Susan Glaspell -- Provincetown Playwright

"If the Provincetown Players had done nothing more than to give us the delicately humorous and sensitive plays of Susan Glaspell, they would have amply justified their existence."[1]

John Corbin's statement, taken from a review of the premier performance of *Bernice* (1918/1919), Susan Glaspell's first full-length drama, reflects an early critical appreciation of Susan Glaspell and the Provincetown Players never seriously challenged during or after the Provincetown's existence and Glaspell's affiliation with them.[2] It implies a double meaning which, in literary criticism and theater history alike, has simply been stated as a matter of fact: Susan Glaspell as a playwright is a representative of the Provincetown Players, and the Provincetown Players as an experimental theater are representative of Susan Glaspell. Expressed in a more complex manner, the relationship between the Provincetown Players and Susan Glaspell is characterized by the fact that neither could Susan Glaspell have developed into the noteworthy playwright of the 1920s without the Provincetown's influence, nor could the Provincetown Players have developed into the highest ranking experimental little theater of the 1920s without the support of Susan Glaspell's steady dramatic output. This relationship is, in other words, markedly determined by a process of interdependent influences, an interrelation of a symbiotic nature: Susan Glaspell and the Provincetown Players in a "happy marriage" from 1915 to 1922.

The problems with this simplified version of a complex relationship are that it appears to be so convincing that no one has bothered to prove it conclusively, and that the nature of the basic driving forces in this relationship has never been probed. This is partly due to the fact that American scholarship has been very slow in warming up to a critical evaluation of the beginning of modernism in the American drama.[3] It is due even more to a problem in methodology, where historical criticism and formal criticism have been considered as two distinctly separate entities. It is a methodological purism, subscribed to by literary criticism as vehemently as by theater history, which excludes the validity of the other and which does not allow for a joint approach of formal and historical criticism. On the other hand it seems obvious that this period of dramatic resurgence can only be properly assessed if criticism acknowledges its "method" also, namely the attempt of a joint approach of all arts for the sake of a re-unification of their forces into a new drama. It is precisely with such a joint approach of critical analysis that one will be able to answer in a

more definite, more precise, and more conclusive way whether and to what extent Susan Glaspell represents the characteristics of a Provincetown playwright.

This approach necessitates a two-part structure. The first part will be concerned with the characteristics of the Provincetown Players, their philosophy, their aims, and their practices, i.e., the manifestations of their philosophy and the realization of their aims. The second part will deal with the degree to which Susan Glaspell fits these characteristics of a "typical" Provincetown playwright, that is, whether there is an overlap in philosophical viewpoints and in coinciding aims and practices. The degree to which Susan Glaspell's plays, in artistic structure and content, converge with the Provincetown plays in general will render a valid and reliable indication of whether the relationship is one of identification, association, or mere utility.

The Provincetown Players' philosophy is inseparably linked with their founder and director, George Cram Cook. It was the stamp of his influence which determined the development of their little theater and its quick success as an off-Broadway challenger to the traditional fare of the established theater. It was also his autocratic leadership which was partly responsible for the short life of the Provincetown's experiment, which lasted from about 1915 to 1922. Arthur Davison Ficke, Cook's long-time friend from Davenport, Iowa, called him a "mad humanist", characterizing Cook's individuality and eccentricity as a unique combination of two basic elements: "On the one side, he was always conscious of the great Mississippi River rolling endlessly down the valley; on the other side, he always felt the great river of civilization flowing down the ages."[4]

Cook was definitely not what Herbert Marcuse recently called the "one dimensional man". He had a strong sense of historicity acquired not only through study, but also through experience. This resulted in what has been termed his dualistic nature. For Cook history was both threatening (negative traditions, conventionality), and protective (positive traditions, the sense of belonging), as well as demanding (traditions to be assimilated within the self and projected from the self for the purpose of shaping the future). Influences on Cook were manifold. Darwin's theory of evolution attracted his as much as did a pantheistic theology combined with a Rousseauistic belief in nature as the only educator of man. Despite his tendencies towards a mystical idealization of these philosophical convictions, Cook was impelled by a strong pragmatic sense of verification -- to realize these ideals in a meaningful, socially responsible way. It was Nietzsche who redirected Cook's energy from free-style farming in Iowa and literary editorship in Chicago to the theater. From *The Birth of Tragedy* Cook learned to re-orient his previous individualized efforts of living a

meaningful life into an attempt at communal experience.

The establishment of a theater as a center for such communal experience was a logical step for the pragmatist Cook. Subsequently Cook defined -- in his somewhat verbose and prophetic style -- what later was to become the Provincetown philosophy. It was his wish "to reshape at least one small part of society nearer to the heart's desire, believing that in the freeing of creative forces a life together might come into being which would itself be a creation, and greater than any of us."[5] It is, furthermore, his wish "to make all hands work for that level and to do it by recreating in a group of modern individuals, far more highly differentiated than primitive people, a spiritual unity underlying their differences, a unity of the tribe, a unity which may spontaneously create the unity necessary to the art of the theatre."[6]

In tying together the individual strings of Cook's thought into a coherent Provincetown philosophy, five main contributing aspects can be distinguished: (1) The new drama is an expression of life, or, more precisely, an expression of the dualistic nature of man striving for unity. This aspect is strongly conditioned by Nietzche's concept of the dichotomy of the "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" element in artistic expression; (2) The new drama can only be created by and expressed within a group of individuals with a unique cause; (3) It is a shared effort of creative expression by all the contributing arts -- a unified artistic expression; (4) It has a strongly developed sense of its historical ties and conditions as well as its traditional values; (5) It has a definite sense of social responsibility.

The multi-faceted character of the Provincetown philosophy is due primarily to the equally diversified character of Cook. The aims derived from his idealism are nevertheless defined by the Provincetown Players in precise terms: "The impelling desire of the group is to establish a stage where playwrights of sincere, poetic, literary, and dramatic purpose can see their plays in action, and superintend their production without submitting to the commercial manager's interpretation of public taste."[7] Besides this clear delimitation against the commercialized drama of the genteel escape-theater of Broadway, one factual aim was stressed -- the establishment of a closely-knit cooperative play-production process in which the playwright freely directs and superintends the production of his or her plays. This policy had a double function. On the one hand it facilitated the experimental needs of a beginning playwright on a very practical level, and on the other hand the playwright was incorporated into the creative exchange between writer, actor, and producer, a purpose serving the philosophy of a communal artistic expression. This combination of experimentation and cooperation was set forth as a

compulsory goal by the Provincetown Players: "No play shall be considered unless the author superintended the production . . . the author shall produce the play without hindrance according to his own ideas."[8] The cooperative creative process also included the spectator. Adhering to strict subscription policies, the Provincetown Players incorporated their audience into the process of the creative exchange, including them as an integral part of the experiment. Even members of the press were admitted to the Provincetown Theater only if they owned a membership subscription.

The aims of the Provincetown Players, then, clearly converged with their general philosophy. The expression-of-life idea (first element of their philosophy) admitted only those playwrights whose dramatic writings expressed a "sincere purpose". The group-oriented policy and the demand for creative expression (second and third element) found their representation in the aims of cooperation and free creative experimentation, as did the demand for social responsibility (fifth element). The fourth element, a distinct sense of historicity, becomes apparent only when we turn to the plays written for and presented on the Provincetown stage.

In the seven years of their existence under the leadership of Cook, Provincetown Players produced ninety-four plays by forty-eight authors. All of these plays were original Provincetown productions. With the exception of several of Eugene O'Neill's plays, almost all of the remaining ones originated within the boundaries of the Provincetown Players, i.e., they developed out of the close contact between the Provincetown Players and the individual playwrights. Thirty-three writers were limited to the production of one play only. Nevertheless, their importance as a group should not be slighted; together they advanced the range of interactive experimentation to a level from which the more formidable playwrights drew their resources. Among those writers with more than just one Provincetown production to their credit were Floyd Dell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Reed, Susan Glaspell, and Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill and Glaspell clearly dominated the Provincetown playbills; fifteen of O'Neill's plays and eleven of Glaspell's were produced during the seven years from 1915 to 1922. However, a distinct difference characterized these two dramatists. Whereas O'Neill came to the Provincetown Players with a score of plays written prior to the Provincetown's foundation, all of Susan Glaspell's plays originate within these seven years, within the setting of this interdependent experimental process where no new play was written and produced until the results of the previous one had been digested. This external criterion, then, as much as it excluded O'Neill from being a typical Provincetown playwright -- a misconception sustained by literary

criticism and theater history alike -- definitely suggests Glaspell as the one consistent Provincetown playwright whose developmental stages closely reflect those of the Players' themselves. To what extent this external criterion aligns with the inner aspects of artistic and thematic development remains to be seen.

The attempt at ordering the bulk of the Provincetown plays according to thematic tendencies and literary directions renders three distinctly noticeable phases. The need, as expressed by Cook and others, for an American dramatic literature expressing a socio-historical awareness was realized in the first two years by a large number of plays reflecting social realism and naturalism. The first group of playwrights attempted almost unanimously to depict, criticize, and satirize contemporary social ills and to propagate liberalism and a moderate radicalism. Several plays criticize the lack of constructive and enriching traditional values. It is especially in the regional plays, in a midwestern or New England setting, that one finds the playwrights' attempts to integrate or reunite a traditional culture with contemporary demands. The city of New York also served these playwrights as an apocalyptic symbol of the disintegration of traditional values. John Reed's *Freedom* (1916) exemplifies this tendency towards kitchen-sink realism intermingled with a traditional idealism, as does Neith Boyce's *The Two Sons* (1916), David Pinski's *The Dollar* (1916), and Pendleton King's *Cocaine* (1916). Credit for the most striking example, however, goes to Susan Glaspell's one-act drama of midwestern farm life, *Trifles* (1916).

Despite their social realism in theme and setting many of these plays conclude, because of their idealistic tendencies, on a note of optimism, a tendency which can also be found in another group of structurally quite different plays emerging primarily in the second phase, the experiments in verse drama introduced by the poets Alfred Kreymborg *(Lima Beans,* 1916; *Vote The New Moon,* 1919) and Edna St. Vincent Millay *(The Princess Marries The Page,* 1918; *Aria Da Capo,* 1919). Thus the second phase is characterized by an internal war of experimentation between the forces favoring an idealism based on socio-realistic outlook and the forces favoring an idealism completely devoid of contemporary concerns and tending to symbolic representations of more timeless concerns such as "love and despair," "beauty", "death", etc. The more pragmatic idealism (again probably due to Cook's influence) survived the battle -- which in retrospect is deplorable, since Edna St. Vincent Millay had as much potential for dramatic symbolism as Susan Glaspell had for realism. It may be conjectured that had the Provincetown Players at this point decided to support experiments in symbolic verse drama, Millay would have evolved as the Provincetown representative. Her verse play, *Aria Da Capo* (1918), is

the first American play to make explicit use of dramaturgic devices later to be employed by the Theater of the Absurd. *Aria De Capo,* besides its modestly expressionist setting, is quite likely an early forerunner of the Absurd tradition. Its importance as such, however, has yet to be acknowledged.

The third phase of the Provincetown plays is characterized by severe and radical changes. The Provincetown Players' aim -- to support the dramatic experiments of the young and inexperienced playwright -- slowly but steadily receded into the background and along with it the drama of social realism which, in the meantime, had become a Provincetown prototype. Several reasons account for this new and final, but also shortlived, change. (1) The Provincetown achievement: steady experimentation had led the Provincetown Players to attain a very high artistic standard in playwriting as well as in acting and producing. (2) The Provincetown audience: it acknowledged the artistic achievement with an ever-growing demand for more. Experimental failure, a lowering of the standard attained -- an inevitable possibility if the inexperienced playwright is to be nurtured -- was slighted by an audience spoiled by increasing perfection. (3) The reliance on the reliable: the Provincetown Players, by force of their own system and with an eye on the critical reviews in the press, were impelled to rely heavily on their "domestic" playwrights O'Neill and Glaspell who, however, in their individual developments had outgrown the phase of initial experimentation. Their new experiments led the Provincetown Players into an area hitherto unexplored, an area which, for the Provincetown audience and reviewers educated on the grounds of social realism, was as yet unacceptable -- experiments in expressionism. Only a brief glimpse of this can be caught in plays like Glaspell's *The Verge* (1922) and O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1921/22), the two main productions of the Provincetown Players' final season. External reasons, together with the internal ones given here, necessitated the discontinuation of the Provincetown Players in 1922.

Three phases of this dramatic development, then, are clearly distinguishable: The initial phase of social realism, leading to the phase of realism vs. symbolism (or the realistic prose play vs. the symbolistic verse play), leading again into the last phase of renewed social realism interspersed with experiments in expressionism. This very last phase was, for reasons given above, no longer directly representative of the original Provincetown aims and practices.

On the surface, Susan Glaspell's importance as a playwright for the Provincetown Players is easy to assess. Aside from O'Neill, Glaspell was the most prolific and consistent dramatist among the many writers who contributed to the experiments of the Provincetown Players. As the wife of

George Cram Cook, Glaspell had an intimate awareness of the Provincetown aims and practices. She was an integral part of the forces that shaped the creative processes in their development. She acted, not only in her own plays, but also in the plays of others; she produced and designed her productions; and she closely observed the productions of others. Her growth as a playwright is hardly imaginable without the parallel growth of the experimental theater in which she worked.

External evidence, however, does not fully explain the nature of Glaspell's relationship to the Players. Instead, it raises new questions. To what extent are Glaspell's personal philosophy, her playwriting aims, and her dramatic achievement indicative of Provincetown characteristics? In dealing with these questions it should be understood that whenever mention is given to a "Glaspell philosophy" or to "Glaspell aims" these must be considered as dynamic rather than static. Glaspell did not join the Provincetown experiment with a pre-established outlook on life, definite dramatic goals, or even playwriting experience. She did enter this phase backed by certain literary experiences in the non-dramatic form, by a certain philosophical idealism strongly influenced by her husband Cook, and by her midwestern upbringing. But these are subject to change and/or verification, a process in which the Provincetown Players function as the experimental base.

Glaspell's philosophy centers on what present-day psychology would term the "self-fulfilled, fully functioning personality". Glaspell simply called it "life's meaning" and described it in terms of historical consciousness:

> I took a walk late yesterday afternoon. Night came, and for some reason I thought of how many nights have come -- nights the earth has known long before we knew the earth . . . . It gave me a feeling of coming from something a long way back. Moving toward -- what will be here when I'm not here. Moving. We seem here, now, in America, to have forgotten we're moving. Think it's just us -- just now. Of course, that would make us afraid, and -- ridiculous.[9]

Life's meaning is the central question underlying all of Glaspell's literary efforts, before, during, and after her affiliation with the Provincetown Players. But it was precisely during this affiliation that the question of *life's meaning* was most intensely explored, developed, and expressed. Under the influence of the Players, but even more so under the influence of Cook, previously unreflected experience was beginning to find form

and structure. The sum total of such structuring and refining of this central question, from the first play *Trifles* (1916) to the last Provincetown play. *The Verge* (1922), reveals a philosophy based on idealistic and humanistic concerns. *Life's meaning* involves the individual's need to challenge life-destroying forces and to foster life-giving forces by relying on constructive traditional values in order to (re-)establish a mental stability and spiritual balance conducive to creative self-fulfillment and responsible social behavior. The disintegrated, disinherited, historically unaware individual is governed by life-destroying forces. The antidote to this poison is rejection of rigid morals. *Life's meaning,* then, is expressed in the ardent desire of the individual to unify his creative, self-fulfilling forces which, when combined and realized, will propel him or her beyond the boundaries of mere existential vegetations and passive acceptance. The figure of Cook loomed large behind this philosophy which is at once idealistic and pragmatic: idealistic in the belief that a harmonious world can exist, and pragmatic in the belief that modern man is capable of (re-)creating the unity between the self and the world. It was a pragmatic idealism conducive to the Provincetown experiment. Finding the support of the Players, Glaspell was able to experiment freely with the possibilities of artistic expression of the ideal of *Life's meaning.*

As a playwright Susan Glaspell was concerned with the possibilities of dramatizing the conflict inherent in the individual's search for life's meaning. Her aim was to present this central conflict in a crucial situation which forces the individual to decide what the meaning of his or her life has been, is, and is to be. The individual is impelled by an inner (psychological) or an outer (social) force to try to understand the causes of basic conflicts within himself or with the society, and to search for possible solutions which will be more closely aligned with valid ideals and values. The experimental openness with which Glaspell committed herself to dramatize these conflicts, and the degree of influence exercised by the Provincetown Players in this process, is clearly visible in the thematic variations of this central conflict in the plays.

Glaspell's progress as a playwright for the Provincetown Players took place within threefold experimbntation involving (1) practical artistic concerns, (2) literary artistic concerns, and (3) idealistic-thematic concerns.

(1) *The practical artistic concern, i.e. progression from the one-act play to the full-length play.* Glaspell progressed like most of the other writers for the Provincetown by starting "small". Experimentation in the form of the one-act play preceded more demanding ventures in the full-length form. Glaspell wrote seven one-act plays for the Provincetown stage before she moved on to the four full-length dramas. She supervised all of her own productions and acted in most of them. Her experiments in the one-act

form varied in quality, from the erratic (*Woman's Honor*, 1917; *The People*, 1916), to the outstanding (*Supressed Desires*, 1915; *Trifles*, 1916). This inconsistency is also characteristic of Provincetown. Certain recurring elements took shape early. Glaspell's preference for female characters is established at the very beginning of her playwriting career, as is her preference for verbal images instead of actions, for tableau-scenes functioning as climactic intensifications of verbal images and actions, and the use of specific symbols and images as intensifiers in the presentation of *life's meaning*. All these are employed again in the full-length plays *Bernice*, 1918, *Inheritors*, 1920, and *The Verge*, 1921, where experimentation is less concerned with structural elements and more with the possibilities of character portraiture and thematic complexity.

(2) *The literary-artistic concern, i.e., progression from social realism to expressionism.* Glaspell's one-act experiments followed Provincetown prescriptions rather closely. She explored the range of the realistic slice-of-life drama, from social comedy and satire (*Suppressed Desires*, 1915; *Woman's Honor*, 1917; *Close The Book*, 1917) to bitter and despairing tragedy (*Trifles*, 1916 -- with tragi-comic overtones; *The Outside*, 1917 -- with melodramatic overtones; *The People*, 1916 -- with propagandistic overtones). *Bernice* and *Inheritors* further developed what had earlier been established as representative of Provincetown drama -- social realism with a strong strain of idealism. With *The Verge*, however, Glaspell moved out of the influential realm of Provincetown directives and entered hitherto unexplored experiments in expressionism. Even though the Provincetown Players endorsed this difficult and challenging experiment, and even though *The Verge* is, together with O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, the most successful play of an otherwise difficult last season (1921/22), it was too near the end of the Provincetown Players' existence to start them off in a new direction. In short, *The Verge* is a dramatic experiment untypical of the Provincetown venture.

(3) *The idealistic-thematic concern*, i.e., *the exploration of life's meaning*. As was indicated earlier, Glaspell did not join the Provincetown Players with a ready-made idealism. The quest for *life's meaning*, though thematically central to all her plays excepting the social comedies, was subject to experimentation, development, and verification. This process involved four stages: (i) statement and description, (ii) definition, (iii) complication and extrapolation, and (iv) expression.

(i) *Statement and description.* First glimpses of Glaspell's probing into the question of life's meaning are caught in *Trifles*, a drama of detection. The true cause of the murder of a farmer by the hand of his wife is established in the uncovering of a series of "trifles" -- the true cause being cultural and spiritual deprivation. Minnie Wright murders her husband for keeping

her from living a rich life, for shutting her in like a bird in a cage. What Glaspell had observed, a few years before, in Cook's mother is given tragic dimensions in Minnie Wright, the stultified, deprived farmwife of the Midwest: "She was ill-nourished by the life of that place. . . .one feels that a richer personality would have resulted from a richer soil -- a little too much energy burned up in just keeping alive."[10] Typical of future Glaspell protagonists, Minnie Wright breaks out of that fateful pattern of meaningless and oppressive existence by destroying her oppressor, thus gaining at least an inner freedom. The same pattern is found in *The Outside*, but there it is less convincing. In both plays, Glaspell concentrated on exposing the causes of oppression and destruction in that probing manner in which the two women in *Trifles* uncover the evidence of a social crime whose import they recognize but also fear: "The two women sit there not looking at one another but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back when they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they cannot help saying it."[11]

(ii) *Definition. Bernice*, Glaspell's first full-length play, renders a definition of the philosophy of *life's meaning* projecting beyond the previous description attempts. In doing so, Glaspell no longer stressed the conditioning factors of oppression and destruction but instead concentrated on defining the results, i.e., the idea of freedom in captivity. In *Bernice* this idea is reflected in the image of life in death. Briefly rendered, the plot envelops the time following Bernice's death. Her death exercises a magnetic power over those who were close to her in life. In trying to render meaning to her death, these persons are each forced to re-evaluate their own lives, forced to newly establish a personal *life's meaning*. "What you saw in [Bernice's] eyes as she brooded over life in leaving it," a close friend of Bernice's observes, "was her seeing -- her seeing into the shadowed places of the life she was leaving. And then -- a gift to the spirit. A gift sent back through the dark."[12]

(iii) *Complication and extrapolation. Life's meaning*, which by this time was the typical Glaspell theme, inherits complexity in *Inheritors*. The pattern of oppression-destruction-freedom in imprisonment or death develops into an idealistic concept strongly reminiscent of Cook's pragmatic idealism. An impelling sense of historical and traditional values pervades the play. These values are seen at once to be timely and timeless. The Midwest again serves as a physical and spiritual background against which Glaspell portrays three generations struggling for a definite assessment of, and a lasting commitment to, a meaningful, responsible, and most of all constructive life for both the individual and his society. Only the young, untouched by the fetish oney which directs their parents lives, are

capable of a total commitment to traditions and values not dictated by material interests. They value their function as mediators of a positive, immaterial idealism above all other concerns. "Father has been telling me about the corn," Madeline says as she is about to be taken to court for her "radical" convictions; "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 [freed by the truth she has found]. Oh -- do that!"[12] The highly idealized concept of the inheritability of life's meaning, enriched by fitting symbols and images, is most convincing within that setting which Glaspell knows best, the Midwest. Furthermore, the play reveals more strongly and obviously the nature of Glaspell's central problem as a writer who is caught between the equally influential and demanding forces of acceptance and rejection. It is a problem which *Inheritors* presented as a socio-historical one -- the quest of the individual for *life's meaning* in the outer world of interpersonal and social relations. *Life's meaning,* in *Inheritors*, is the surrender of individual needs and desires for the reconstruction and improvement of a society not fully aware of its historical and traditional values.

(iv) *Expression.* Glaspell's functional or pragmatic idealism underwent a final change in *The Verge.* Where before a social regeneration of the idea of *life's meaning* seemed possible, in this play it is severely questioned. Inheritability, *life's meaning* to be sought in the outer world, gives way to a new concept of individualized self-awareness and self-fulfillment. Claire Archer, the female protagonist of *The Verge,* does not only challenge the destructive social forces of her environment, even more so she challenges the destructive forces of her mind in order to find meaning in her physical existence and, beyond that, in her spiritual life. A concentration of her inner constructive forces leads Claire Archer to the abandonment of all outer destructive, incomplete, "unrealized" forces. As she is unable to fully realize herself in a hostile environment she chooses madness and, symbolically speaking, death. Claire Archer is the Nietzschean superwoman -- the mystic and the revolutionary in one, isolated from her physical self and her social environment and wishing to break away from it, creative to the point of destruction and self-destruction. She no longer seeks *life's meaning* on an existential or interpersonal level but rather in the ultimate region of spiritual self-fulfillment. Her killing of the one person closest to her, rationally and emotionally, may seem paradoxically wrong, but for her it is the only tragically logical conclusion to a previously incomplete ideal-pattern. Oppression-destruction-freedom in imprisonment, the pattern inherent in all previous Glaspell plays, now includes one final link: self-destruction as an act of self-realization. Glaspell thus dis-

solves the rather complex chronology of the chain of *life's meaning* into a tripartite structure most "simply" expressed as the life-death-life cycle. In *The Verge* it is precisely the verge-symbol which explains Glaspell's conception of the life-death-life cycle most strikingly, the verge being the ultimate symbol of *life's meaning*. Glaspell applies it less in the sense of a dividing line between the "here" and "there", which would follow a Platonic world view, but rather the verge is seen as an intermediate area of transition, an area between the unrealized and the realized self: "Break up what exists," Claire Archer demands of herself; "Open the door to destruction in the hope of -- a door on the far side of destruction."[14] Glaspell thus clearly identifies with Nietzsche's world-concept which allows for a life beyond physical limitations which, however, can only be reached through death.

The idealistic philosophy of *life's meaning* was realized, as the foregoing analysis of Glaspell's Provincetown plays has shown, in a process involving the individual developmental steps of description *(Trifles)*, definition *(Bernice)*, concentration and extrapolation *(Inheritors)*, and expression *(The Verge)*, its artistic representation up until *Inheritors* identified closely with the Provincetown idealism and the Provincetown aims of expressive experimentation, giving life to both in dramas of social realism. With *The Verge*, Glaspell moved beyond this realm and entered into an experiment of expressionist drama which was too shortlived to be called a phase. Glaspell's plays following *The Verge (Chains Of Dew*, 1922; *The Comic Artist*, 1927; *Alison's House*, 1930) are merely post mortems to a phase of dramatic experimentation which was terminated by force of external and internal influences before it was able to establish itself as a lasting tradition. With no theater to support her experiments, Glaspell's development as a playwright came to a fairly sudden end at the point of highest promise.

Notes

1. John Corbin, "Zeraphim and Cats", *New York Times*, 30 March 1919, sec. viii, p. 2.
2. The dates following the titles of individual plays indicate the season of their first performance on the stage of the Provincetown Players.
3. The chapters on "Drama" in the individual volumes of *America Literary Scholarship* over the past decade give ample proof of this lack in critical interest and scholarly effort.
4. Arthur Davison Ficke, "G.C. Cook: Mad Humanist", *Saturday Review of Literature*, vol. III, 26 March 1927, p. 675.

5. Cook in: Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple,* (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1927) p. 91.
6. Cook in: Alan S. Downer, *American Drama* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1960), Introduction: "On the Development of an American Dramatic Art", p. 9.
7. "Announcement of the First New York Season", *Provincetown Players Collection—New York Public Library,* Scrapbook MWEZ x, n.c. 11.284.
8. "Minutes, Sep. 4, 1916", *Provincetown Players Collection. . .* Scrapbook MWEZ, n.c. 55, p. 3
9. Susan Glaspell, *Inheritors (London: E. Benn, 1924), p. 93*
10. Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple,* p. 17.
11. Susan Glaspell, *Trifles,* in: *Plays* (Boston, 1920), p. 25.
12. Susan Glaspell, *Bernice,* in: *Plays,* p. 229.
13. Susan Glaspell, *Inheritors,* p. 101102.
14. Susan Glaspell, *The Verge* (London: E. Benn, 1924), p. 31.

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