change, restlessness of women was the main cause of the development called

Greenwich Village, which existed not only in New York but all over the country. . . " (152).

Not all of the women living in Greenwich Village earned their living as writers, but all of them had a great deal to say in one form or another. Henrietta Rodman, a teacher in New York City schools, was fearless in her fight for women's rights. Because of her efforts through the Feminist Alliance, women gained the right to teach after they married and the right to return to teaching after having a child. Crystal Eastman became a lawyer and used her degrees in sociology and law to fight for the rights of the disadvantaged. She encouraged her brother Max to join the stimulating life of New York City. Ida Rauh, an actress with the Provincetown Players, married Max and settled down to a life of activism on several fronts. Neith Boyce was married to Hutchins Hapgood and had four children, but continued to write under her maiden name, as most women writers did. Other emancipated women moved in and about Greenwich Village, working for birth control, child care for working mothers, rights of property for women, more enlightened divorce laws, the original equal rights amendment, and world peace. They joined their husbands and other males in the struggle against the many terrible wrongs of the industrial order (Sochen 78).

The men these energetic women knew and loved encouraged them in their new-found freedom. In the publication the Masses editor Max Eastman and associate editor Floyd Dell wrote often about the new woman and her place in a world where she could share equally with men. Floyd wrote also about his personal search for love and happiness in the modern world. He was able to express for other men the joys and frustrations of accepting women as equals. Since in the new sexual order men had to give up some of the advantages they had known, acceptance of the new order was definitely easier said than done.

Susan Glaspell was not as much of an activist as some of her Village sisters. She did not seem comfortable passing out pamphlets on street corners, marching in demonstrations, or arguing with management. She agreed with many of the efforts of her friends, but her support was more apt to come through the words she would write as a reporter, a novelist, and a playwright. In her fictional characters she did not so much pose a polemic, however, as offer a plea for understanding of the female position--"the feminist in tragic and heroic terms" (Sochen 91). In her writings she "explored the woman's problem as essentially an individual, personal one, not a social one" (Sochen 43).

Although Glaspell's early novels and short stories seem today overly sentimental and depict women as long-suffering wives and mothers, her heroines, always capable and bright, began to question the fate society had designed for them. Her women had minds of their own, and she began to let her female characters use them. In her plays, although her heroines were products of the traditions of the past, they began to resent and to try to change those traditions--sometimes ever so slightly, ever so quietly. They were not always sure themselves what they wanted or which way to turn. They struggled with themselves as well as with society. In Bernice the heroine yearns to be her own person, to make decisions about how her life is spent. On her deathbed she devises a plan which will give to her life the meaning she wanted it to have. In Inheritors the young Madeline chooses to face her future by making decisions that are unpopular with her family. She wants to become actively involved in the world around her.

In The Verge Glaspell completely shatters old values and old forms and turns the heroine Claire Archer inside out so the audience hears in her words and sees in the design of her environment her inner struggle revealed. In an expressionistic frenzy Claire battles with traditional notions and those who represent those notions.

In Alison's House, her last play produced, Glaspell uses the life of Emily Dickinson for her story and returns to the traditional box set for the stage. The message that life cannot be contained within walls is still there and reminds one of what the character Judith had said in a Glaspell short story in Harper's Monthly Magazine in 1914, "life was more valuable than anything that would shut life in" (208). This idea runs through Glaspell's literary works and speaks in her life.

As the author of over fifty short stories and essays, nine novels, and fourteen short and long plays, it is surprising that Susan Glaspell has not received more notice from feminist critics of today, for her literary works could withstand a "re-visioning." Her famous short story "A Jury of Her Peers" is the work most often included in collections of feminist writings. Although this account appears more often as a short story, it is the play form, titled "Trifles," that is best known. Through its simple story and careful detail of place and characters, "Trifles" reveals in text and sub-text the consciousness of a woman.

The story is about Minnie Wright, a farm wife whose identify and spirit are slowly eroded by the demands of a joyless husband. The play opens as police officers and neighbors enter "her" kitchen and move around the house trying to find clues about the recent murder of her husband. The wife, who seems to be the only suspect, has been taken to jail, even though she denies having committed the crime. While the men go upstairs to the bedroom, where the dead husband was found, the women who accompany their husbands remain in the kitchen and poke around, remembering how full of life their friend used to be when she was first married. She had a beautiful singing voice and had sung in the church choir, but her husband insisted that she give up her singing. Her one delight was a canary she kept in a cage in the kitchen. Since the cage is empty, the women assume the bird has died. They realize they have not been over to see Minnie lately, and they blame themselves for not being better friends. As

they talk and look around the kitchen, they begin to notice the little things that women notice about a kitchen. The towels are unusually dirty--not what they would have expected in Minnie's kitchen. A piece of quilt left on her sewing rocker is sewn in a haphazard, uneven manner--not like the work she usually did. When they rummage about in her quilt scraps they notice a little package of scraps wrapped round with string. When they open the package, a dead canary with its neck broken falls out. The men start down the stairs at this point. The women exchange knowing glances and quickly put the bird back into the basket and cover it over with quilt scraps. When the men say that there seems to be nothing around the house that would tell them anything about the murderer, the women agree. The men look around the dirty kitchen and shake their heads over what the husband had to endure. For them the state of the kitchen is important in and of itself; for Minnie's friends it is what the state of the kitchen signified about Minnie's life.

In what men might consider trifles the women in the play see the significance of a life. The murder of her canary, which had symbolized her individual spirit and freedom, drove Minnie to seek her own justice. The women, in their silence, make their own decisions about justice. As the title of the later short story adapted from the play indicates, Minnie finally has had a jury of her peers. The women, part of the sisterhood, understand. When the play was written in 1916, women were finally beginning to win their rights as citizens and to serve on juries. This simple play, set amidst the harsh realities of the middle west Susan Glaspell knew, caught the essence of the feminist message which she would struggle to give intellectual and emotional form in her later dramas.

Her husband George Cook and her fellow bohemians urged Susan Glaspell to write truthfully and freely out of her own experience. As a playwright Glaspell sought to imitate life at the same time that she rebeled against what she imitated. She created on

stage what she observed, but challenged the observer to go beyond what was there. She did not present plots which stereotypical characters played out. She did not offer absolute answers. She allowed her heroines to search for answers and challenged the audience members to see new possibilities for the lives of women.

Susan Glaspell's dramas reveal the growing awareness of a valid feminist perspective. Her heroines fashion, out of their individual needs, a meaning for their own lives. In an attempt to explore what feminist critics are labelling, at least until a better term is created, "feminine consciousness," I propose to identify in the heroines of four of the long plays of Susan Glaspell the characteristics of an evolving feminist literary statement. Through my revisioning I hope to pull out of the dramatic material of the past a new appreciation for what Glaspell accomplished in depicting woman's attempt to be taken seriously as a writer and as a participant in a life outside the confines of domesticity. Since her plays and her experimentation, as well as her feminist awareness, are tied closely to her involvement with the Provincetown Players, it seems essential that this study begin with the story of those dreamers and their impact on her life. Chapter 1 will set the scene in Provincetown. Each chapter following will look at one of the four plays, Bernice, Inheritors, The Verge, Alison's House, as an example of Susan Glaspell's contribution to an American feminist literature.

The story begins in the second decade of the twentieth century in America. By 1911 Susan Glaspell had left Davenport, Iowa, the place of her birth. She had attended postbaccalaureate classes in literature at the University of Chicago, had traveled to Europe with friend Lucy Huffaker and had found a job in New York City, where she waited for George Cram Cook to join her. Everywhere there seemed to be promises of what was possible. In his book Homecoming Susan's friend Floyd Dell remembers the time:

> In the year 1911 there were signs that the world was on the verge of something. It was thought to be new life. The London Athenaeum--we quoted it in the Review--said: "Few observant people will deny that there are signs of an awakening in Europe. The times are great with the birth of some new thing" (216).

George Cram Cook's hope that America would be part of this Renaissance was quickly fulfilled. Dell continued:

> The year 1912 was really an extraordinary year, in America as well as in Europe. It was the year of the election of Wilson, a symptom of immense political discontent. It was a year of intense woman-suffragist activity. In the arts it marked a new era. Color was everywhere--even in neckties. The Lyric Year published in New York, contained Edna St. Vincent Millay's 'Renascence'. . . . The Irish Players came to America. It was then that plans were made for the Post-Impressionist Show, which revolutionized American ideas of art. In Chicago, Maurice Browne started the Little Theatre. One could go on with the evidence of a New Spirit come suddenly to birth in America. (218)

In such an atmosphere the talented and visionary men and women who gravitated to Greenwich Village took up their causes and changed the course of American culture.

On April 14, 1913, George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell were married by the mayor in Weehawken, New Jersey, and then took the Fall River Boat to Provincetown (The Road to the Temple [hereafter designated Road] 227). Their union would lead to an eventful life for both of them for the next eleven years together.

Provincetown Players

Susan Keating Glaspell (1876-1948), as a pioneer in the American drama taking shape in the second decade of the twentieth century, established her place in theatre history. As a playwright for and co-founder of the Provincetown Players, her contributions are recognized in most accounts of the Little Theatre movement in the United States. Some theatre historians name her and Eugene O'Neill in the same sentence as the most prolific Provincetown playwrights. Others feel safer identifying her as wife and inspirational support to Provincetown director George Cram Cook, "Jig" as he was usually called.

As a playwright she is most often remembered for her two one-act plays, "Suppressed Desires" and "Trifles." "Suppressed Desires" is a comedy written with her husband about the new craze of psychoanalysis, and "Trifles" is a serious play about a farmer's wife who finally murders the husband who has slowly stifled her spirit for living. One or the other of these plays is usually included in anthologies of short plays, and "Trifles" is referred to in more than one playwriting text as an example of superb one-act craftsmanship. High schools and colleges still perform these plays when a short play serves the production purpose. Although Glaspell wrote five other one-acts which were produced by the Provincetown Players, they are not included in collections of American one-acts that have remained viable examples of the genre.

Scholars do not seem comfortable including her long plays in the American canon of dramatic literature. Even though it is often admitted that her plays were important as sounding boards for the ideas of her time, they withstood neither the grueling financial test of commercial theatre nor the reactions of some critics and audiences. Alison's House, because it received a Pulitzer Prize in 1931, is often included in chronological histories of American theatre, but at the time the award was announced critics publicly

wondered how this quaint play based on the life of Emily Dickinson managed to beat out other productions of that year.

Even though her plays have always received mixed reviews, they have become a lasting monument to her work as a writer. One of her biographers, Arthur E. Waterman, feels that her plays are more important than her novels because in writing them she broke from tradition and experimented with form and content. In her novels she rarely deviated from traditional forms . Waterman admits that "experimentation of itself does not necessarily increase the intrinsic value of a work of art," but he recognizes that her "plays of ideas" were on the cutting edge of a new American drama and that they "were influential in fostering new forms of dramatic expression" (274). Her quiet, introspective dramas did not have the energy of Eugene O'Neill's. They did not dazzle. But if one listened there was much to take in. In her plays she was able to cut back the excesses of sentimentality that she had used in her novels. Good friend Hutchins Hapgood explained her theatrical pieces in this way in his A Victorian in the Modern World:

> Susan was extremely sensitive to her immediate surroundings; and under the influence of Jig and of the atmosphere that we all contributed to, she rapidly acquired a realistic style which perhaps had as much or as little to do with her nature, as The Glory of the Conquered. (377)

The Glory of the Conquered is Susan Glaspell's first novel, written with the female reader in mind. It speaks in sentimental language of undying love and understanding and sacrifice of a wife for a husband and his work. After she read portions of the "just finished novel" to friends Floyd Dell and George Cook, they discussed it between themselves on the way home. According to Dell's account in his book Homecoming, they admired the liveliness and humor of it, but "George deplored . . . the lamentable conventionality of the author's views of life." Dell felt she was "brimful of talent, but, we agreed, too medieval-romantic in her views of life." But that was

before she left Davenport, Iowa, before she spent a year in Paris, before she took a job as a writer in Chicago, before she married Jig Cook, and before the Provincetown Players needed plays which would be worthy of an American dramatic Renaissance.

When Dell was first introduced to her in Davenport, she was already "a young newspaperwoman who had begun a brilliant career as a novelist" (170). She had graduated from Drake, had become one of the first girl reporters for the Des Moines Daily News, had published short stories in Harper's, Ladies' Home Journal, American Magazine and Woman's Home Companion and was making a name for herself as a novelist.

Her columns for women in The Daily News followed the chatty style popular at the time, but as a reporter on the State House beat, she covered legislative sessions and wrote about the day-to-day calendar of events (Waterman 7). Although her news reporting did not give her much creative leeway, she had the opportunity to observe politics in action and later used her store of details to write local color stories set against a political background (Waterman 7).

In Davenport she joined the intellectuals who attended the meetings of the Socialists' Group in Turner Hall. In the same Hall she and her friends might attend a performance by the local German Theatre group. She enjoyed listening to Professor George Cook's ideas and participated in the Monist Society he and Floyd Dell founded so they could have their own religious meetings while others in town attended regular church services. Soon "people who had never been together before," began to attend the Monist Society meetings. When the local Library Board refused to buy a book called The Finality of the Christian Religion and was supported in its censorship decision by a mayoral candidate, "the queer fish of the town," as Susan calls her friends, showed their power by writing letters to the newspapers and changing the course of a city election (Road 193).

Friend Max Eastman felt Susan Glaspell was destined to "escape from Davenport and live a high, un-Philistine kind of life" (566). In 1912 she accepted a job in New York City--where she waited until George Cook's divorce from his second wife became final. This "sweetly conscientious farmer's wife," as Max Eastman fondly describes her, actually enticed the man she was to marry from a wife who was pregnant with their second child. Susan did not feel bound by Midwestern attitudes about the sacredness of marriage--as some of her novels began to indicate. A greater, more natural love and harmony and purpose could be allowed to override marriage vows. A greater idealism made it possible for her to disrupt Jig's marriage and join with him in their oneness.

After Jig and Susan married in the spring of 1913 and settled down to life in New York City, where Susan's "pen was earning the living" (Eastman 566), in the summers they began to retreat, with a few friends, to the shores of the Atlantic in Provincetown, Massachusetts. At that time Provincetown was still being abandoned by fishermen and discovered by city-weary New Yorkers. The "tiny house with a yard" and a "pure white little fence," where a striped cat, full name of Carnal Copulation, "sat on the fencepost" (Eastman 566) became the studio for Susan, the workshop and garden for Jig, and one of the gathering places for those Provincetown summer dwellers who would take up the cause of the Provincetown Players. With all of the inconsistencies about Susan and Jig noted, Max Eastman still felt their home had "an atmosphere of Christian conservatism, a quiet piety"(566). According to Hapgood, early Provincetown had no extreme in any direction: "this came in at a later time. There was balanced harmony and joy in life" (378).

It was during the winter of 1914-15 that Jig and Susan wrote their first play--together. It was a comedy about the new rage, psychoanalysis, and was titled "Suppressed Desires." It could be said that "Suppressed Desires" is the play that launched the Provincetown Players. When the Washington Square Players, another early

group in the American little theatre movement, turned down the Glaspell/Cook spoof on psychoanalysis because it was "too special" in its subject matter, (Road 250) the couple decided to mount their own performance for friends and fellow writers who shared summers with them on the beach front at Provincetown. In the summer of 1915 Neith Boyce, wife of Hutchins Hapgood, offered her house as the theatre and a short play she had written, "Constancy," to fill out the evening's bill (Road 251). The simple in-door settings were enhanced by suggestions from beginning stage designer Bobby Jones, (Road 251) who happened to be spending summers with his friends he knew in the winter in Greenwich Village. Even though Susan and Jig were apprehensive about the reaction to their first dramatic collaboration, "People liked it, and we liked doing it" (Road 251).

Neighbors who had not been invited were hurt, so in order to accommodate a larger audience, the performances were moved to Margaret Steele's studio in "the old fish-house out at the end of the Mary Heaton Vorse wharf, across from our house" (Road 251) and given again. That same summer George Cook wrote another comedy on his own, "Change Your Style." The second bill for the summer included his spoof on Provincetown art schools and Wilbur Steele's "Contemporaries." Without realizing it at the time, the small band of idealistic writers and artists who relaxed and re-nourished at Provincetown had created the Provincetown Players.

Encouraged by the response to their theatrical efforts, George Cook began to envision the possibility of his dream--A Beloved Community of Life-Givers (Road 252). Jig's community, of course, would have a theatre, but it would not be a theatre for commercial purpose. It would be "a whole community working together, developing unsuspected talents" (Road 251). Members of the community would write their own plays and put them on, "giving writer, actor, designer, a chance to work together without the commercial thing imposed from without" (Road 251). In her book about her husband

and her years with him, The Road to the Temple, Susan Glaspell set down her memories of their reactions to the commercial theatre of that period.

> We went to the theatre, and for the most part we came away wishing we had gone somewhere else. Those were the days when Broadway flourished almost unchallenged. Plays, like magazine stories, were patterned. They might be pretty good within themselves, seldom did they open out to--where it surprised or thrilled your spirit to follow. They didn't ask much of you, those plays. Having paid for your seat, the thing was all done for you, and your mind came out where it went in, only tireder. An audience, Jig said had imagination. What was this "Broadway," which could make a thing as interesting as life into a thing as dull as a Broadway play? (248)

Even though Mary Vorse remembered later that the Players had no mission, her recollection does not seem accurate when compared with other accounts (Taubman 152). Obviously she did not live, as Susan Glaspell did, under the same roof with Jig Cook, for Susan later wrote that those who returned to Provincetown "that next summer had little chance of escaping" (Road 253). Her husband expressed it with "I must act, organize, accomplish, embody my ideal in stubborn material things which must be shaped to it with energy, toil." He would attempt to intoxicate those around him with the "passion of the primitive group, out of which the Dionysian dance was born" and without which "no new vital drama can arise in any people" (Road 252-53).

Filled with a passion to organize his clan that would produce true drama out of "one feeling animating all the members" (Road 252), Jig Cook set to serious work.

The first bill of that summer included "Winter's Night" by Neith Boyce, "Freedom" by John Reed, and "Suppressed Desires" by Susan Glaspell and George Cook. Members met at the Cook/Glaspell house to read plays for the second bill

(Road 253). A Provincetown resident of that summer who, according to friend Terry Carlin, had a trunkful of plays he had written, came for the reading. Freddie Burt read the play to the group for the shy author, who sat in the next room while the Players listened. When the reading was over, everyone present realized that "Bound East for Cardiff" was exactly the kind of drama they wanted to perform and quickly went into the dining-room to tell Eugene O'Neill they wanted to use his play. "Then we knew what we were for," Susan Glaspell wrote. "We began in faith, and perhaps it is true when you do that 'all these things shall be added unto you'" (Road 254).

Everyone was encouraged to try his or her hand at playwriting. Susan Glaspell, a disciplined writer who had proved she could make her living as a journalist, novelist, and short story writer, was called on. She was reluctant. "Suppressed Desires" had not seemed like work. "Before the grate in Milligan Place we tossed the lines back and forth at one another, and wondered if anyone else would ever have as much fun with it as we were having" (Road 250). Since George Cook was busy organizing his disciples, building the Wharf Theatre out of an old fish-house, and writing letters to those who might buy a summer season of tickets, he did not have time to write plays. When he informed her, "Now, Susan, . . . I have announced a play of yours for the next bill," she protested with, "But I have no play!" She felt that she didn't know how to write plays, had never "studied it." "Nonsense," said Jig "You've got a stage haven't you?" (Road 255)

Susan had trouble arguing with Jig. She believed in his vision, so "I went out on the wharf, sat alone on one of our wooden benches without a back, and looked a long time at that bare little stage" (Road 255-56). Memories from a murder trial she had covered as a newspaper reporter in down-state Iowa began to set the scene for the one-act play that would become Susan Glaspell's most famous story. It embodied the realistic details and emotions of an incident which could not be forgotten. As she later wrote, "I

had meant to do it as a short story, but the stage took it for its own" (Road 256). Later she re-worked it as a short story, and it was published with the title "A Jury of Her Peers." The play was "Trifles."

"Ten days after the director said he had announced my play, there was a reading at Mary Heaton Vorse's. . . . The crowd liked 'Trifles,' and voted to put it in rehearsal next day" (Road 256). The third bill of the summer offered Susan Glaspell's first solo dramatic piece, a replay of Neith Boyce's "Constancy" and John Reed's "The Eternal Quadrangle."

After several one-acts, which received mixed reviews from the critics who had begun to take note of the Players, Susan Glaspell tried her hand at a long play. By this time the Players had a winter season in a theatre on Macdougal Street in Greenwich Village. Even though Jig refused to feel that they were in competition with Broadway theatre, he wanted more people to be given the opportunity to participate in their mission to encourage the writing and support of a native American drama. Susan wrote, "I did not think we were ready to go to New York; I feared we couldn't make it go" (Road 258). But her husband and Jack Reed, "adventurers both, men of faith," thought they could make a go of it (Road 258).

From 1917 to 1922, in between the writing that helped support her and Jig, Susan Glaspell wrote four short plays--"The People," "Close the Book," "The Outside," and "Woman's Honor"--and four long plays--Bernice, Inheritors, The Verge, and Chains of Dew. She and Jig wrote the one-act "Tickless Time" together. All were produced by the Provincetown Players. She and Norman Matson, the man she lived with after Jig died, collaborated on Comic Artist, a play which critics thought suffered because of the attempted amalgamation of two different styles of writing (Waterman 202). In December of 1930 her play which won the Pulitzer Prize, Alison's House, was produced first by

Eva LaGalliene's Civic Repertory Theatre. After five months in repertory, it was moved uptown to the Schubert, where it played for only two weeks (Bronner 20).

As a member and playwright of the Provincetown Players, Susan Glaspell was a vital catalyst in the emergence of a native drama. She contributed to the new ideas of art, the new attitudes about American drama, and the new forms theatre would take. Her place in our country's literary history was being inextricably woven into the story of those idealistic Players who started by writing their own plays and producing them the way they wanted to far from the demands of commercial Broadway. It's a wonderful story--full of interesting and clever characters. As Ludwig Lewisohn described them, "The Provincetown group . . . were the rebellious children of the Puritans nobly aware [as Susan Glaspell was to show in Inheritors] of the tradition of libertarianism which is the true tradition of America and of their folk--a tradition which seemed to be going down to disaster under their eyes" (392). The simple folk, their ancestors, had been the fabric of America, but their ideals were being forgotten in a country where profit and mechanization were de-humanizing the individual. The Players were passionately dedicated to changing this trend. They wanted to go back to the core of humanity and reveal the simple beauty and hope there.

Hutchins Hapgoods says it simply as "They felt the thought and emotion of the day was anaemic and rudderless and they felt their own souls were too. . . . the theatre didn't express life to them--their lives or anybody's lives" (393). They wanted to change that, too.

In Road to the Temple Susan recalls her husband's musings about a "possible American Renaissance."

> Suppose the nascence depends not on blind evolutionary forces, involving the whole nation, but on whether or not the hundred artists who have in them potential power arrange or do not arrange to place themselves in vital

> stimulating relationship with each other, in order to bring out, co-ordinate and direct their power. Suppose the stage of economic, political and social evolution is such that a great creative movement can either appear or not appear in the second decade of twentieth-century America, according to the deeds or omissions of a hundred poets, painters, novelists, critics, scholars and thinkers. (244)

It was in this heady atmosphere generated by George Cram Cook that a group of sons and daughters of nineteenth-century immigrants and sons and daughters of American pioneers found purpose. They turned away from the farms and family businesses of their parents and gathered around a renewed American promise--a spiritual and intellectual promise that focused on personal, individual potential. The Greenwich Village community, where they lived in the winter while they made their living, and the Provincetown community, where they relaxed and followed their dreams, were made up of educated and professionally successful inhabitants who were equipped to make that difference George Cook envisioned. Hutchins Hapgood was close at hand to observe them:

> The original Provincetown group were workers; they lived pleasantly together, made love, had occasional bouts with Bacchus, and did what more conventional people would call unseemly things, but they had a rather steadfast general purpose in life, a quiet persistency in trying to express themselves more truthfully in writing or painting than is fashionable, and they cared really little for the big successes, measured by money or the world. (379)

Susan Glaspell saw them as a "simple people, who sought to arrange life for the thing we wanted to do, needing each other as protection against complexities, yet living as we did because of an instinct for the old, old things, to have a garden, and neighbors,

to keep up the fire and let the cat in at night" (Road 235-36). About the first official summer season as the Provincetown Players, she writes, "It was a great summer; we swam from the wharf as well as rehearsed there; we would lie on the beach and talk about plays--every one writing, or acting, or producing. Life was all of a piece, work not separated from play" (Road 256).

As life and its problems intruded more and more into the serenity of those summers--labor problems, the war in Europe and then the American entry into that war, women's suffrage and its attendant demands for fair treatment in jobs, adequate child care for working mothers and the choice of birth control--Provincetown residents became involved in the movements taking place in America and the world. People moved in and out of the community, trying to find their purpose in the revolution they felt.

For sensitive people who were bent on being part of an American Renaissance, some of the pieces of life they saw were not acceptable as they were. The worker, the immigrant, children, Negroes, and women were considered the downtrodden of the industrial society America had become. The intellectuals and social activists in Greenwich Village became the voices for these downtrodden. Jack Reed, an original Provincetown Player, participated in the Paterson silk workers strike in 1913. The pageant he staged in Madison Square Garden about the events that led to the strike had a profound effect on public reaction (Road 250). Mary Heaton Vorse, another founder of the Provincetown Players, was a labor organizer. Friend Margaret Sanger, a nurse asked by poor women on the Lower East Side of New York how to prevent having more babies, dedicated herself to learning all she could about the prevention of conception, so that women could control their own bodies (Sochen 63). In October 1916, after much ridicule and a grand jury indictment, she opened the first clinic for, as she named it, "birth control" in America (Sochen 62). Max Eastman and Floyd Dell published articles in Masses in defense of her movement. The anarchist Emma Goldman helped spread the

word. Crystal Eastman, Max's sister, continued in the struggle for women's rights that her Congregationalist mother had supported and worked in the settlement house movement. After receiving her law degree, she became an important researcher and writer for new social legislation. Henrietta Rodman worked for the betterment of women, especially her fellow teachers and women who wanted to lead professional lives. According to Dell "she [Henrietta] was especially in touch with the university crowd and the social settlement crowd, and the Socialist crowd; and it was these, many of whom never actually lived in the Village, who, mixing with the literary and artist crowds in the Liberal Club, gave the Village a new character entirely" (Dell 247). The Liberal Club on Macdougal Street and Polly Holliday's restaurant in the basement of the club offered a meeting place for the cliques and common interest groups that gravitated to the Village. The discussions and debates that began at the Liberal Club upstairs inevitably continued in a more boisterous atmosphere at Polly's. Polly's "right-hand man in this enterprise, cook, waiter, dishwasher and chief conversationalist, was Hippolyte Havel, an Anarchist, with fierce moustachios and goatee, a gentle soul with occasional volcanic outbursts," who was also an actor in some of the Provincetown theatrical productions (Dell 247).

Much talk and many words in print by supportive friends kept the activity level high and the expectations higher for those who lived in the Village in its early days.

Susan Glaspell, described by Floyd Dell as a "slight, gentle, sweet, whimsically humorous girl," (Dell 170) was not as comfortable on the corner soap box as some of her friends were, but she fought for the bigger causes, as well as for her husband's cause, in her reporting and her dramas. Within her group, she felt free to sit down in front of that bare little stage on the wharf and give life to what she saw and emotion to what she felt. She observed carefully and wrote, always frankly, about what she saw. Her artistic mind was her own. The idealism, which continues to reveal itself in her dramas, grew

out of the simple virtues her family had tried to live out in Iowa. Her honest treatment of those old ideas in conflict with the new ideas impinging on America in the twentieth century were encouraged by the community she had joined when she had moved east. She continued to become, as Ludwig Lewisohn put it, "morbidly frugal in expression but nakedly candid in substance" (Nation 509).

Surrounded by friends who were thinkers, artists, rebels, she was encouraged to "let go" of at least some of her Midwestern notions and let her characters speak out of their personal struggle. Hutchins Hapgood described the Provincetown Players as a group "composed of men and women who were really more free in all ways than many elements of Greenwich Village--free from violence and prejudice, either radical or conservative" (Hapgood 392-93). According to Robert Sarlos in Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players, Jig's communal group offered freedom within a social structure--much "like group psychotherapy and communally practiced religion" can do:

> This idyllic atmosphere, supportive and non-judgmental, made it possible for the evolving Susan Glaspell--woman writer and artist--to "recover the sensation of life" and create the new forms which grew out of that time. (Sarlos 59)

Just writing about problems was not good enough for some; they had to be in the trenches. Jack Reed was one of those "adventurers," as Susan wrote. In Road to the Temple she recalls the last time she and Jig saw him. One night under a big tree in Jack Reed's yard in Truro, Susan and Jig and Jack talked for the last time together. "'I wish I could stay here,' he said. 'Maybe it will surprise you, but what I really want is to write poetry.'" When Susan asked why he didn't, Reed said that he had promised too many people. He went back to Russia, encouraged others to fight for their freedom, and died there (Road 302).

Susan and Jig continued to hold the Players together, and Susan continued to write plays, but the forces of the world had had their impact. Susan's plays reflected the changes at the same time that she tried to hold on to what was important to her. In the native theatre taking shape, a social self-consciousness was emerging--not just for men, but for the women who were willing to take chances alongside their male adventurers. The new self-consciousness for women, who had been locked in by what men expected them to be, was not going to be easy, but in the world of Greenwich Village and Provincetown, where freedom of expression was encouraged with a religious fervor, the new attitudes could be tested, in everyday living or in the literature and on the stage--where everyone could observe the joys and the dilemmas of the testing. "At that time there was still healthy vigor and moral idealism underlying the effort. So that the total result was a working-out of the situation into a more conscious companionship, greater self-knowledge and a broader understanding of the relations between the sexes" (Hapgood 395). Hutchins Hapgood also noted, "The freedom of the Village, which made the observor to see a little more clearly some of the typical relations between men and women, brought out into sharp relief the greater naturalness of woman's instinct" (Hapgood 320).

With the freedom to react more naturally to her instincts, a heroine might do all kinds of things she did not know she could do. A woman writing from a new sense of awareness might actually speak out of her womaness in a form which challenged the world's shibboleths and the community's model. Without realizing her personal search for a feminine expression could become part of a feminist tradition of writing, Susan Glaspell unleashed in her dramas some of the arguments which later feminist critics would take as their own and use to identify a feminist style.

The work done in feminist criticism in the last 25 years is a continuation of the self-awareness explored by Susan Glaspell in her plays and fostered by her friends in

journalism, social work and the arts. The attitudes of a culture do not change rapidly, however--as women were well aware in Susan Glaspell's time. It was only after Susan B. Anthony's struggles in the nineteenth century that women in the twentieth century were given the right to vote. Susan Glaspell and her crowd were conscious of becoming, however, another link in the pursuit of America's promise of individual fulfillment for both sexes.

The right to vote had to be part of any woman's citizenship as an American, but that right had to lead to full participation in the business of living if it were to mean anything. In the community at Provincetown, Susan and George Cook, along with their friends and fellow travellers, searched for a fullness of living which they felt should be available to anyone. Susan Glaspell wrote out of her private experience and discipline, but strived to explore and reveal for others what they might have failed to notice. Her dramas were beginning to pose the questions that women were hearing within themselves. They were questions they had been hearing for some time but had difficulty verbalizing.

Individual expression was important for Susan and Jig, but they believed it should serve a higher, common good. Fame and fortune were shunned for what was more important. The notion that there was glory to be found in ways that society did not reward became a recurrent theme in Glaspell's works. She continued to look for that "harmony," that "oneness," which was treated in her first novel. Susan Glaspell became her own kind of feminist and her writing evolved from sentimental statement to the dramatization of human struggle in a changing social order.

She understood the frustrations of being born a woman and recognized what society unfairly expected of women, but she retained the mystical belief in life's "oneness," which had no ultimate boundaries in time and place and gender. Her philosophical orientation probably kept her from being more of an activist and a

propagandist than she was; but it did not keep her from struggling, as an artist, with the more intangible questions about living life as a woman.

Bernice

Susan Glaspell's first full-length play, Bernice, features the heroine of the title, even though she is never seen on stage. The play opens a day or so after Bernice's death in the country home she established and shared with her retired father, a middle-age housekeeper, and a busy husband who is more often away at his work in New York City.

The curtain opens on the living room of what Susan Glaspell identifies as Bernice's house in the country, the "house of a woman you would like to know, a woman of sure and beautiful instincts, who lives simply" (159). There is a tea table before a fireplace, French windows which reveal the colorful trees of October and a warm sun. Comfortable window seats invite those inside to sit and look out. The books about the room indicate that those who live there savor reading and knowledge. Bernice's father, Mr. Allen, and Abbie, the housekeeper who has been with Bernice since her birth, talk about Bernice as they wait for the train which is bringing Craig Norris, Bernice's husband, and his sister Laura from the city.

In an effort to remove the painful, personal reminders of Bernice, they begin to re-arrange the furniture and remove decorations. But Bernice's presence goes deeper than the furnishings, and her father exclaims, "You can't get Bernice out of this room" (160).

Through those who knew her best, the audience learns about Bernice, a sensitive woman who chose to make a life from what she felt was most important and not from what others might see as important for her. Early in the play her father reminds himself, as well as Abbie, when he recalls, "the things that are important to most people weren't so important to Bernice" (162).

Because Bernice is removed from the action of the play by her death and the audience must rely on others' perceptions of her, it is easy for those who remember her

to create a romantic picture of who she was and to see in her actions what they want to see. In this sense, Bernice is the kind of heroine Rachel Brownstein identifies in her account of females in nineteenth century literature, Becoming a Heroine. She is a person created by others for their advantage.

According to Brownstein, in nineteenth century literature others, usually men, determined what the characteristics of a perfect woman should be--much as they might determine the characteristics of a perfect piece of art. This perfect heroine was expected then to sustain the image created of her. As Mme de Genlis wrote, " 'The life of every Woman is a Romance'" (Brownstein 32). Remaining true to that romance, no matter what one had to endure, was the female's only position of influence. She was expected to be the guardian of the perfection bestowed upon her (Brownstein 34) but was not allowed to be the creator of her own life. The Rose of romance identifed by Brownstein is beautiful and exalted and beloved and must not deviate from the original artwork man creates and most women, therefore, admire (36). The perfect Rose must be simple and not complex, coherent and not diffuse, perfect and not faulty, finished and not in the process of becoming, signifying and not seeking, imaginary and not imagining (36).

Feminist critic Lillian S. Robinson warns women of the underlying oppression that is the result when women are idealized. "Throughout much of our literature, fanciful constructs of the ideal female, her character and psychology, have obscured the limitations suffered by actual women. Worse, they have encouraged expectations and behavior that only strengthen the real oppression" (882).

In Bernice, Susan Glaspell draws her heroine from this romantic model of the past, but she cannot allow her to be trapped by the boundaries of that model. Glaspell cherished the active life of experience and created female characters who were opening up to new experiences. More and more her heroines give up the "blind obedience" that disturbed Virginia Woolf and fashion choices which grow out of their personal

circumstances and values. They begin to be the initiators of the events in their lives. They reject the passive role expected of them in the past.

Bernice had an independent integrity of person that made it necessary for her to determine how her life would be spent. She fought the oppression Lillian Robinson thinks is created when women are idealized. She may not have had the choices some women had, but they were her choices to make and she made them. Her illness and sudden death become the deus ex machina which makes her statement possible. Although death is not unbelievable, Susan Glaspell's use of it in this case is dangerously close to contrivance, especially since there is little explanation of its cause. However, once the theatregoer accepts the conditions of the situation and becomes a willing participant in Bernice's world, her choices take on meaning beyond what her father, her husband or her best friend were able to see.

With all her perfection, as noted by those who knew her, Bernice had characteristics which did not fit the romantic pattern Brownstein describes. She confused even those who knew her best. Her father admits that some people "called her detached" (162). Abbie can't forget that she was loving and thoughtful, but that she could also be "off by herself" (162). Her father feels he understood her, "Except, there were things--outside what I understood" (163). She was complex and diffuse. There was a sense of mystery, the unrevealed, about her. Glaspell, like other writers of her time, was influenced by Freud's writing about the unconscious. In the early years of the twentieth century his writings stimulated artists to explore the new dimensions of the human psyche, and writers became interested in revealing the many layers of a person's being. Any character could become a study of the human psyche. What was in the unconscious became as significant as what could be observed. The mystery of personality, slowly revealed, became as intriguing as the mystery of plot had been.

And this is what Susan Glaspell does with Bernice. She slowly reveals this complex woman who must take the life she has been given and play it out the best way she can--in the simple rooms of her country home, through the small circle of lives she touches. She sacrifices; she gives meaning to others; the play is hers and she, from the grave, speaks the important message.

But then what is the message? What is Bernice saying? The characters in the play struggle to figure it out. The audience members may struggle with it long after the final curtain has fallen. It is difficult to believe that Susan Glaspell expected us to accept the conclusion at the end of the play--as theatrical and inspirational as it was--and not go on to some of our own conclusions about Bernice and why she did what she did. Bernice was awakening, as feminist critic Elaine Showalter puts it for other heroines, "from the drugged pleasant sleep of Victorian womanhood" (133). She was reacting, becoming, imagining; therefore, she could not be that perfect Rose of romance of the past--no matter how she tried. Death shortens her life; but at the end, with the little time she has left, this frail woman uses it to make a statement. She doesn't hesitate to rationally manipulate the circumstances. She fights back with the means at hand.

At the end of the first act Abbie reveals to Bernice's husband and then to her best friend, Margaret Pierce, that Bernice took her own life. Both are stunned by the report and feel such an act was not possible for one who "came from the whole of life" (177). Craig Norris reacts by seeing her suicide as a sign of her love for him. He is able to understand Bernice only as she was connected to him--not as a viable individual in her own right. He needed her loyalty, but told Abbie, "She never seemed to need me" (170). What she needed he could not see. Mr. Norris realizes, "her life wasn't made by my life," but he finds it difficult to imagine that her life should be significant in and of itself. When Margaret suggests that Bernice's life had a rightness they could not understand, Craig Norris says that she did not really know Bernice. "You say life broke

through her--the whole of life. But Bernice didn't want--the whole of life. She wanted me" (203). John Corbin, New York Times critic who was more sensitive than most to the ideas Glaspell tried to express, recognized Craig Norris as a "vain male" who "can sometimes be strengthened, rendered loyal and even fine, by a pleasing idea that is not quite true" (30 Mar. 1919). As Margaret says to Mr. Norris during their discussion about Bernice, "You wanted me to help you find the truth. I don't believe you can stand truth, Craig" (197).

Margaret's reaction to Bernice's suicide is one of disbelief and then one of blame towards Craig. Laura, Craig's sister, blames Bernice for not seeing a doctor in time and for living "so far from everything." She even blames Bernice for her brother's affairs with other women, for Laura holds the romantic view that the wife is responsible for keeping the love alive in a marriage. If the romance is no longer there, the husband can be forgiven for looking for it elsewhere. In Laura's eyes, Bernice was not behaving as a wife was supposed to behave. A wife should want to hold her husband; "it's what a wife should want to do" (186).

Margaret retaliates with, "there was something in her Craig did not control" (186). Margaret's world of justice and Laura's sense of propriety come into conflict, and as they argue Margaret begins to discover what her friend Bernice was saying. Margaret realizes that in her own "busy, practical life" (183) she has forgotten to fully appreciate what life can mean to others. Craig admits that as a man he felt he had to move things; he had to feel that he "has the power to reshape" (174). Bernice would not be reshaped.

In desperation Margaret turns to Craig, and although they cannot agree, they comfort each other with their recollections of Bernice. They lament that Bernice was never able to be a mother. Craig feels that he and Bernice loved each other, but realizes that there was a part of her he could not speak to. She was her own person and refused

to abandon "the flow of life" that some people give up in order to seek power, recognition, success and even love. On the other hand, while she was alive he was content not to try and find out what she thought and felt. He was only able to see her life in his terms.

Abruptly, near the end of the second act, Margaret speaks out of her instinct and realizes that Bernice's suicide is not "in the rightness" of what she knew about her. She pulls Abbie into the room and says, "I say no. I don't believe it. What you told me--I don't believe it" (204). In another dramatic twist, which closes Act II, Abbie admits that Bernice did not take her own life, but had made her promise that she would tell Craig that she killed herself. Bernice had held out her hands and begged, "Oh, Abbie, do this last thing for me! After all there has been, I have a right to do it. If my life is going--let me have this much from it!" (206)

The shock of the end of Act II is even greater than the shock at the end of Act I. Now, Margaret truly feels that she never knew the real Bernice. Bernice had inner feelings she never revealed to those she loved. As a rational person, Margaret seeks a sensible answer. Act III remains to set straight the record revealed in Acts I and II, and in good dramatic form Susan Glaspell prods those in the play, as well as those in the audience, to see what it was Bernice was getting at all along. The conclusions are not clean nor simple, but they are not subtle either. Judged by today's taste the writing may seem overdrawn, the "technique somewhat primitive" (Corbin 30 Mar. 1919), but Glaspell knew how to seize the theatrical moment.

Margaret wants to tell Craig that Bernice did not commit suicide, but Abbie urges her not to tell him. Abbie realizes Bernice made the request for a reason; "And when you take that from him--what do you give to him?" (214) In Bernice's death Craig realizes a new life--a life in which he feels he knows Bernice in a way he never did

before. Abbie wants to honor Bernice's request. Margaret finally agrees that Bernice's request should stand.

At the end of the play Craig insists that the room be given back to Bernice and her memory. As furniture and decorations are restored, Margaret perceives what Bernice's life and death meant.

> Oh--Abbie. Yes--I know now. I want you to know. Only--there are things not for words. Feeling--not for words. As a throbbing thing that flies and sings--not for the hand. [She starts to close her hand, uncloses it.] But, Abbie--there is nothing to hide. There is no shameful thing. What you saw in her eyes as she brooded over life in leaving it--what made you afraid--was her seeing--her seeing into the shadowed place of the life she was leaving. And then--a gift to the spirit. A gift sent back through the dark. Preposterous. Profound. Oh--love her Abbie! She's worth more love than we have power to give! [Craig has come back with some branches from the trees; he stands outside the door a moment, taking out a few he does not want. Margaret hears him and turns. Then turns back.] Power. Oh, how strange . [Craig comes in, and Margaret and Abbie watch him as he puts the bright leaves in the vase. The Father comes in.] (229)

Bernice, a sensitive woman who insists on an emancipation which she does not completely understand, is a voice which asks for understanding. She asks to be accepted as an individual with values of her own, values which may not be readily understood by her family and friends. As Margaret explains to Laura, "she wanted each one to have the chance to be himself" (188). Even though her family and friends depend on her, they have difficulty verbalizing the kind of purpose and influence she had for them. But Bernice did not want to die quietly, without leaving a statement of her life for

them to ponder. By making them confront the meaning of her deathbed request, she makes them confront the meaning of their lives and her significance in those lives. She does this, as they discover, not for her own satisfaction only, but so that they will discover the importance of the ultimate power of unselfish human love which transcends all power and all groups of people. Worldly perceptions, which divide people into men and women, weak and strong, success and failure, are transitory. As she left the world, she "held out her hands with gifts she was not afraid to send back," (229-30) Margaret realizes. The play closes with Margaret's speech:

> And more than that. [Her voice electric] Oh, in all the world--since first life moved--has there been any beauty like the beauty of perceiving love? . . . No. Not for words. [She closes her hand, uncloses it in a slight gesture of freeing what she would not harm.] (230)

The characters in Bernice are in the process of personal discovery and personal growth. It is Bernice, in her statement at death, that shocks them into soul searching and discovery. If we can believe at the end of the play that they have been transformed because of the revelations of thought and feeling they have experienced, Bernice has made their conversion possible and has wielded a power which is much more important to Susan Glaspell and to her heroines than worldly power.

The tale of love and sacrifice is always a compelling one, and certainly Susan Glaspell believed in the power of a loving relationship. However, she also believed that women deserved the full measure of life that men were free to experience. In the final analysis, especially in the feminist atmosphere of the 1980's, it is difficult not to see Bernice as a martyr and a victim. Her story deserves some consideration from her point of view. Even in 1919 in his review of Bernice John Corbin was able to see that "one part of her at least had long ago ceased to be," sacrificed, as he put it, to "masculine vanity" (March 30). The "ironic truth which pierced sentiment and romance"

identified by biographer Arthur Waterman rings out in today's reading of the text. Since Bernice must withdraw from life in order to make her statement, she is not unlike her nineteenth century sisters who were trapped in a world of female archetypes (Robinson 898).

The writing of Bernice's story, however, becomes a kind of freedom for writer Susan Glaspell. Bernice is a personality closer to Glaspell's own than Margaret or Laura. Susan Glaspell could not be the traditional woman, but as a writer and person she quietly pursued her work and her relationships and avoided the flamboyant and aggressive postures of many of her friends. Through Bernice she may be pleading for her own position and for her own quiet worth as a woman and an artist. She may even be revealing some of her ambivalence about her role in the world of modern woman. In Bernice some of the romantic vestiges of Brownstein's heroine remain, but more importantly Glaspell's heroine, like Glaspell herself, is breaking loose and is in the process of becoming, seeking, and imagining.

Inheritors

By the time Susan Glaspell wrote her second full-length play, Inheritors, produced by the Provincetown Players in March and April of 1921, her plays were being taken seriously. More reviewers were covering her dramas of ideas, which were a contrast to the popular entertainment mentality. Not everyone who wrote about Inheritors was equally impressed, but it spoke so honestly about social and human concerns of the time that it could not be ignored. The Provincetown Players, as a force in American theatre, were gaining a reputation because of their two most illustrious playwrights, Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell.

"Broadway blazes and buzzes," wrote critic Ludwig Lewisohn in his review of Inheritors, but "the memorable dramatic occasion of the year is on MacDougall Street where Susan Glaspell has added to the wealth of both her country and her art. It is the first play of the American theatre," he continued, "in which a strong intellect and a ripe artistic nature have grasped and set forth in human terms the central tradition and most burning problem of our national life quite justly and unscrupulously, equally without acrimony or compromise" (Nation 112:515). In 1920, in a review of Susan Glaspell's first book of collected plays, Lewisohn had remarked, "there are no terrors for her in the world of thought" (Nation 111:509).

Other critics related to the message and the characters in the play, but complained that the production was wordy or undramatic or overlong or all three. In truth, the play's progression was more novelistic than dramatic, but Lewisohn persisted in finding the right argument for his praise of the play:

> It has constant ironic and symbolic suppressions and correspondences and overtones. This power of creating human speech which shall be at once concrete and significant, convincing in detail and spiritually

> cumulative in progression, is, of course, the essential gift of the authentic dramatist. (Nation 112:515)

He went on to say that "The acting of the Provincetown Players in Inheritors is by far the best their little stage has ever seen." Floyd Dell later remembered it with high praise in his autobiography Homecoming:

> To me, the justification of the Provincetown Players' existence--aside from discovering Eugene O'Neill, a mixed blessing--and he would have been discovered anyway, I thought--was in two plays: one was Susan Glaspells 'The Inheritors'; a beautiful, true, brave play of war-time. In this play, moreover, Susan Glaspell brought to triumphant fruition something that was George Cook's, in a way that he never could--something earthy, sweet and beautiful that had not been in her own work before. To much that was praised in her plays I was not responsive--'Bernice' was not for me. But to my mind 'The Inheritors' was a high moment in American drama. And I like to remember beautiful Ann Harding, first seen as the heroine of that play. (267)

Although it is true that Madeline Morton, the role Ann Harding played, is the heroine of the story, Inheritors does not focus on one character in the same way Bernice did. Madeline becomes, at the end of the play, the voice for her ancestors from Act I and Act II. She makes the important ultimate choice and refuses to abandon the spirit and beliefs of those who paved the way for her. She does not speak just for the line of women from which she came, but it is clear that the struggles of the women in her life made it possible, and necessary, for her to make the choices she does.

The sweep of this play is grand--panoramic. Act I is set in 1879 on the Fourth of July. As the curtain rises, Grandma Morton, the first white woman to settle in the county in 1820, sits in a rocker patching a boy's pair of pants. She is old in body, but

alert in mind and spirit--a pioneer woman who has lived long enough to bridge the distance between the frontier and the expansion and development of the American continent. A picture of Abraham Lincoln hangs on the wall of the simple cabin. A visitor is there to see her son, who holds the deed to the land they live on. Her son Silas and his friends who fought in the recent war between the states have not returned from the the day's celebration. While they wait for the return of the veterans, Grandmother Morton answers Mr. Smith's questions and tells him about Blackhawk and the Indians she has known. She tells how the early settlers helped each other. "We worked. A country don't make itself. When the sun was up we were, and when the sun went down we didn't" (8). As they talk her grandson Ira and a neighbor youngster, Madeline Fejevary, play outside. As it turns out, Mr. Smith is a businessman, there to see about developing the town, and he wants to offer Silas Morton a fair price for the hill that is on Silas' property.

When Silas Morton returns with his dear friend and neighbor, Mr. Fejevary, he hears Mr. Smith's proposal. Mr. Fejevary, a man of position in Hungary, left his homeland in 1848 and settled in the midwest of a country where he felt he could find a freedom that his own country was taking away from him. Silas, a common farmer who has learned to respect education because of Mr. Fejevary, has another idea for the hill above the town. As a gesture to the ideas that Mr. Fevejary has awakened in him, he has decided that the hill at the edge of the town should be used for a college--where boys and girls from the cornfields can learn. Grandmother Morton resists, "I worked for that hill! And I tell you to leave it to your own children." Silas responds, "There's other land for my own children. This is for all the children" (34).

GRANDMOTHER: What's all the children to you?

SILAS: [Derisively] Oh, mother--what a thing for you to say! You

who were never too tired to give up your own bed so the stranger could have a better bed.

GRANDMOTHER: That was different. They was folks on their way. (35)

Silas will not be dissuaded and even though they tell him how expensive financing a college would be, he continues explaining why he believes in the light of knowledge. At this Grandmother remembers, "Light shining from far. We used to do that. We never pulled the curtains. I used to want to--you like to be to yourself when night comes--but we always left a lighted window for the traveler who'd lost his way" (43). Mr. Fejevary's son, who attends Harvard, has entered the scene by then, and he says, "I should think that would have exposed you to the Indians." Impatiently, Grandmother Morton replies, "Well, you can't put out a light just because it may light the wrong person" (44). Grandmother Morton realizes her son has the spirit she taught him, and she knows he is right. What they have should be given to others who come along.

Act II opens in a corridor of the library of Morton College. It is a day in October on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Morton. The new generation is now in charge. Grandmother and Silas and Mr. Fejevary have died, but what they built and believed in has been left to those who remain. State Senator Lewis and Felix Fejevary speak about Silas Morton, whose picture hangs on the wall. As chairman of the board of Morton College, Fejevary is interested in talking to Senator Lewis about a state appropriation for the enlargement of the college. He points out to the Senator that Morton College boys fought in the recent war, as well as "went in as strike breakers during the trouble down here at the steel works" (46). He's sure that the Senator can see that Morton is a "one-hundred-percent-American college" (47). The Senator asks, "haven't you a pretty radical man here?" Fejevary admits that Professor Holden is an

idealist and a scholar. To which Senator Lewis remarks, "Oh--scholar. We can get scholars enough. What we want is Americans" (48).

As they talk, it emerges that Senator Lewis is really upset about Professor Holden's complaint about the treatment of one of his students who was put in jail for being a conscientious objector during the First World War. Horace, Fejevary's son, enters the library during their talk to look up Abraham Lincoln's speeches. He wants to prove that two Hindu students at the college misquoted Lincoln. Horace discovers that the Hindu students know Lincoln's second inaugural address better than he does. However, Horace is still unwilling to allow them to distribute on the campus their leaflets against another Hindu student's deportation.

Senator Lewis and Horace's father continue their tour of the library while Horace chats with two girls who are making plans to play a joke on a boy they call one of the "jays" of the school. As they talk Horace's cousin, Madeline Morton, granddaughter of Silas Morton, enters the library with her tennis racket. She is there to check on the Lincoln quote herself. Madeline is no book worm. She's popular, likes to dance, and plays a good game of tennis, but she is as independent as her Grandmother was. As Madeline goes about her business, one of the girls says to Horace, "Well, I'll tell you something. I heard Professor Holden say that Madeline Morton had a great deal more mind than she'd let herself know" (67).

Senator Lewis and Fejevary re-enter the scene and Fejevary introduces Madeline to the Senator. When the Senator says, "I should think you would be proud to be the granddaughter of this man of vision," (69) in a somewhat unusual response for her, Madeline flashes back as she leaves, "Wouldn't you hate to be the granddaughter of a phrase?" (70). A few minutes later Horace rushes in and yells. "Father! Will you go after Madeline. The police have got her!" (75)

It seems Madeline has hit a policeman with her tennis racket. She became angry when the policeman roughed up two Hindu students who were passing out handbills against the deportation of Hindus. Act II, Scene 1, closes with the Senator saying, "If she had no regard for the living, she might--on this day of all others--have considered her grandfather's memory" (77). The irony of clichés, such as the one offered by Senator Lewis, seemed so obvious to Susan Glaspell, and she uses them throughout her plays to point up her message.

In Act II, Scene 2, Felix Fejevary seeks out Professor Holden who is celebrating the college's anniversary in his own way--by reading Emerson and Whitman alone in the library. They both reminisce about the college and the dedication of the library Fevejary's father spoke at 30 years earlier. Felix, as chairman of the board of the college, explains to Professor Holden that in order for Morton to grow and in order to pay professors what they are worth the legislature must be convinced that the college deserves a state appropriation. He will not be able to convince them, he says, unless Professor Holden is more discreet about his unpopular beliefs. Felix Fejevary expresses a reaction to Professor Holden that is brought up and quarreled with again and again in Glaspell's writing. "Candidly, I don't feel you know just what you do think; is it so awfully important to express--confusion?" (84)

Glaspell seems, in more than one of her works, to resent that only orderly, proper, rational ideas should be considered viable. She indicates that writing should also exist to express confusion, for people feel confused at times. To sort through the confusion may lead to a new order. She tries to make a case for what is intuitive, illusive and poetic--those characteristics which are more often noted as feminine and not masculine. But Susan Glaspell was not just making a case for what could be called a feminine outlook; she was making a case for what she considered another kind of logic --the logic of the idealist and not the "man of affairs" whom Senator Lewis admires. In

her world of Greenwich Village and Provincetown the so-called feminine outlook was enjoyed and appreciated by many men and women as a sensible way to view the world. For those philosophers and artists she knew there was truth to be found in what some called the irrational. For them what seemed irrational often made more sense than what was seen as rational.

The feminist revision of old works and the contributions of new feminist writers grow out of a new vision which is identified as a feminist appreciation of life. According to Annette Kolodny, a feminist critic of today, feminist criticism should result, however, from a willingness to see life's experiences in fuller variety and not from a desire to restructure life into a different dogma (New Feminist Criticism 162). Kolodny feels that women have questions that do not occur to men. For the good of both men and women, those questions should be asked and explored (160). Each American man was his own Adam. It is inevitable then that each woman must become her own Eve, taking strength from the women who preceded her. As Professor Holden laments that Morton College students disappoint him, he says, "The only students I reach are the Hindus. Perhaps Madeline Morton--I don't quite make her out" (91). When Fejevary tells Holden what Madeline has done and that he had to intercede on her behalf to get her out of jail, Holden reacts in pleasant disbelief. Maybe what he has noted in Madeline is really there.

Madeline arrives at her uncle's bidding, but fails to see the seriousness of what has happened to her. He says to her, "You don't seem much chastened." Madeline replies, "Chastened? Was that the idea? Well, if you think that keeping a person where she doesn't want to be chastens her! I never felt less chastened than when I walked out of that slimy spot and looked across the street at your nice bank" (99). When she learns that her uncle was able to get her out of jail but left the Hindu student in, she offers to give the money she will get next Tuesday, on her twenty-first birthday, from her

Grandfather Morton's estate, to help the Hindu get out of jail. Her uncle is hurt and accuses her of casting in her lot with revolutionists.

MADELINE: I thought America was a democracy.

FEJEVARY: We have just fought a great war for democracy.

MADELINE: Well, is that any reason for not having it? (109)

They talk about Fred, Madeline's brother who was killed in Paris, and his sacrifice for America. They speak of Madeline's father, Ira, and what he has sacrificed. A disturbance outside the library interrupts their talk. Madeline runs to the window and sees another Hindu student being bullied by a policeman. There is an exchange between her and the policeman, and she yells to the student, "Atma! Don't let him take hold of you like that! He has no right to--Oh, let me down there!" (114-115). As her uncle protests her actions, she runs from the library. Madeline is being "radicalized" by the intolerable actions she witnesses.

By the beginning of Act III Madeline is emerging as her grandmother's protégé. From Great Grandmother Morton to Grandfather Silas through Silas Morton's son the torch has been passed. The link is completed when the audience meets Ira Morton and hears the story of his wife's death. It is in Act III that for the first time Madeline hears the story about her mother, which her father finds so painful and has never told her. Lineage of family name and fortune is not the important thing, however. Lineage of thought, spirit, courage are the important characteristics--the ones which have prevailed through generations of the Mortons and the Fejevarys. The young girl Madeline is the one who emerges as the heroine who must keep the torch burning. Her brother Fred may have died in France for the wrong reasons, but she cannot continue to live for the wrong reasons. She finally realizes that for herself--even when those who love her try to tell her differently.

Act III is set at the old Morton homestead where "the room has not altogether changed since that day in 1879" (116). Ira Morton sits and looks at ears of corn he pulls from a sack as Madeline tells him about Fred Jordan, the friend who is in the hole --a punishment cell in jail--for refusing to fight in the war. So she can better understand how Fred feels, she draws on the floor with chalk the boundaries of Fred's cell. Emil Johnson arrives to take Madeline to the courthouse, for she comes before the Commissioner at four o'clock. Ira resents Emil Johnson having anything to do with Madeline, so Emil leaves, but offers to come back for her. Madeline does not understand her father's feelings towards Emil. He distrusts Emil. He seems afraid that Emil is going to take away from him the corn he has nurtured over the past years.

Aunt Isabel, who has always given Madeline a birthday party in the past, arrives with a tennis racket for her birthday. Madeline offers her aunt a piece of fudge which she has made to celebrate her birthday. She has put the fudge, symbolically, into a glass dish her grandmother had brought from Hungary and given to the daughter who became Madeline's mother. "I held you when you were a little baby without your mother," remembers Aunt Isabel (136). She urges Madeline to come to her senses and tell the Commissioner that she felt sorry for the Hindus and that she had not thought out what she was saying.

Professor Holden, who has driven Mrs. Fejevary to the Morton place, enters. Aunt Isabel leaves so he can talk to Madeline. They talk about Fred Jordan and the injustice done him, but Professor Holden also urges Madeline "not to destroy yourself needlessly" (139). He tells her, "I think there is danger to you in--so young, becoming alien to society" (144).

> MADELINE: As great as the danger of staying within--and becoming like the thing I'm within? (144)

She cries as she reminds Professor Holden what Fred Jordan and the Hindus must endure in prison. Ira Morton says, "Don't cry. No! Not in this house. . . . What are you crying about then?" (146)

"It's--the world. It's--" Madeline begins. "The world?" Ira says. "What good has ever come to this house through carin' about the world? . . . Where's your mother? Where's your brother? The world" Madeline insists that her father tell her what happened to her mother. "What has she to do with Emil Johnson?" So her father, as Glaspell explains it, looses the pent up thing within him. (146-147)

> What has she to do with him? She died so he could live. He lives because she's dead. . . . .Then she came--that ignorant Swede--Emil Johnson's mother--running through the cornfield like a crazy woman--"Miss Morton! Miss Morton! Come help me! My children are choking!" Diphtheria they had--the whole of 'em--but out of this house she ran--my Madeline, leaving you--her own baby--running fast as she could through the cornfield after that immigrant woman. She stumbled in the rough field--fell to her knees. That was the last I saw of her. She choked to death in that Swede's house. They lived. (148)

Then Madeline realizes what her mother gave to her. She gave her an example of the way life should be lived. With her brother gone she remains to carry on the example--in her time. Then her father pleads, "Madeline! Don't you leave me--all alone in this house--where so many was once. What's Hindus--alongside your own father--and him needing you?" (150). And then he speaks of what his contribution to life has been.

> Not even the corn stays at home. If only the wind wouldn't blow! Why can't I have my field to myself? Why can't I keep what's mine? All these years I've worked to make it better. I wanted it to be--the most

> that it could be. My father used to talk about the Indians--how our land was their land, and how we must be more than them. . . . I've made the corn more! (151)

What her father says only convinces her that she must do what she has to do. She tells Aunt Isabel she must leave with Emil:

> I'm sorry, auntie. You know how I love you. But father has been telling me about the corn. It gives itself away all the time--the best corn a gift to other corn. What you are--that doesn't stay with you. Then--[not with assurance, but feeling her way] be the most you can be, so life will be more because you were. (154)

She says goodbye to her father and leaves the house where her journey began two generations before.

Inheritors is a long play. It is rich with ideas and conflicts. It tells, in many respects, the story of Susan Glaspell--her pioneer past, her break with much of that past, but her faith in what it originally stood for. It seems to mirror her personal struggle to make the decisions she felt she had to make--to marry Jig, to follow his dream to Greece via Provincetown, and to live that life outside the idealism of her time.

A reviewer for the New York Evening Post understood Susan Glaspell when he wrote that although in the Inheritors "she is concerned more specifically with the concrete social effects of the rebellion of ideals," it is clear that she understands those who feel compelled "to break away from the repetitious design, who heed the individual impulse to create new forms" and who must give of themselves for what they believe in (8 Mar. 1927). Her early years in Davenport and the heritage of the land and people she learned about there made her a part of the American experience and tradition. She believes in the values of that tradition, but she also recognizes that for the sake of expediency and profit it can be lost. Because of ignorance and narrowmindedness, it

can be misinterpreted. The American and the artist, and she had the spirit of both, must relentlessly seek the truth--must, as Professor Holden says, grow as Walt Whitman grew, by "each man being his purest and intensest self." In pioneer America some women had been that also. Great grandmother Morton had been that; Madeline's mother had been that, and Madeline realizes she has to be that, too, even if it means going to jail and sacrificing her comfort.

Madeline is a twentieth century American heroine and owes little to Rachel Brownstein's Rose of romance. She was fashioned on the frontier. Those who love her, however, seem to expect her to be that Rose--to behave in the manner they choose for her. When they ask her not to act on her principles, she cannot give in. They have unwittingly taught her more than they realize. There is an important choice for her outside comfortable love and the woman's limited sphere. It is not an easy choice, but Susan Glaspell the writer makes it an inevitable choice. The passive female role will not work for Madeline. The passive role made no sense for her ancestors; it makes no sense to her.

For today's audiences the messages in Inheritors may seem obvious and hackneyed. For the audiences who went to see the Provincetown Players perform Susan Glaspell's American drama, it was a bold attempt to show Americans the importance of their past and American women their choices for the future.

The Verge

The Verge opened the winter season of 1921-22 at the MacDougal Street Playhouse and played from November 14 through December 1. From December 6 to December 16 the production was taken to the Garrick Theatre by the Theatre Guild. The year of 1921 was a busy and creative one for Susan Glaspell. Inheritors played in the spring; The Verge in the fall. Both plays are full of intellectual, emotional and artistic struggles which must have taken some personal fight from within and some physical energy to bring them to realization on the stage.

Hutchins Hapgood recalls having a dream about Susan in which he saw her "lying on her bed in great agony" (427). Haunted by it, the next day he inquired of Jig how Susan was. Then he told Jig why he was concerned. Astounded, Jig replied, "That is very strange, for Susan was very unhappy last night" (428). Jig then explained that the incident with Susan was "somehow connected with what she had been going through, which was part of the deeper note that produced her Verge." In his account Hapgood explains The Verge as being atypical for Susan Glaspell. "For years Susan's manner as a writer had been one of rather superficial sentimentality, but this play, as I have suggested, was a passionate expression of the feminism which rejected, with complete destructive desire, the world of man as opposed to that of woman" (248).

When Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanou wrote their story of the Provincetown Theatre in 1931, they recognized The Verge as a play with vision which "fascinated by the intensity of living it suggested" (85). Just as she had done in Bernice, Susan Glaspell "delved, this time more deeply, into the drama of strange obscure impulses." For them, "The Verge was the story of an unusual woman whose consuming desire was to break out of the familiar pattern of life and become something that had never been before. Oversensitized and imaginative, she became caught in her obsession, and it drove her over the verge into madness" (85).

The unusual woman in The Verge is Claire Archer, an experimental horticulturist who is on the verge of creating a new plant form called the Breath of Life. She and her assistant, Anthony, work in the greenhouse laboratory created for the stage, making sure the plants in the greenhouse receive the proper light and soil and temperature. Susan Glaspell's description at the beginning of Act I aids the scene designer and the reader in her intent.

> At the back grows a strange vine. It is arresting rather than beautiful. It creeps along the low wall, and one branch gets a little way up the glass. You might see the form of a cross in it, if you happened to think it that way. The leaves of this vine are not the form that leaves have been. They are at once repellent and significant. (2)

Friend and Provincetown Player Cleon Throckmorton designed the expressionistic set for The Verge. It was new and daring for the native theatrical scene--influenced by the German expressionism which was finding its way to America through experimental theatre groups such as the Provincetown Players.

Harry Archer, Claire's husband, refuses to take his wife's obsession with her plants seriously and worries about such things as getting a decent breakfast for himself and their house guests, friends Dick Demming and Tom Edgeworthy. When he complains to Anthony about the heat in the house being given over to the greenhouse while he must freeze, Anthony takes Claire's side:

> ANTHONY: Why Miss Claire got up at five o'clock to order the heat turned off from the house.
>
> HARRY: I see you admire her vigilance.
>
> ANTHONY: Oh, I do. [Fervently.] I do. Harm was near, and that woke her up.

HARRY: And what about the harm to--[Tapping his chest.] Do roses get pneumonia?

ANTHONY: Oh, yes--yes indeed they do. Why, Mr. Archer, look at Miss Claire herself. Hasn't she given her heat to the roses?

HARRY: [Pulling the rug around him, preparing for the blizzard.] She has the fire within.

ANTHONY: [Delighted.] Now isn't that true! How well you said it. (4-5)

Desperate and playfully vengeful, Mr. Archer asks Hattie, the maid, to serve him his breakfast in the greenhouse, where it is warm. When Hattie arrives with her toaster and utensils, she is stopped by Anthony.

ANTHONY: Breakfast--here? Eat--here? Where plants grow?

HATTIE: The plants won't poison him, will they? [At a loss to know what to do with things, she puts the toaster under the strange vine at the back, whose leaves lift up against the glass which has frost leaves on the outer side.]

ANTHONY: [Snatching it away.] You--you think you can cook eggs under the Edge Vine?

HATTIE: I guess Mr. Archer's eggs are as important as a vine. I guess my work's as important as yours.

ANTHONY: There's a million people like you--and like Mr. Archer. In all the world there is only one Edge Vine.

HATTIE: Well, maybe one's enough. It don't look like nothin' anyhow.

ANTHONY: And you've not got the wit to know that that's why it's the Edge Vine. (6-7)

Harry arrives with a thermos of coffee, removes a box of dirt from one of the tables and sets up breakfast. Claire appears and chastises him for pulling down the temperature with his presence. She and Anthony look at Edge Vine, which seems to be turning back from its full expression. Claire and Anthony express their concern, but they are still hopeful about the bloom opening on the Breath of Life--so they can "see its heart. . . ." As Dick, one of the house guests, opens the outer door and allows the snow and cold to blow in, Claire goes for the door, shuts it and leans against it: "How dare you make my temperature uneven!" (12)

The three of them discuss Claire's flowers and the mysterious thing she is doing. Finally she agrees to explain to them:

> I want to give fragrance to Breath of Life--[Faces the room beyond the wall of glass.]--the flower I've created that is outside what flowers have been. What has gone out should bring fragrance from what it has left. But no definite fragrance, no limiting enclosing thing. I call the fragrance I am trying to create--Reminiscence. [Her hand on the pot of the wistful little flower she has just given pollen.] Reminiscent of the rose, the violet, arbutus--but a new thing--itself. Breath of Life may be lonely out in what hasn't been. Perhaps some day I can give it reminiscence. (17)

After an attempt to lighten the mood, Harry says to Claire, "Rest easy, little one. . ." Claire does not give up so easily.

> CLAIRE: We need not be held in forms molded for us. There is outness--and otherness.
>
> HARRY: Now, Claire--I didn't mean to start anything serious.
>
> CLAIRE: No; you never mean to do that. I want to break it up! I tell you, I want to break it up! If it were all in pieces, we'd be [A little

laugh] shocked to aliveness--[To Dick] wouldn't we? There would be strange new comings--mad new comings together, and we would know what it is to be born, and then we might know--that we are. Smash it. [Her hand is near an egg.] As you'd smash an egg. [She pushes the egg over the edge of the table and leans over and looks, as over a precipice.] (19)

Harry insists on keeping the conversation light. The dialogue which follows displays Susan Glaspell's ability to carry on a lively stream of banter.

HARRY: [with a sign.] Well, all you've smashed is the egg, and all that amounts to is that now Tom gets no egg. So that's that.

CLAIRE: [With difficulty, drawing herself back from the fascination of the precipice.] You think I can't smash anything? You think life can't break up, and go outside what it was? Because you've gone dead in the form in which you found yourself, you think that's all there is to the whole adventure? And that is called sanity. And made a virtue--to lock one in. You never worked with things that grow! Things that take a sporting chance--go mad--that sanity mayn't lock them in--from life untouched--from life--that waits. [She turns toward the inner room.] Breath of Life. [She goes in there.]

HARRY: Oh, I wish Claire wouldn't be strange like that. [Helplessly.] What is it? What's the matter? (20)

One by one, the people in Claire's life try to coax her back from the precipice, but she will not withdraw. Even her daughter Elizabeth, the child of her first marriage to a portrait painter, cannot soften her. When Elizabeth returns from boarding school and tries to take an interest in what her mother is doing and offers to help, Claire rejects her and ridicules her.

ELIZ: Well, now that I'm here you'll let me help you, won't you, mother?

CLAIRE: [Trying for control] You needn't bother.

ELIZ: But I want to. Help add to the wealth of the world

CLAIRE: Will you please get it out of your head that I am adding to the wealth of the world!

ELIZ: But, mother--of course you are. To produce a new and better kind of plants--

CLAIRE: They may be new. I don't give a damn whether they're better.

ELIZ: But--but what are they then?

CLAIRE: [As if choked out of her] They're different.

ELIZ: [Thinks a minute, then laughs triumphantly.] But what's the use of making them different if they aren't better?

HARRY: A good square question, Claire. Why don't you answer it? (49-50)

But this is the question Claire does not want to feel she has to answer. Life for her must not be dependent on the definite purpose, the correct answer, the traditional relationship. A woman should not have to be only a mother and a gay companion and good sport for the man in her life. She yearns for something out there "that's not been touched" (52). Claire is the personification of an evolving plant form. She resents being asked to explain herself. When Harry asks her to say what it is she means, Claire responds, "I don't know--precisely. If I did--there'd be no use saying it." As the only male friend in the play who understands her, Tom Edgeworthy, nods, "The only thing left worth saying is the thing we can't say" (33).

At the end of Act I, when she realizes that the Edge Vine is not running to the edge of what it can be--has turned back--Claire struggles to pull it from its dirt and then flings it at Elizabeth. Horrified by such treatment of a daughter by a mother, Harry runs to Elizabeth's defense and hurries her out of the greenhouse.

Act II is set in a tower--"a tower which is thought to be round but does not complete the circle." The shape is distorted and when the scene opens, Claire is seen "through the huge ominous window as if shut into the tower" (58). Adelaide, Claire's sister who has often acted as a mother to Elizabeth, and Harry climb the spiral staircase to see Claire in the tower that Adelaide has never been invited up to see. Adelaide admonishes Claire for her treatment of Elizabeth and says, "You are really a particularly intelligent, competent person, and it's time for you to call a halt to this nonsense and be the woman you were meant to be!" To which Claire replies, "What inside dope have you on what I was meant to be?" Adelaide attempts to pull Claire back from the "sober business of growing plants" and to cajole her with, "Come, come, now--let's not juggle words." Claire will not be patronized and yells, "How dare you say that to me, Adelaide. You who are such a liar and thief and whore with words!" (69). Old, traditional forms--whether they are words, ideas, plants, or people--make Claire uneasy. They are too limiting--too hypocritical. She has searched for possibility and adventure in two husbands, but they disappoint her. Friend Dick Demming offers a physical haven for a while, but he is as intimidated by her intensity as the others. Tom understands her, but refuses to muddle her dedication to her work by giving in to her female plea for a romantic love relationship. The night before she hopes to see her plant creation take form--"distilled from the most fragile flowers there are"--she urges him to accept her. He refuses, even though he admits that he is moved. "My dear--dear, dear, Claire--you move me so! You stand alone in a clearness that breaks my heart," he says to her. She hypnotizes him with her litany of words that seem to go "into patterns" and

they are drawn to each other and then repelled as they draw closer. He draws her to him; she wraps her arms around him as the romantic strains of Barcarole being played on a phonograph at the dinner party below momentarily urge them to forget "otherness" and become one with love. Claire releases herself to Tom with, "My love--my love--let go your pride in loneliness and let me give you joy!" (85)

Tom fights his feelings and reminds her, "You rare thing untouched--not--not into this--not back into this--by me--lover of your apartness" (85-86). The orgasmic moment is over and Claire shouts down the spiral stairs, "Harry! Choke that phonograph. . . . If you don't stop that music, I'll kill myself" (86). Her one last chance to turn back, as the Edge Vine turned back, is thwarted. And Tom has been the one who kept her from giving in.

Act III is set in the greenhouse of Act I. Hattie tells Anthony about the strange happenings of the night before. When Mr. Archer finally discovers that Claire and Dick Demming have been lovers, he becomes hostile toward Dick. Tom packs his belongings in preparation to leave. Claire refuses to see any of them. Anthony is interested only in the Breath of Life, which is supposed to flower that day. Claire appears in the greenhouse, in a seemingly light-hearted, refreshed mood. Anthony reminds her that at eleven o'clock they are to look into the flower and see if the expected has happened. She is reluctant to go into the room where the plant is kept.

> CLAIRE: [Halting] Have I spoiled everything? I don't want to go in there.
>
> ANTHONY: We're going in together, Miss Claire. Don't you remember? Oh--[Looking resentfully at the others.]--don't let any little thing spoil it for you--the work of all those days--the hope of so many days.
>
> CLAIRE: Yes--that's it.

ANTHONY: You're afraid you haven't done it?

CLAIRE: Yes, but--afraid I have.

The plant is brought out for all to see. Everyone is silent. Claire finally speaks in poetic monologue.

Breath of the uncaptured?

You are a novelty.

Out?

You have been brought in.

A thousand years from now, when you are but a form too long repeated,

Perhaps the madness that gave you birth will burst again,

And from the prison that is you will leap pent queernesses

To make a form that hasn't been--

To make a prison new.

And this we call creation.

Go away! (105-106)

One by one the men leave her alone with her creation. Tom looks through the glass from the outside and is drawn in. "Claire-- As you stood there, looking into the womb you breathed to life, you were beautiful to me beyond any other beauty. You were life and its reach and its anguish. I can't go away from you. . . . I love you because it is not in you to stop" (108).

CLAIRE: And loving me for that--would stop me? Oh, help me see it! It is so important that I see it! . . . When I have wanted you with all my wanting--why must I distrust you now? When I love you--with all of me, why do I know that only you are worth my hate?

TOM: It's the fear of easy satisfactions. I love you for it. (110)

But Claire is drawn back to the flower of her creation. Tom, out of concern for both of them, calls her back. Even he begins to feel she has gone too far. "I'm here to hold you from where I know you cannot go. You're trying what we can't do" (111).

> CLAIRE: What else is there worth trying?
>
> TOM: I love you, and I will keep you--from fartherness--from harm. . . I will keep you--safe.
>
> CLAIRE: [Troubled by the word, but barely able to raise her head.] Safe?
>
> TOM: [Bringing her to rest again.] Trust me, Claire.
>
> CLAIRE: [Not lifting her head, but turning it so she sees Breath of Life.] Now can I trust--what is? [Suddenly pushing him roughly away.] No! I will beat my life to pieces in the struggle to--
>
> TOM: To <u>what</u>, Claire?
>
> CLAIRE: Not to stop it by seeming to have it. . . . Now I know who you are. It is you puts out the breath of life.

She puts her arms around his neck and cuts off his breath. As he gasps, she says, "Breath of Life--my gift--to you!" The stage directions read:

> She has pushed him against one of the plants at right as he sways, strength she never had before pushes him over backward, just as they have struggled from sight. Violent crash of glass is heard. (113)

Harry, Anthony, and Dick rush in. Dick goes to Tom, but reports that "it's no use, but I'll go for a doctor." Harry falls at Claire's feet, "My darling! How can I save you now?" Claire replies, "Saved--myself." Anthony takes Reminiscence, the flower she was breeding for fragrance for Breath of Life, and holds it out to her as a choice. She ignores him and is drawn to the Breath of Life. She begins to sing "Nearer My God to Thee" as she falls upon her creation. Slowly the final curtain shuts her out.

Susan Glaspell's unusual play must have stunned even the most seasoned theatregoer. It could certainly not be ignored by friends or critics. Hutchins Hapgood remembers:

> At the next meeting of Heterodoxy [a feminist club in the Village] the subject for discussion was this play. One of my friends in the club, Elise Dufour the dancer, who had never succeeded in getting away from what those women called the mere man's psychology, describing the meeting to me, said, "It seemed to me, while these women were talking about The Verge, that I was in church, that they were worshiping at some holy shrine; their voices and their eyes were full of religious excitement. I was, I think, the only woman not under the spell. I tried at first to say a few things about the play that were in the line of ordinary dramatic criticism, which I thought had a reasonable basis; but when they all glared upon me, as if they thought I should be excommunicated, I spoke no further word. (377)

Alexander Woolcott of the New York Times did not have a great deal of patience with the play, even though he praised Margaret Wycherly's acting and the sets which he felt were "beautifully mounted, a little art and a little skill, creating a more satisfying suggestion of earth and air and sky than can be managed with immense expenditure by the allegedly wiser producers of Broadway" (15 Nov. 1921:23). On November 20 in the Sunday issue in his column "Second Thoughts on First Nights," he accused Miss Glaspell of "abject worship of the divinity of discontent" and Claire Archer of "talk about herself with the ego-centric ardor and helpless garrulity of a patient in a psychoanalyst's office." He did suggest, however, that the letter from Ruth Hale (Heywood Broun's wife) that appeared on the same page of the paper might offer a

balance to his point of view. Miss Hale seemed convinced of Susan Glaspell's contribution. She wrote:

> Miss Glaspell is the only playwright I ever knew who can tell a story like this. If the surface of life changes by a hair's breadth, she not only knows it, but can convey it in words. She is the painter of those wisps of shadow that cross the soul in the dead of night. She can write great horrors in the terms of little ones--come to think of it, of course, she wrote "Trifles." I do feel very strongly that, if we cannot always quite understand her, it would be smart for us to try. (20 Nov. 1921, sec. 6)

Stark Young in The New Republic urges tolerance for Miss Glaspell's play by explaining:

> And so working on the deVries theory of the development of species, she sees that plants break up, explode, and from this mutation when there is the right combination of individuals and environment, a new species may appear which will be isolated from the rest and carry life with it from the life it left. And so the dream possesses her that perhaps she can be this individual in the midst of her own species, may suffer isolation and be split away into a new life, having exploded her species as the plants do theirs because something in them knows that they have gone as far as they can go. All of which, obviously, is hard to state in words or character; but it bears on the newer psychology and is worthwhile trying, unless the theatre plans to go on dodging the modern ego. (7 Dec. 1921:47)

Although scholar Arthur Waterman feels "there is no one spot in the play where we can put our finger and say, 'Here is the meaning of The Verge'," he thinks that "we do understand the play by the end of the final act" (197). What is understood certainly

may, and did, differ from individual to individual, however. The basic intention may be obvious, but the sub-text, the "wisps of shadow that cross the soul," the clouds of thought that cross over the main idea, comes back to haunt and confuse (Hale 6:1).

While Hutchins Hapgood, a close friend of Jig's and Susan's, must have known something about Susan's intent in her writing, his evaluation of The Verge as "a passionate expression of the feminism which rejected, with complete destructive desire, the world of man as opposed to that of woman," seems too simple. Heroine Claire Archer seems more bent on destroying old female forms than on destroying males. In destroying old female forms she is bound, of course, to alter male forms, making it necessary for the male to respond differently to the women in his life.

Not only does Claire want to break loose from the traditional roles society has for her as a woman, wife, mother, sister, and homemaker, she wants to encourage new life forms. She ridicules the old female forms, traditional male expectations and the religious, social, and educational structures both sexes use to give order and meaning to their lives. The men she has sought out to give new meaning to her life eventually disappoint her. She passes them by--first Harry, then Dick and even Tom. In a weak moment of uncertainty, she starts to turn back from her journey to apartness, just as the Edge Vine had turned back, and urges Tom to grab hold of her willingness to make him happy. He refuses. Once her Breath of Life blooms, it is too late. She can't turn back. She must proceed OUT--and so she does--taking Tom with her in her passion.

It is as a woman imprisoned by society's expectations of the female that Claire rebels, but her rebellion goes beyond being female or attacking men. She is at war with society's established world and longs for the spiritual and evolving possibility. If old species of plants can explode into new ones, social structures and people should be given the same opportunity. No wonder women saw their struggles in Susan Glaspell's play. No wonder some people saw only confusion. She was trying to say the things

that could not be said. But as she has Tom say, "The only thing left worth saying is the thing we can't say" (33). In her letter to the Times Ruth Hale recognizes that as an artist Susan Glaspell at least tried to say what was not easy to express nor explain. In so doing, she became a voice for women and other artists. She gave a sense of community to those who wanted new sensations and directions for their lives. With a new awareness she sought the self-knowledge and self-appreciation that would encourage women to become self-actualized beings.

In a world which saw man as the initiator of activity and the model against which society measured itself, women had too often been depicted as objects. According to Susan Gubar in her essay "The Blank Page and the Issue of Female Creativity," male writers saw women as art objects--the product of a man's interpretation or the final product in the unraveling of a mystery (293). Women had not been allowed to articulate themselves and create out of their own experiences. Devoted to task and not creation, they were discouraged from knowing or enjoying themselves (Gubar 295).

The notion of woman as object was beginning to be offensive to the emancipated woman of the twentieth century. She insisted on initiating her own life. Armed with the new psychology of the unconscious, she explored her inner thoughts and feelings and revealed them, unashamedly, to the world. Susan Glaspell, armed with the new artistic style of expressionism, gave unbridled expression to the thoughts and feelings of her heroine. In the character of Claire she displayed the probing intellect that could not be happy with the simple answer. Susan Glaspell herself was too bright and honest for the oversimplified answer.

At the same time that Susan Glaspell's character Claire struggles against the traditional roles that limit what she is supposed to be, writer and artist Susan Glaspell seems to recognize the destruction that can come to one who strays too far away from

what has been. In her description of the leaves on her strange vine that "creeps along the low wall," she notes that the unique leaves "are at once repellent and significant" (2). In Inheritors Professor Holden had warned Madeline about becoming an "alien from society." In her Greenwich Village circles Susan Glaspell knew bright, independent women who were living significant lives that others found repellent from time to time. These women saw no reason why life should be limited to what had been. They believed that new ideas could infuse society and make life different and better. Some of them suffered from wanting more than they could get; others made other people suffer because they wanted more than others were willing to give. Susan Glaspell was sensitive to the conflicts and the dilemmas of their expectations and felt them in a deeply personal way. Her doubts and determination she wove into her plays. She and Jig certainly had dreams, but she continued to recognize that dreams did not always survive the rigors of living.

Her dramas, carefully crafted in some respects, do not adhere to the "hierarchical dramatic structure of traditional male forms," identified by Diahn Luhan in Feminist Theatre Groups. They are more accurately described with those adjectives that Luhan says are used to characterize feminist drama: plotless, circular, layered, poetic, choral, lyric, primal, ritual-like, multiclimactic, surreal, mosaic, collage-like and non-realist" (98). Certainly The Verge could be described with several of Luhan's adjectives. There is a thin plot; no strong story line progresses from the beginning to the end of the play. Although horizontally static, the drama is vertically layered with ideas and feelings that surround the characters. When Claire's purpose ends in chaos and madness at the end of the play, her life comes round to more of a dead end than when the play started. Dialogue is often surreal, poetic, choral. Inner, primal reactions surface in Claire and are enhanced through the artistic design of the stage set.

When the play is over, it is not easy to feel that Claire has triumphed or that she has escaped from the distorted tower prison. Was being on the edge good or bad? Or just precarious? Was the land beyond the verge an improvement or just another defeat for women? Or was madness inevitable? Maybe Susan Glaspell was not convinced that there was a way to break loose from what had been. And could it be that her latest play was reflecting some of the doubts she and Jig were having about their lives and the accomplishments of the Provincetown Players? As the Players became more successful with the public, Jig felt he had failed his initial objective. He would have to leave his homeland in order to find the new Athens he sought. In the spring of 1922 he and Susan left her new play Chains of Dew with the group that remained and sailed for Greece.

Alison's House

Susan and Jig had been in Greece just over a year, living in Delphi at the foot of the mountains they loved, when Jig was stricken with glanders, a disease rare to humans. Their puppy, which they treated like a child, had taken ill and died shortly before Jig's condition became obvious, and finally the doctors, who had been saying Jig had the grippe, realized his condition was much more serious than they had diagnosed. According to Susan's account in The Road to the Temple, an American doctor from Athens concluded that Jig suffered from glanders, which he had contracted from the puppy. The doctor recommended that Jig be moved to Athens quickly, in "the most comfortable car possible" (439). By the next morning it was too late to consider moving him. The Greek peasants of Delphi stopped their Christmas festivities to be with the dying Kyrios Kouk, the friend who had traveled from America to open to them "their own great past" (443). As Susan put it later, "Jig's own friends, the friends of all the other part of his life, friends in America, did not even know that he was dead." He was carried to his grave "by peasants and shepherds of Parnassos who did not quite know whom it was they carried. . ." (443).

Susan had been there to look after him as always. She was his support in Greece as she had been in Provincetown. When, during their first winter in Greece, her father died and she returned to Iowa to be with her mother, Jig was lonely. He wrote to her of his sadness and his need for her to be there with him (Road 359). She was there the next winter when he died and when he was laid to rest in his beloved Greece. The morning "when last I went where Jig remains," Susan writes, ". . .was a morning of low clouds, which moved across those black-mouthed caves from which man came, hung over the theater, the Temple. As I stood there, though it had seemed I could not leave him, there came a feeling of its all being something bigger than I, than he. Our parting, a personal grief, became almost an intrusion. He had been taken into the great

past he loved and realized. Below, on the road--the women spin, the sheep pass" (Road 445).

Two of the original Provincetown players now lay buried in the foreign lands that had captured their devotion. Jack Reed's remains were under the Kremlin Wall, and Jig Cook's were in a crude graveyard of old Delphi.

It is probably safe to say that Susan Glaspell and her writing were never the same after she left Greece that winter of 1924. She returned to the Provincetown area, found solace in old friends, and wrote The Road to the Temple, her monument to the husband who had inspired her to break new ground in her writing. But she retreated from the verge and sought a less harrowing life at the center of daily living.

While she was writing The Road to the Temple, she met the writer Norman Matson, thought she had found her new life mate and began living with him. Although they never married, Susan Glaspell led her family to believe that they had (Noe 170-71). She and Matson collaborated on the play The Comic Artist, which was first performed in London in 1928, later in Westport in 1931 and in New York City in 1933. Susan's happy writing marriage with Jig was not repeated in The Comic Artist with Matson. Instead of encouraging each other's strengths as writers, Susan and Norman seemed to be at war with each other (Waterman 202). Their personal relationship came to an end when Matson decided to marry a much younger woman who was carrying his child (Noe 182).

Susan Glaspell's next play, Alison's House, was produced in the winter of 1930 by the Eva LeGallienne Civic Repertory Company. It was inspired by Genevieve Taggard's book, published in 1930, The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson (Waterman 204). One can only assume Glaspell, after reading Taggard's book, was struck immediately with the idea for the play, since it went on the boards so soon after the book came out. Although the play is a thinly disguised recount of what is known and what is

conjectured about the life of Emily Dickinson, Susan Glaspell could not use the Dickinson name nor the Dickinson poetry in her work. The family of Emily Dickinson would not give permission. Evidently Glaspell was not long discouraged by this stumbling block. She called the play Alison's House and set it in the Midwest, near the Mississippi River, where she had been nourished in her younger years. Once again the Theatre Guild was given the opportunity to produce Susan Glaspell's latest play, but they turned it down (Waldau 104). The Eva LaGalliene Civic Repertory Company deviated from its commitment to classical revival and decided to include it in their repertory on 14th Street. After it won the Pulitzer, it was moved uptown to the Ritz Theatre, where it opened on May 1, 1931, and played for two weeks straight. By today's standards it had only a few performances--forty-one in all (Toohey 88). Eva LeGalliene played the role of Alison's niece Elsa, the woman in the play who has the courage to alienate herself from the family in order to follow her love. She is the contrast to Alison who remains in the family and expresses her love through her poems and in her imagination.

Although many critics and theatregoers wondered how, Alison's House received the Pulitzer Prize for the 1930-31 season. Pulitzer Juror Walter Prichard Eaton later defended his decision by remembering that the play "plumbed the deep American love of home and family still existing outside the confines of New York cubbyhole apartments, and which also brought the strange story of Emily Dickinson to dramatic life" (Toohey 93). Eaton's comment reminds one that Susan Glaspell's plays are open to a variety of interpretations, and what struck Eaton about the play is not necessarily what struck others. Alison's House is another example of the feminist style of writing that Luhan describes (98). In the feminist style a linear thought line may take off on a vertical axis at any point along the way and include tangential implications, in a stream-of-consciousness manner. One issue calls to mind several others along the same line of

concern. In Alison's House this style of writing makes it possible to move back and forth in time to create a large tapestry of events as they have happened, as they are happening, or as they will happen in the Stanhope family. The different generations contribute their memories and reactions, and it becomes clear that each person sees the situation from his or her own perspective. Mr. Stanhope finds comfort and stability in living a proper life; that is his perspective. He believes that everything one feels should not necessarily be said or expressed in behavior. Propriety is not Ted's concern; he must ask the direct questions; he expects immediate answers. A plot line, which most critics felt was non-existent in Alison's House, is not as important as capturing and encouraging the interplay of thought and feeling in the characters who shared that house.

It may be true that Susan Glaspell and her characters are products of a solid American past rooted in the family home and the values of the small community, but that does not mean that they are unable to see the problems in both arenas. Susan Glaspell valued home and family, but she knew that both could be restrictive as well as comforting, especially for women. Within the confines of their domestic spheres women were too often relegated to carefully prescribed roles which did not offer much freedom or intellectual stimulation. The women in her haunting one-act Trifles understood how stifling a home could be.

In Alison's House Susan Glaspell attempts, as she did in Bernice, to capture the essence and impact of a woman who is already dead. In this case the woman is Alison Stanhope, a poet who has been dead eighteen years. She lives on, however, not only in the memories of her family, but in the poems she wrote that were discovered when she died.

The play takes place on one day--December 31, 1899. At the end of the play "distant bells ring in the new century" (691). In life Alison Stanhope had belonged to the old century; in death she leaves her poetic legacy to the new century. The play is

about the discovery her family makes about her as they prepare to sell and move from the family home--the symbol of the past. One cannot help but think of Chekhov's Cherry Orchard when reading Alison's House. Susan Glaspell's title for her play tells the reader without subtlety the statement she is making. The house where the play takes place, which had been the house of Alison's father, the Stanhope house, takes on new significance and becomes, for those who know Alison's poems, Alison's house

When she was living out her life under the roof and the rules of her father and brother, Alison spent her time cheerfully looking after those who depended on her. She, who was not supposed to complain nor let her feelings be known, wrote about her feelings in her verses, which she kept from everybody except her sister Agatha. It was not that her father kept her from being educated. He had seen that she had the books she loved, but he would not have been able to accept her being independent enough to act on any of the ideas she read in those books. As a woman, Alison was expected to remain passive and defer to the wishes of the men in the family. When her niece Elsa runs off with a married man, Elsa's father can no longer consider Elsa a legitimate member of the Stanhope family. Her behavior does not meet the traditional standards.

The play opens in the library of the family house, a house that indicates comfortable circumstances and a family life of "traditions and cultivation" (653). There are cozy places to read, and a large window allows one to look out into the larger world. Furnishings of an earlier period adorn the room and portraits of an older generation hang on the wall. Ann, Mr. Stanhope's secretary, greets a reporter, Mr. Richard Knowles, who has come down from Chicago to get a story about poet Alison Stanhope before her study is dismantled and the house she grew up in sold. The Stanhope family is reluctant to let any "outsiders" into its little world, and they are unwilling to divulge any personal information about their famous family member. Ted, youngest child of Mr. Stanhope who has been trying to get private bits of information about his aunt Alison, agrees to

show the reporter to Alison's room. Ann is concerned, but since Mr. Knowles is a would-be poet himself and an admirer of Alison's, she agrees to look the other way as they go toward the stairs to the second floor. When Ted returns, Mr. Stanhope queries him.

STANHOPE: What have you been doing?

TED: Just walking around.

STANHOPE: Where?

TED: Round the house?

STANHOPE: What room of the house?

KNOWLES: My fault, sir. I wanted to see Miss Alison's room.

STANHOPE: You did, did you? A great many people have wanted to see it, and haven't.

KNOWLES (to Ted): I want to thank you for letting me see it.

STANHOPE: He had no business to let you see it.

KNOWLES: Nevertheless I shall remember it always.

STANHOPE (momentarily touched by the sincerity of his tone): And now you're going to write a lurid story about it.

KNOWLES: Not lurid. (With a smile) That wouldn't be the way to handle this story. But that room belongs to the world, don't you think so? Alison Stanhope's room--holds something. (657)

The Dickinson family's refusal to cooperate with Susan Glaspell when she wrote her play actually enhanced the statement she was making in the play: individuals have no right to control the life or the products of the life of another. Women, and women artists, should have control of their own lives. Whether the Dickinson family liked it or not, Emily's contributions belonged to the larger world and would live long after her generation. Whether Emily Dickinson realized it or not, her writings would make a

feminist statement for those who followed her. Her choices would make future choices possible. Susan Glaspell believed this to be the artist's contribution. The Provincetown Players were predicated on such a belief. Jig Cook's disciples were responsible for encouraging and sustaining the long-term vision and refused to be tempted by the present success.

Agatha, Alison's feeble sister, knows the mystery of her sister Alison better than anyone else in the play. She lived close to her. Her struggle is to decide whether to destroy what she knows--or to reveal it to the world. Agatha, confused, uncertain and fearful, helps the family pack items in preparation for the move from the house she has lived in all her life. When she suspects that Mr. Knowles has been in Alison's room, she becomes disturbed, "I won't have people looking through Alison's room. I've guarded it for 18 years (Changing, cunning.) All right, look. Look again. See what you find" (657). Mr. Knowles can't pass up the opportunity to ask:

> KNOWLES: One question, please. . . .Have all the poems of Alison Stanhope been published?
>
> AGATHA: . . . . What does he mean?
>
> STANHOPE: (soothing her) Never mind. I will answer your question, though I've answered it many times before. All the poems of Alison Stanhope have been published.
>
> KNOWLES: Please, just this. It is a matter of public concern, you know. Did you find any papers--did you--
>
> AGATHA: What papers? What papers is he talking about?
>
> STANHOPE: My sister is not equal to this. No, we found nothing that brings any new light to bear on the life of Alison Stanhope. Everything had been gone through long before. (658)

Giving up the family home, eighteen years after Alison's death, reminds the family members of how life had been--when they were younger and when Alison was there to be understanding and reassuring. The situation offers everyone a chance to say things--important things about life and death, the past and the future--that would not normally be said in life's goings and comings, things that probably should have been said before. It also means that family members feel the need to come together one last time and say those things they feel but have trouble saying. Even in death Alison held the center of the family in place.

In the midst of the upheaval of moving, Elsa, Mr. Stanhope's daughter who had disgraced the family by running off with a married man, appears. She asks, "Father, may I--come in?" She offers him her hand, palm up, and "goes out toward him, timidly, but eloquent" (662).

Earlier she has been described as one who has beauty, a soft radiance. She is dressed in furs, hat and coat. Louise starts to protest, but defers to Mr. Stanhope who stares strangely at his daughter, the one who challenged his beliefs.

> ELSA (gratefully): Hello, Ted. (To her father.) Perhaps I shouldn't have come. But Eben wrote me the place was being broken up and--
>
> LOUISE: You wrote to her?
>
> EBEN: Yes, I wrote to my sister.
>
> ELSA: I had to be here once more. I thought--perhaps it's too much to ask--but I hoped you would let me stay here. Just to-night. It would--do me good.
>
> LOUISE (with a shrill laugh): Now that's--funny. (Laughs again.)
>
> ELSA (advancing a little to her father): It doesn't mean you forgive me, Father, if--if you don't. If you can't. But won't you just do it--because

> Alison would do it? She'd take my hands. She'd say--Little Elsa. She'd say--Elsa has come home. (662-63)

Elsa's entrance is quickly upstaged by the cry of fire--which has been found in a closet which breaks through to Alison's old room. The fire is extinguished, but because of straw and coal oil discovered in the room, it is obvious that the fire was set. Mr. Stanhope notices that the packing straw which Agatha has been using to pack a tea set is gone, and he asks, "Agatha, what did you do with the straw the dishes were packed in?" Wailing, Agatha ends Act I with "O-h! I wish you'd all go away--and leave me here alone. Why couldn't you let it burn?" Agatha collapses as the curtain closes (665).

Act II opens at 3:00 p.m. of the same day. Ann is back at the typewriter. She and Mr. Stanhope are going through family papers and records. In between the activities and exchanges of contemporary routines, there is talk about the past: relationships, remembrances, business transactions, references to events that set up probabilities as well as mysteries in the story of the play.

The young people interject the present by discussing the New Year's Eve dance. Ted once again nags for tidbits of information about his famous aunt, so that he can write a paper that will impress his English professor at Harvard. Mr. and Mrs. Hodges, who are considering buying the house in order to turn it into a house for summer boarders, pay a visit. They talk of cutting down some of the trees and lilac bushes that shut the place in too much. Mr. Hodges remarks that they will need to "take out some of that tangled old stuff and put in flower beds in fancy shapes" (669). They insist on looking over the house, even when Mr. Stanhope says his sister is ill upstairs. Eben has regrets about selling the house to the Hodges because "they'll destroy it." His father responds with "I want it destroyed.". . . I care for it so much I don't want--itself, to go to some one else" (670).

Then the talk turns to Agatha and Elsa, and Eben says, "She [Agatha] loves Elsa. Elsa doesn't harm anybody--except herself."

STANHOPE: She harmed all of us. She disgraced us.

EBEN: Maybe she couldn't help it.

STANHOPE: "Couldn't help it"! What a weak defense. Alison helped it--and so did I.

EBEN: What did you say, Father?

STANHOPE: Never mind what I said. The only person in this family who has any sense of family is Louise--and she's another family. (670)

Members of the Stanhope family understood what it meant to protect the family's honor. They had pride in their family name and history, and Mr. Stanhope reminds them that decisions have to be made for the family and not for individual satisfaction. Maybe Mr. Stanhope's sense of family and responsibility is what Pulitzer juror Walter Eaton found appealing about the play.

When Eben's wife Louise discovers that Elsa is in the house, she asks, "Elsa isn't staying here, is she?"

STANHOPE: Tonight.

LOUISE: Then I'm not staying.

EBEN: Family feeling.

LOUISE: Exactly. I'm sorry Father Stanhope, but I can't stay in the house with Elsa. She ran away with the husband of my best friend, leaving--

EBEN: Father knows just what she did, Louise. (671-72)

Louise argues a bit longer, but is interrupted by the Hodges' return downstairs. Mr. Stanhope and Eben seem unwilling to urge Mr. Hodges to make his decision about

buying the house, but Louise encourages the sale by talking about the possibilities for the house and the imaginative things she knows the Hodges can do with it. They agree to buy, and Mr. Hodges writes a check to "bind the bargain" (674).

Mr. Knowles, who has been walking down by the river, returns to see if he might take Ann for a walk. While old relationships change, new ones are being built in the young. For the young the formal ways of the past seem like unnecessary barriers to honest feelings. For the old the casual ways of the present seem irreverent and reckless. Mr. Stanhope does not understand a young man asking a young woman he barely knows to take a walk with him.

> STANHOPE (heatedly.): But why do you want to take a walk with her?
>
> TED: Oh-gee. 'Cause he <u>likes</u> her. You don't have to know a girl's name to like her.
>
> KNOWLES: No, you don't. Though it's a very nice name, Ann Leslie. It suits her, I think. (675)

Mr. Knowles is full of the experiences he is having on this last day of the century and speaks to Ann of his feelings. "I was walking down there by the river. And I didn't know whether I was thinking of Alison Stanhope, or thinking of you. Well, guess you were part of the same thing. And I was thinking of the last day of the century getting dim" (676).

Mr. Stanhope listens as he looks through the books on the shelves. The reporter continues,

> You know, how you think of a lot of things at once. I thought of how she used to walk where I was walking. (Stanhope turns, though they do not see him.) And never will again. But it was as if her thoughts were there. They must have been hers--for they were better than mine. And it

seemed to me if you would walk there with me--you and I together--well, that she wouldn't be gone. (676)

Susan Glaspell believed that the consciousness of the artist could reach beyond time and place and person and create new awareness for the future. The playwright uses this moment in the play to make her statement.

When Ann leaves to get dressed for the walk, Mr. Stanhope, taken with the young man's words and feelings, offers Mr. Knowles a gift. "This is a book my sister Alison loved and used." Taking it, Knowles replies, "Emerson's poems. Did she mark it?" Stanhope nods, "I was going to take it for myself. But she loved to make her little gifts. So--for her--on the last day of her century--I would like to give it to you." Overwhelmed by the gift, Mr. Knowles reads aloud from the book. Then Mr. Stanhope takes the book and reads a poem which is appropriate to the moment entitled "The House."

"There is no architect
Can build as the muse can;
She is skilful to select
Materials for her plan;

Slow and warily to choose
Rafters of immortal pine,
(He glances up to the beamed ceiling above.)
Or cedar incorruptible,
Worthy her design."
Some other things, and then--(Looking ahead.)

"She lays her beams in music

In music every one,

To the cadence of the whirling world

Which dances round the sun.

That so they shall not be displaced

By lapses or by wars,

But for the love of happy souls

Outlive the newest stars."

(He hands back the book.) (677)

Without breaking the moment, Mr. Knowles replies, "Alison's house." Mr. Stanhope quickly responds with, "Yes." They begin to come to the same conclusion. The family home is now known as Alison's, for she is the one who has given so obviously to the future. Ann returns, radiant and happy. After the young couple leaves, Eben asks, "Did you notice Ann?" "Yes, I noticed her," says Mr. Stanhope. "She never looked more like her mother."

EBEN: Happy.

STANHOPE: She's in love.

EBEN: In <u>love</u>? (Laughing.) Oh, come, Father! She doesn't know him.

STANHOPE: Neither did Alison know him.

EBEN: It must have been--pretty tough for Alison--giving him up.

STANHOPE: You'll never know. I know a little--no one will ever know the half.

Elsa enters. She and Eben speak of the past and Eben accuses Elsa of making their father look older--because of what she did.

EBEN: What did you run away like that for?

ELSA: But I had to go, Eben. Don't you see? That was the way I loved him. (678)

Agatha insists on coming downstairs and joining them for tea. Eben tries to console Agatha with, "It's going to be fine for you up at Father's. That's going to be the most comfortable room you ever had." Agatha replies, "If Elsa hadn't run away and left her father I wouldn't be turned out." Elsa responds, "I'm sorry, Aunt Agatha." In a quite different tone, Agatha says, "Little Elsa" (679).

Eben leaves the room and Agatha and Elsa are alone. When Agatha is sure they are alone, she opens the stringed bag she carries on her arm and takes out a small portfolio. After some hesitation, she holds out the leather case to Elsa, suddenly withdraws it and then decides to give it to her. "Take it! For Elsa. (She falls forward.)" Act II ends as they realize Agatha has died.

Act III finally takes the audience to the room everyone has wanted to see--Alison's Room--where she wrote her poetry and invited the youngsters of the family when they wanted her comfort. Elsa is there, about to look into the portfolio Agatha shoved at her before she died. Ann knocks. She wants to chat with Elsa about her feelings for Richard Knowles. She knows she can talk to Elsa--the one who was special--"so nice to everyone, yet always holding yourself a little apart. . . .we thought you were brave."

> ELSA: I wasn't brave. I was trapped. I didn't think it was right--but I couldn't help myself. And Bill. When you love, you want to give your man--everything in the world. (682)

Even though she was the one who escaped the family home and family attitudes, she speaks of being trapped--not liberated--by the love she followed.

As the clock that Elsa has wound after its many years of silence ticks away the last minutes of the last hour of the nineteenth century, Eben and Elsa reminisce about

Alison. Mr. Stanhope enters and asks about the leather case that he remembers Alison using. Elsa opens the portfolio and takes out a "slender package of old papers, tied with a thread" (686). Of course they are poems by Alison that no one knew about. They read them and realize that she speaks of the love she felt but could only write about.

> STANHOPE: If I had known it was as much as this, I would not have asked her to stay.
>
> ELSA: You did ask her to stay?
>
> STANHOPE: In this room I asked her to stay. He was below. He had come for her.
>
> EBEN: I never really knew the story.
>
> STANHOPE: She had gone East, with Father, to Cambridge. Thirtieth reunion of Father's class. She met him there. He was a teacher of English, at Harvard. At once they seemed to recognize each other. He was for her. She was for him. That was--without question. But he was married. He had children. They parted. But--they were one. I know that now.
>
> ELSA: It was death for her. But she made it--life eternal.
>
> EBEN (so moved it is hard to speak): Never mind, Alison. We have found you. (687-88)

Again, it seems unfair, but it is only after she is gone that those who thought they knew her really know her--really bother to consider her.

When Ted enters the scene and asks if he might read the newly discovered poems, his father warns, "They will not be taken from this room. . . . I will protect my sister, I will do--what Agatha could not do."

> EBEN (sharply): What do you mean?

STANHOPE: They were for her alone. She does not have to show her heart to the world.

ELSA: Father! You don't mean-- Tell us you don't mean--!

STANHOPE: I mean that I am going to burn them in her own fireplace--before her century goes.

EBEN: Father! (688)

An argument about what should be done with the poems ensues. Ted insists the poems shall not be burned. Eben and Elsa agree with Ted, but are stunned by his outrageous behavior towards his father and their father's retaliation towards him. The two generations, watching the clock run out the last minutes of an old century, try to determine their responsibility to Alison. Elsa quietly asks, "Come, Ted dear, I ask you to go. And leave them to me. I know their value--as no one else knows."

TED (looking hard at her): All right, Elsa. I trust them to you. Not Eben. Not Father. I leave them with Elsa. (He goes.)

ELSA (after he has raised his head): Ted's exasperating, but of course you didn't mean it, Father. You couldn't mean it. It's Alison's heart. You wouldn't keep that from--living in the world she loved.

STANHOPE: Living in <u>your</u> world? Linked with--<u>you</u>? As if--

ELSA: Don't say it, Father, She wouldn't. She would understand. Alison knew. And do you know, I think she would be glad?

STANHOPE: Glad you ran away with a married man--living in shame and leaving misery behind you?

ELSA: Glad I have my love. In spite of--all the rest. Knowing what it is to be alone. I think she would be glad I am not alone. What could I do--alone? How could I--Elsa--find victory in defeat? For you see, I am not enough. She would know that. She would be tolerant. She would

be gentle-- oh, so gentle. If she were here now--in her own room--she would say--Happy? Are you happy? Be happy, little Elsa, she would say. (689)

Eben returns with the wine which they use to toast the New Year. Mr. Stanhope wonders still about Alison's intent. As Eben gathers up the poems they have been looking at, Mr. Stanhope asks, "--but I ask you, did she give them to the world?"

EBEN: She didn't give the others to the world, either. She was too timid of the world. She just left them, and we did the right thing, as in her heart she knew we would.

STANHOPE: They were not left with the others. Where were they left? What did she tell Agatha?

EBEN: We don't know their story, and now we won't know it, for Aunt Agatha can't tell us. But we know they are here, alive, and we know we will do the right thing. (689-90)

Ted returns with Ann and her reporter. He has informed them of the poems. Ann reveals that she knew about Mr. Stanhope's feelings for her mother, which he had to deny for the sake of his own family. Ann, a young woman who has recently discovered love in her relationship with Knowles, adds her voice to those asking that the poems be given to Elsa.

STANHOPE: Elsa! Why should I leave it to Elsa?

ANN: To a woman. Because Alison said it--for women. (690)

After everyone has had his or her say about what should be done with the poems, at the end of the play Mr. Stanhope and his estranged daughter are left alone to tie up any loose ends that remain. In this last short scene Mr. Stanhope makes one last attempt to convince Elsa that Alison's story must be kept within the family.

ELSA (after a pause, low): I didn't know, Father, that you had gone through it too.

STANHOPE: Did you think I was happy with your mother?

ELSA: No.

STANHOPE: And why did I stay? For you, and your brothers. Mostly for you.

ELSA: And then I--

STANHOPE: Then you--made it all nothing.

ELSA: I must seem--all wrong to you, Father.

STANHOPE: You are wrong. You did not think of others, and that is wrong.

. . . .

ELSA: Don't Father. Don't say it. She wouldn't. You ought to hurt me--some. But don't be that cruel, to make me feel--because of me--she can't go on. I loved Father. I loved so much that--

STANHOPE: It is possible to love so much you can live without your love.

ELSA: I suppose it is possible, if you are a very great soul, or have a very stern sense of duty. But do you know, Father, I feel Alison wrote those poems for me.

STANHOPE: I feel she wrote them for me.

ELSA: And there will be those in the future to say, She wrote them for me.

STANHOPE: I feel--something right, something that all the time had to be, in you and me, here alone in her room, giving back to her century what she felt and did not say.

ELSA: But she did say.

STANHOPE: For herself alone.

ELSA: How can you know that? And even so-- What has been brought into life cannot be taken from life. (Stanhope goes to the fire, puts on more wood.)

STANHOPE: I never thought you and I would do another thing together. But she did love you. Then shield her. Join with me. What went on in this room-- let it end in this room. It is right. (goes to the table and takes the portfolio.)

ELSA (standing between him and the fire): Father! The birds that sang thirty years ago. (Her hands go out, as birds.) The flower that bent in the wind. (She bends, as in the wind. The clock gives the first stroke of twelve. He stands motionless , listening.)

. . . .

ELSA(choked with tears): Happy New Year, Father.

STANHOPE (mechanically): Happy -- (From a distance are bells in the village, whistles, a few shots. He looks around the room, hearing the bells. He looks long at Elsa.) It isn't--what you said. Or even, what Ann said. But her. It goes. It is going. It is gone. She loved to make her little gifts. If she can make one more, from her century to yours, then she isn't gone. Anything else is--too lonely. (He holds the poems out to her.) For Elsa-- From Alison.

ELSA(taking them): Father! My Father!

STANHOPE (his arms around her): Little Elsa (He holds her close while distant bells ring in the century.)

Curtain. (691)

In contrast to the explosion of emotions at the end of The Verge, the final scene of Alison's House brings stability and understanding, for those on stage as well as off. The playwright's message is clear and her theatrical devices are, albeit contrived, carefully executed.

One can understand why critic Robert Littell of the New York World, saw Alison's House, as "a play that often seems more like a labor of love than a play" (2 Dec. 1930:11). His reaction is right. In the life of Emily Dickinson Susan Glaspell finds a marvelous blend of sacrifice and courage and artistic triumph. She couldn't have written the scenario better herself, and she fits it neatly into play form with a better unity and focus than her other long plays had. Emily Dickinson, the person Alison's story tells about, according to feminist critic Susan Gubar, "played out the Gothic fiction of the white-dressed maiden imprisoned in daddy's house" (299). Maybe so, but Alison Stanhope, the quiet, caring woman who writes poetry in Susan Glaspell's play is more than a prisoner. Even though she is incarcerated within the expectations of her family and by the rules of her social group, she seeks her own freedom. She shows an independence of spirit and finds a means to express what others asked her not to express. She ultimately raises the consciousness of her own family and through her poetry has the final word and speaks to the future. What's more, as Ann points out in the play, she did it for women.

In Alison's House Susan Glaspell adds her interpretation of and appreciation for a female life she must have had empathy with--especially at the time in her own life when she was putting the years with Jig to rest and rediscovering in her own writing the purpose she needed. The sentimental part of her nature finds play in the Dickinson story, but the vehicle also affords her a means to sort out those rational and irrational forces that try to justify the unfair treatment of certain individuals. Love and justice may not take the same form for every individual, but both should be abundantly available if

there is to be a harmony of living. As an artist Susan Glaspell plumbed the human need for love and justice--especially for the woman coming into a new consciousness.

Conclusion

Bernice, Madeline, Claire and Alison, the heroines Susan Glaspell created for four of her long plays in the early decades of the twentieth century, remain strong female personalities, even by today's standards. Each has a "mind of her own" which she insists on using, even though those around her often do not understand why or to what purpose. The conflict between society's expectations and the desire to be freely themselves causes emotional, intellectual and physical turmoil for the heroines, but they refuse to take the line of least resistance. They are the stuff of pioneer courage and reasoned enlightenment, and they emerged from the pen of a successful woman writer who spent her life juggling her intuitive insights with her sensible ideas. She refused to ignore either, and it is just as easy to switch adjectives and say that her insights were sensible and her ideas intuitive. Above all, as a writer she could never allow herself to ignore what her thinking and feeling revealed to her. She expressed for the women of her time what she felt was ripe for expression.

Her heroines were who they were, just as Susan Glaspell was who she was. They were women searching for answers that were true to their own values--not the values which were insensitively imposed upon them by a society which was most often controlled by men and ordered to a masculine norm. Traditional female roles had biological and domestic boundaries, and it was difficult for many men to accept or appreciate women outside those boundaries. That "working-out of the situation into a more conscious companionship, greater self-knowledge and a broader understanding of the relations between the sexes" that Hutchins Hapgood identified did not come without struggle (395).

Each play is a dramatic attempt to depict individual females searching for their place and their purpose in a world which had refused to recognize that they had brains that were located in the appropriate place and not , as psychologist of the period,

Havelock Ellis, put it, in their wombs. They are evolving women and Susan Glaspell reveals the struggle that occurs as they attempt to know and appreciate themselves, as individuals, in a new relationship with men. Like anyone searching for a new identity--especially when the previous one had been so limiting--they are often confused and unaware of the direction in which they are heading. Their values were not always of this world. Glaspell's heroines seemed to demand what Virginia Woolf said George Eliot's heroines demanded--"something--they scarcely know what--something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence" (Miller 352).

Getting the vote had been only the beginning--a long time in coming. Women and those around them began to face what it meant to restructure and revision their lives in light of the opportunities and new information available to them. Susan Glaspell had been discovering those opportunities for herself as a writer and a member of the Provincetown Players. In her plays she depicted what the restructuring and revisioning could mean to individual women and to those who peopled the world of those women.

A Bernice did not feel that she had to be an extension of her husband or his world, but she unfortunately had no real means of being independent either. She had realized a new courage, but the attempt to express it was pitiful. She could make the choice to remain in her house in the country and look after her father; but her husband did not take seriously her decision to do so. He went about his business in the city and sought other female companionship when he needed it. Bernice's decision to let her husband think she committed suicide got his attention at least. It made him pay attention to her life and their relationship--something he had not done while she was living. Bernice's husband and her best friend, Margaret Pierce, interpret Bernice's final sacrifice in their favor, for they are unwilling to accept that they may have been at fault in their expectations of her. No doubt Susan Glaspell wanted to indicate that Bernice's life, simple as it was, had meant something and that in her death she left a message of

love that had enriched the lives of those who knew her, but was that all she said in her play? One thinks not. Bernice had to die before she was appreciated--before those around her could recognize her as an individual who chose to live her quiet life her way. The sentimental notion of sacrifice for love which Susan Glaspell had used so willingly in her early novels begins to take on a dark side in Bernice. The dark side of Bernice's actions is what troubles those who live after her, and they are quick to blame her or to give her life an heroic interpretation for their sake. What some critics of Glaspell's time had labeled as "dark impulses" in her heroines might be seen by today's feminists as Susan Glaspell's attempt to show the independent soul daring to break loose. When confronted with her impending death, Bernice was strong enough to make one of the few decisions left to her, but there was still something not right about the life that had been available to her. Susan Glaspell and her friends must have been acutely aware of the subtext of Bernice's life. They were living examples of men and women who shunned what society expected so they could make their own value choices. They may have made sacrifices, but they made them to support their own agenda.

In Inheritors the young heroine Madeline has talents and commitments that she does not at first see in herself, but the courage and dedication she learns from her ancestors enable her to fulfill those commitments. In the course of the play she makes discoveries about her father, her dead mother and her grandfather that reinforce the decisions she finally makes. She takes an unpopular stand in favor of the rights of the conscientious objectors of World War I. She defends the immigrants who came to America because she felt they understood, better than some who were born in America did, what the American promise was about. Her decisions to speak out were not easy ones. Those who loved her and had looked after her urged her to be sensible--not cause trouble for herself and those who cared for her. Her friends and family felt that no respectable young woman should behave the way Madeline insisted on behaving. A

professor at the college she attends, who understands the dilemma of being practical and being idealistic, admires Madeline's unique sensitivities, but he also feels obligated to remind her that for the sake of survival she must sometimes give in to the social order. Young, headstrong, and inspired by what she learns about those from whom she has inherited her ideals, she makes the choices she has to make--even though they are at war with much of her community. The alien position the female held in society almost made it easier for her to react in an independent manner if she dared (Kolodny Critical Inquiry 76). Madeline's grandmother had helped those who needed help; her mother contracted diphtheria and died as a result of helping others. Madeline's contribution could not be any less. She will go to jail, if need be, to support the beliefs of those who have been wrongly treated. Inheritors is an example of that native American drama the Provincetown Players sought to encourage. For Susan Glaspell it was also a vehicle for displaying the roles women played and should be allowed to play in the changing landscape of a country.

In The Verge Claire Archer tests her own boundaries as a person at the same time that she experiments with her plants and new plant forms. After she fulfills society's expectations and her biological potential by marrying and giving birth, she feels compelled to break out of society's mold and push her experiences to the outer limits. It is difficult to be sympathetic with Claire Archer, for in her zeal to find new life forms in herself and her plants she destroys what life has given her. Her dedication and imagination seem to go berserk. Her distorted perspective, visualized in the expressionistic stage set and spoken in the poetic language of her emotional speeches, grows into an obsession and Claire loses her ability to cope in the world around her. Women could not continue to accept some of the myths of their past, but Susan Glaspell's heroines found themselves caught in a future which was difficult for them to understand or control. The Verge may not have shown women the heroine they wanted

to become, but Claire Archer could serve as exorcist by recognizing and expunging what they could no longer be. Hutchins Hapgood was struck by the change in Susan Glaspell he felt the play represented. "When . . . later still [she wrote] The Verge, she pushed sentimentality of one kind far behind her; although in The Verge she goes so far beyond it that she falls over on the other side and becomes sentimental à rebours in her expression of half-mad feminism" (377). Claire's extreme choice, like Bernice's pitiful choice, becomes no choice at all, although the struggle of both caught the attention of women of the time.

Alison Stanhope, a nineteenth century woman from a family of position, accepts the responsibilities she has inherited. In many respects she is Emily Dickinson, Gubar's "maiden imprisoned in daddy's house." However, in Alison's House Susan Glaspell's version of Emily Dickinson is more than a woman who must give in to the demands of the men in her life. She has a mind of her own, but what is even more important to writer Glaspell, her heroine has a talent of her own. She is a poet--an artist. What she creates transcends time and place and personal situation. The unrequitted love of Alison Stanhope might have seemed cruel punishment to a younger Susan Glaspell or to a feminist bent on enjoying "free love," but for a mature writer who has weathered the passion of her youth and laid her heart's love to rest amidst the ruins of classical Greece there is purpose beyond youth's impatient demands.

Elsa, the character who leaves her family in order to be with the love of her youth, admits that even within her free choice she has been imprisoned. Complete freedom may not exist in love's relationship. However, it is more apt to be realized in the larger canvas of the artist, for in artistic expression life is given meaning, a new sensation, which lives for those who follow. George Cram Cook's American nascence depended on "the deeds. . .of a hundred poets, painters, novelists, critics, scholars and

thinkers" after all. Alison Stanhope's sacrifice made her larger gift possible. Long after house and belongings are sold and packed away, her poetic gifts remain.

As playwright for the Provincetown Players Susan Glaspell offered her gifts. She became their most prolific female writer, with eleven titles (Sarlos 161). Her plays have continued to be her most important literary contribution to the American twentieth century because they were breaking new literary ground and offering insights for the women and men of her time. What is more important, they sought to value woman's experience. Susan Glaspell, woman, emerges into writer, artist, creator of fictional women who express in a variety of forms the ideas and feelings of an emerging American woman. Events of the world around her were making her expression possible, but her own personal decisions and insights were making her expression meaningful to her generation and to those who would build on her contributions.

Susan Glaspell was able to go beyond the traditional female role her ancestors had played out. As an educated person, not only could she enjoy an intellectual independence her female ancestors had not known, in her roles as journalist, novelist, playwright and actress she could create for herself and other women a new awareness and a different future.

WORKS CONSULTED

Bach, Gerhard. "Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): A Bibliography of Dramatic Criticism." The Great Lakes Review 3 (1977): 1-34.

Barlow, Judith E., ed. Plays by American Women: the Early Years. New York: Avon Books, 1981.

Boyers, Robert. "A Case Against Feminist Criticism." Partisan Review 44 (1977): 602, 610.

Broun, Heywood. "The Drama." New York Herald Tribune 14 Nov. 1916: 7.

Brownstein, Rachel Mayer. Becoming A Heroine. New York: Viking Press, 1982.

Cheney, Anne. Millay in Greenwich Village. University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1975.

Corbin, John. Rev. of Bernice by Susan Glaspell. New York Times 30 March 1919, sec.4: 2.

---. Rev. of The Verge by Susan Glaspell. MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City. New York Times 20 Nov. 1921

Cornillon, Susan Koppelman, ed. Images of Women in Fiction. Rev. ed. "Feminist Style Criticism." By Josephine Donovan. Bowling Green: University Popular Press, 1973.

Daly, Mary. Beyond God the Father. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Dell, Floyd. Homecoming. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1933.

Deutsch, Helen and Stella Hanau. The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre. 1931. 1959. New York: Russell and Russell, 1972.

Diamond, Arlyn and Lee R. Edwards. The Authority of Experience. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977.

Dickinson, Thomas H. Playwrights of the New American Theatre. Essay Index Reprint Series. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967.

Eastman, Max. Enjoyment of Living. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948.

Esslin, Martin. Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969.

Flexner, Eleanor. American Playwrights: 1918-1938. 1938. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1966.

Freedley, George and John A. Reeves. A History of the Theatre. Rev. ed. Crown Publishers, Inc., 1962.

Gagey, Edmond M. Revolution in American Drama. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.

Gassner, John. "A Playreader on Playwrights." New Theatre Oct. 1934: 9-11.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "What Do Feminist Critics Want? or A Postcard from the Volcano." ADE Bulletin (MLA) 66:

--- and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.

Glaspell, Susan K. Alison's House. The Pulitzer Prize Plays: 1918-1934. Ed. Kathryn Coe and William H. Cordell. New York: Random House, 1935.

---. Bernice. Plays. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1920.

---. The Glory of the Conquered. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1909.

---. Inheritors. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1921.

---. The Road to the Temple. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, Company, 1927.

---. "The Rules of the Institution." Harper's Magazine 128 (1913-1914): 198-208 .

---. "Trifles." Plays. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1920.

---. The Verge. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1922.

Gould, Jean. "Susan Glaspell and the Provincetown Players." Modern American Playwrights. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966.

Greene, Elsa. "Emily Dickinson Was a Poetess." College English Oct 1934: 9-11.

Gubar, Susan. "The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Hale, Ruth. Rev. of The Verge by Susan K. Glaspell. MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City. New York Times 20 Nov. 1921, sec. 6:1.

Hapgood, Hutchins. A Victorian in the Modern World. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. and Catharine R. Stimpson. "Theories of Feminist Criticism." Feminist Literary Criticism. Ed. Josephine Donovan. Lexington: University of Kentucy Press, 1976.

---. Toward A recognition of Androgyny.

Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l'Ecriture feminine." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Kolodny, Annette. "Dancing through the Minefield." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

---. "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'." Critical Inquiry 2 (Fall 1975): 75-92.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. The American Drama Since 1918. Rev. ed. New York: George Braziller, 1957.

Langner, Lawrence. The Magic Curtain. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951.

Leavitt, Dinah Luise, ed. Feminist Theatre Groups. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc. Publishers, 1980.

Lewisohn, Ludwig. "Drama." Rev. of The Verge by Susan K. Glaspell. MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City. Nation 14 Dec. 1921: 708-9.

---. "Susan Glaspell." Nation 3 Nov. 1920:509-10.

---. Expression in America. New York: Harpers, 1932.

Littell, Robert. Rev. of Alison's House by Susan K. Glaspell. Civic Repertory Theatre, New York City. New York World 2 Dec. 1930: 11.

Mantle, Burns. " Susan Glaspell." Contemporary American Playwrights. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1938.

Miller, Nancy K. "Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Montgomery, Judith H. "The American Galatea." College English May 1971: 890-899.

Noe, Marcia. "A Critical Biography of Susan Glaspell." Diss. The University of Iowa, 1976.

Olsen, Tillie. "Women Who Are Writers in Our Century." College English Oct. 1972: 6-17.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." College English Oct. 1972: 18-30.

Robinson, Lillian S. "Dwelling in Decencies: Radical Criticism and the Feminists Perspective." College English May 1971: 879-889.

Rose, Phyllis. Writing of Women: Essays in a Renaissance. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Universal Press, 1985.

Sarlos, Robert Karoly. Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1982.

Scholes, Robert. Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1974.

Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing. Princeton: University Press, 1977.

Snell, George. The Shapers of American Fiction. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1947.

Sochen, June. The New Woman: in Greenwich Village, 1910-1920. Quadrangle Books, a New York Times Company, 1972.

Spack, Patricia Mayer. The Female Imagination. New York: Avon Books, 1975.

Taubman, Howard. The Making of the American Theatre. Rev. ed. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1965, 1967.

Toohey, John L. A History of the Pulitzer Prize Plays. New York: The Citadel Press, 1967.

Van Doren, Mark. Rev. of Alison's House by Susan K. Glaspell. Civic Repertory Theatre. New York City. Nation 27 May 1931: 590-91.

Waldau, Roy S. Vintage Years of the Theatre Guild: 1928-1939. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972.

Waterman, Arthur E. Susan Glaspell. New York: Twayne's Publishers, Inc., 1966.

---.. "A Critical Study of Susan Glaspell's Works." Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1956.

Woolcott, Alexander. Rev. of The Verge by Susan K. Glaspell. MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City. New York Times 15 Nov. 1921:

Young, Stark. Rev. of The Verge by Susan K. Glaspell. MacDougal Street Playhouse, New York City. New Republic 7 Dec. 1921: 47.